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“Embracing Christ in the arms of faith”



A New Testament picture of faith in action

The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, 7th March 2004.

“Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God,” Luke 2:28.

The Bible is a book written by a Father for His children. It is full of pictures which greatly assist in the understanding of the great truths our Heavenly Father would have His children learn. We have just such a picture before us in the incident involving Simeon and the infant Christ in the temple.

It is a picture of faith at work and how it clasps Christ to its heart. It is a picture of how the sinner receives Christ and is saved.

Simeon, we are told, was a godly old man who was “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him,” verse 25. He entered into the temple at the very moment Christ was carried in by Mary and Joseph. The Saviour would have been 40 days old at this time, since Mary was required by the Law of God, to undergo a time of purification. “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled,” Leviticus 12:2-4.

Let us learn from the circumstances of this apparently chance encounter.

I. SIMEON'S ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST WAS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

His coming into the temple at that time was something planned of God and supervised by the Holy Spirit. The references to the Holy Spirit and Simeon are interesting. Let us ever bear in mind that Simeon was a believer; he was saved. However, he illustrates for us just how God brings a sinner to Christ. Christians need to bear in mind that the gracious drawing that first brought us to the feet of Christ was not a one-off experience, but rather the beginning of an ongoing drawing of our souls out after Christ. Christian, do we not sing the hymn:

Draw me nearer, nearer, Blessed Lord, To Thy bleeding wounded side?

1. The Holy Spirit was upon him. Verse 25. The moving of the Holy Spirit upon Simeon is, in essence, the same moving that takes place in the life of the sinner upon whom God has set His love and whom He determines to save. Simeon was the subject of the Holy Spirit's grace and power.



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2. The Holy Spirit taught him. “And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ,” verse 26. Knowledge was imparted to Simeon of heavenly things. In the work of conversion, the sinner is taught of God. “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me,” Acts 26:18. The imparting of divine knowledge is an essential aspect of the conversion of the sinner. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them,” Ezekiel 36:26-27.

3. The Holy Spirit drew him. Verse 27. The Holy Spirit was moving upon Simeon, teaching Simeon and drawing him to an encounter with Christ. These three simple facts illustrate for us the means, ordained of God, whereby the sinner is caused to meet with Christ. shorter catechism The Shorter Catechism states, in answer to Question 31: “What is effectual calling?” Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel. It was to this wonderful work of drawing by the Holy Spirit that our Saviour refers, in John 6:44 & 45. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. . . . Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”

II. TRUE FAITH WILL ACT WHEN IT ENCOUNTERS CHRIST

When it encounters Christ faith must clasp Him in its arms.

1. Simeon recognised Christ. This was the first time Simeon had set eyes upon the child Jesus but he knew Him. He needed no further information than that given by the Holy Spirit. He was taught of God, John 6:45. This was at a time when very few others recognised Him! Faith will recognise Jesus when unbelievers remain blind to Him. Do you recall the experience of the blind man healed by Christ? He was persecuted by the Jewish leaders for his stout defence of the One Who had healed him and he was cast out of the synagogue — he was excommunicated. We read of the response of Christ to this event in John 9:35-38. “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.” Here is saving faith at work. It cannot stand in the presence of Christ without embracing Him, acknowledging Him, worshipping Him. Faith will see Christ when others cannot, for the grace of God has opened the eyes of the one granted the grace of faith.

2. Simeon took Christ from His parents. What a picture of the gospel meeting we have here! Paul, the great evangelist, likened himself to both a father and a mother to those he brought the gospel. Read these words carefully. “For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain . . . But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse (mother) cherisheth her children . . . As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,” 1 Thess 2:1, 7, 11.



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Preacher

The preacher of the gospel is like Mary and Joseph on this occasion. He holds out Christ in his arms for sinners to embrace. I would be a father and mother to you this evening and offer you Christ the bread and milk of life. Christ is freely, lovingly, particularly and wholly offered to the sinner in the gospel and I hold Him out to you now.

3. Simeon drew Him close. He did not stand awkwardly holding the infant but enfolded Him in his arms and hugged Him to his heart. What expressions of love and devotion the old man would have manifested, both by word and deed! Here is what it is to receive Christ. Is this not wonderfully simple and clear?

Near but so far away

How many would have embraced Christ as an infant in their physical arms but never embraced Him in the arms

of faith? Many a matron visited the home of Mary and Joseph in Nazareth and asked if they could nurse the little child — was there ever a more beautiful, winsome child than Jesus? And yet having done so, they failed to trust Him as their Saviour. Many of you have held in your hands the written Word of God. You have been instructed in its glorious truths but though you have, as it were, embraced Christ in a physical sense, you have never embraced Him to your heart by faith. How sad is this dreadful truth!

III. EMBRACING CHRIST IN THE ARMS OF FAITH BRINGS JOY TO THE HEART

1. A wonderful joyfulness possessed the soul of Simeon. He praised God, for the word “bless” is the word “praise”. A joyfulness immediately filled the heart and soul of Simeon and his mouth opened to sing forth its joy. When the arms of faith are filled with Christ then the soul will be filled with joy and the mouth with blessings and praise.

Emptiness

The sinner who has not Christ has but empty arms, an empty heart, an empty life, an empty eternity!

2. He is bold in his confession of Christ. What he now knew he told out to others and that immediately. He prayed! His confessing of Christ was in words addressed to God in prayer. He was like Paul, who manifested the change that was wrought in his soul by praying. “Behold, he prayeth,” Acts 9:11.

Words of praise

What words Simeon uttered with Christ 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 hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel,” Luke 2:29-32. There are phrases here which, to a devout Jew, could refer only to the Messiah. Would there not have been many there who would have considered Simeon mad, calling this forty-day-old infant the Saviour of the world! Simeon’s view of the infant Christ was akin to that of the thief on the cross who saw beyond the bleeding, battered, broken body of the One mocked and despised of men. He saw, by faith, the Lord



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of Glory and the King of Kings. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," Luke 23:42.

3. He lost interest in the world. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word," Luke 2:29. Simeon desired heaven. The world meant nothing to him any more. Christ spoils you for this world. All who embrace Christ by faith have one predominant, persistent desire. To be with Christ. The believer longs for that transporting to the presence of the Saviour in the land that is fairer than day. The words of Paul have been used and savoured by believers since first they were written to the church at Philippi. "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better," Philippians 1:23. Have Christians not repeated longingly in their hearts and softly upon their lips, the refrain of John in response to the Saviour's final words to the apostle at the end of the Bible? "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus," Revelation 22:20.

Empty in order to fill

Faith in Christ should empty our arms of all other things in order that we might fill them with Him alone and never let Him go. "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts," Galatians 5:24. Simeon would hold on to Christ and go to where he would ever behold Him and enjoy Him. It is written in the Song of Solomon, chapter 3:4. "It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go."

Never let go

Faith, true faith, saving faith, will never let Christ go once it has clasped Him to its heart. Have you embraced Christ so freely offered to you in the gospel? Is He yours today? Does He nestle in your arms, spoiling you for the world?

What think ye of Christ?

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," Are you a receiver, an embracer of Christ or a rejecter? Is a place in your arms for Him?