

ENDING IN PEACE

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*The
Back to God
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THE DENOMINATIONALIOAOCAS OF
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ENDING IN PEACE

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared in the presence of all people a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel. Luke 2:29-31

There's a man I'd like you to meet before this year 1971 crumbles away. There are several intriguing things about him that are worth noticing. He was among the most common of men. His name was ordinary, though it sounds quaint now. His name was Simeon. And, you know, if you could be like Simeon, you wouldn't have any worries anymore.

You see, Simeon was one of those rare men who had the privilege of ending his life clear eyed, clear headed, and unafraid. This is what makes him so appealing as we are about to wrap up another year. Time is sacred—we all feel that somehow—because life is sacred, and it is solemn and thought provoking to mark the passing of one year and the beginning of another.

Simeon was at a point like this in his life, only it wasn't just the end of the year for him. He was at the point where he knew that his life was just about over. Something happened to him that made it as dear as he had had a preview of his own obituary in the newspaper. It was as if God came to him and said, "Okay, Simeon, this is it. You've been around long enough. Say good-by to everybody because you are leaving for the long-journey. This is the end, Simeon."

But Simeon was supremely happy. He was happy, just as you want to be now that this

year of your life is nearly over. Maybe it's the last full year you will ever live. Simeon was at the great point of transition from life to death. But his eyes were alive with a glow of joy, as they had never been before.

The reason? He held a baby in his arms, and that baby's name was Jesus.

Please don't misunderstand. Often people can be quite impressed with babies. They exclaim over them and cuddle them and hold them. I don't mean that this is what Simeon did, though he did take the infant Jesus in his arms. He experienced an emotion that went far beyond the ordinary joy people feel when they hold little babies. As he took the baby from the startled Mary and Joseph, Simeon's eyes sturned heavenward and a prayer broke from his lips. He said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word"

You can imagine the mixed emotion that swept through Mary and Joseph. To have someone take their small child and immediately ask God to let him die, was very upsetting. Really, now, wasn't Simeon overdoing it just a little bit—to get so carried away when he held the infant Jesus? Oh, we still give Jesus quite a bit of attention at Christmas time, when the whole world pauses for a couple of weeks and recognizes His birth, but nobody says that he is ready to die, once he has celebrated Jesus' birth. But that is what Simeon did. As he held Jesus in his arms, he announced that he was ready to have God take him.

It is very important that we notice that when he prayed to God to let him die, he used the word *peace*. As Jesus nestled in his arms, he declared that he was ready to die in peace, you

remember. Now, for you and me, the word peace is rather empty. Much of the meaning is drained away. We are cynical so far as peace is concerned. Not so with the Jews of long ago, nor with the Jews of today, for that matter.

There's a good chance you have heard the Jewish word for peace. It is *shalom*. For Jewish people this word is unendingly new. When we think of peace we think of quiet, calmness, no war-things like that. But our ordinary idea of peace is rather bland. The word *shalom* is to the word *peace* as *ecstasy* is to *happiness*.

Shalom for Simeon meant being surrounded by all there creating, rejuvenating, regenerating, revitalizing - grace of the living God meant entering into a new order of things where human frailty was exchanged for power and human failings were wiped out by new accomplishments. *Shalom* in the Bible extends outward from the individuals who enjoy the deep satisfaction it brings on a personal level, and it embraces all nature. The brooks and the streams flow more gently when *shalom* comes. When *shalom* comes, lions are tamed, and asp and vipers lose their venomous sting and coil around the chubby arms of playing infants. *Shalom* is the realization of all our fondest hopes and dreams.

And suddenly, as Simeon cradled that Jesus in his arms, all *shalom* became reality for him. He was ready to die. His readiness was not a grave resignation but a jubilant surrender of his full person into the arms of a salvation-bringing God who would make all things well for him.

As we see him, pictured so vividly in the second chapter of the book of Luke, there is a

wave of envy that sweeps over a man so happy to leave all this world behind, seems odd. For we desperately clutch at what we are and have. Even as 1971 is about to fade away, we take our frantic inventories and try to assure ourselves that we have made some progress. And 1972 will be even better. We celebrate life by participating in it more fully and more frantically at year's end. But many of us don't have the peace the dying Simeon cried out about. We don't have joy. And in our envy of that dying patriarch we cannot help but question whether he didn't get somewhat too carried away about the baby Jesus. Wasn't his reaction an overreaction? What made him say what he did?

Well, I'll tell you what made him say it. He understood the significance of that little baby he held. And I might say that if you understood Jesus' significance, you would feel as Simeon did. Honest. Let's listen again to exactly what he said, when he took the baby Jesus in his arms.

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou has prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." And then Simeon, apparently continued speaking to the startled ones. This is what he said: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against; and a sword will pierce through your own soul also; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

You see, according to the Bible, God had told Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the person who was going to bring the great

salvation of God into the world. Apparently Simeon had been led into the temple in Jerusalem on the same day Mary and Joseph had come with Jesus to fulfill some of the requirements of the law. Mary and Joseph came in without expecting to raise any particular interest. And Simeon had come, too, driven by some strange impulse. And then suddenly they had come together and God made clear to him that Jesus was the person who would bring salvation.

It was as if all the importance of Jesus Christ suddenly burst within Simeon's small skull and the glory of Christ's work overwhelmed him with glorious happiness. But the point is just this, so far as you and I are concerned right now: his extraordinary joy was caused by Jesus Christ. Jesus was the one who made the difference. Simeon saw Jesus as the great Son of God who was going to bring salvation, enlightenment, and peace to the entire world—the people of Israel, yes, but also to the Gentiles—to all the nations wherever they were found. He saw that about Jesus. And he saw, too, that it was going to be accomplished by a cross. For looking ahead along the corridors of the future he saw Jesus' mother, Mary, standing by the cross of Calvary in agony as she observed her firstborn son slaughtered before her very eyes. But in spite of the cross, indeed because of it, Simeon knew that salvation would be spread throughout the world.

That vision gave Simeon so much joy that he returned his shining eyes heavenward and anticipated a death surrounded by the fullness of God's peace, *God's shalom*.

So much for Simeon! I am not worried about him anymore, because I know that all is well

with Simeon. But what about you, this year's end? Do you know the same salvation that brought peace to Simeon's heart? Do you know Jesus, too? Do you believe in Jesus, and are you overwhelmed with the joy and peace that Simeon experienced?

The question, then, this year's end is this: Do you know Jesus, too? After all, we've just come through a period of the year when there has been a great deal of talk about Him. Do you know Him as Simeon did, as the one whom God sent to be a light and salvation for all people?

Do you know Jesus, too? I want to ask this first of all of those of you who have had a great deal of exposure to Jesus throughout this year. I guess most of you in this group are church members, and I assume that you have attended church many times during this year. But our church attendance can be so formal, can't it? And some of us are satisfied with attending churches in which there is a lot of pageantry and many, many words, but there is not much said anymore about the Bible and about the Jesus of the Bible.

So I want to ask you if you know Jesus, now at the end of this year, in a way that would make it possible for you to turn your eyes toward God and say, "Lord, I'm ready to die. I'm ready to die because I know that your Son has died on Calvary's cross to take away all of my sins. And I know that I will experience the fullness of His salvation and peace. Are you able to say that? That is the important thing. You've brushed past Jesus so many times this year, but do you know the joy Simeon knew, because you know Jesus as he did?"

And then there is another group of people whom I would like to ask, "Do you know Jesus, too?" I want to place this question squarely in front of those who are a part of our Back to God Hour congregation. The letters we receive indicate that there is a congregation of people who listen to this program with great regularity—usually every Sunday. They are always there, listening to the preaching of the Word over this broadcast. Some of you have churches of your own. But many of you do not for one reason or another. The Back to God Hour is your church. And I guess that means that I am your minister.

So, now that 1971 is just about over, I as your minister, your pastor, want to ask you, "Do you know Jesus, too?" I tremble some times when I remember that I am responsible in a special way for your souls. Some day God will ask me, "Did you tell them about Jesus, and about who He is and what He means? And did you ask them to believe? Did you plead with them to believe?"

Again and again, during this year, we have investigated together the mystery of God's grace revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. We talked about the way Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, came to this world to bear the sins of His people on the tree of the cross. We have talked about what it means to live the Christian life—how this affects personal morality and ethics, how this affects work and play and education. We have talked about Jesus from the Old Testament and from the New Testament.

Good. But it will not mean a thing to you, and it will not mean a thing to me either unless we believe fully in this blessed Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ. And when I say believe, I mean that there is something very emotional about this. We must be like Simeon. We must be able to look up into heaven at any time and be able to say to God, "Take me ready. I'm ready because I know what Jesus has done for me. I believe that Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior."

And so today I plead with you, if you have been resisting the message of the gospel stop right now and surrender. Repent of the usual sins that are keeping you away from the salvation of God. Fall upon your knees and cry out, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Do that. Do that now. Don't hesitate.

Now we see again how quickly a year can come to an end. It seems as if it was only yesterday that we stood at the threshold of 1971, and we had the whole year ahead of us. Now its end suddenly comes up to meet us. Well, that's the way life can end, too. That quickly. Like an airplane getting ready to land at the airport. Suddenly the runway comes up to meet the last seconds pass swiftly. Suddenly the flight is over. Repent and believe. Because life can end that way, too. And after life comes the judgment. You must be ready. That's why I ask you, "Do you know Jesus?" Believe in Him before it is too late, and experience the joy and peace Simeon experienced.

I want to invite you at the end of this year 1971, to look in the face of Jesus and to believe fully in Him. Simeon had only a baby in his arms and a heart full of prophecy. We have more. We can see Jesus now as He lived, suffered, died, and rose again for the salvation of His people. We know the full extent of His

great saving work There is no reason for us
to doubt the love of God anymore.

So we must believe in that love must
abandon our sinfulness and flee to the Lord
Jesus Christ. He can save us and He will.
Don't end the year without coming to the
Saviour. Believe in Him and be saved.

I want to conclude with the words of a hymn
written by Charles Wesley. This is my testi-
mony. And I pray that it's yours

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love Divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helplessness;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

JO

No condemnation now I dread:
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness Divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, thru' Christ my own.

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me.

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, we marvel at the wonder of what you have done for Simeon took you in his arms many, many years ago, we now take you into our lives as he cried out with joy, we exclaim hallelujah, now as another year of our lives is passing away.

Amazing grace, indeed! O God, may your grace surround the lives of thousands who hear the message of redemption today. May they turn from their sinfulness and cling to the love revealed so fully on the pages of the Bible.

Conquer the strongholds of those who have been fighting you all this year. Overcome their rebellion and displace them with peace.

And now we pray that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit may be with us all. Amen.

Prepared for broadcast by Dr. Joel H. Nederhood,
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