

A DEVOUT MAN

"And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him." Luke 2:25.

Let us journey to the great temple in Jerusalem where the spotlight of divine revelation is turned upon a scene of simple dignity, charming piety, and spiritual awareness. As we enter the courts of the Lord's house with reverent step, we observe a couple who have brought an infant to dedicate Him to the service of God. The names of the three are Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Mary was carrying her first-born. Joseph was carrying a pair of turtledoves. They were quite poor, so were unable to present a lamb as their offering. There was not any halo around the Babe, or any crown on Mary's head. When Joseph and Mary had made their offering at the altar and turned to leave for the long journey back to Nazareth in Galilee, a stranger approached them for the purpose of mingling his rejoicing with their own. The name of this stranger was Simeon. He was old, but his step was eager, and the light of an unspeakable happiness was in his eyes. Recognizing this child as God's long-awaited Messiah, the very Saviour of the world, in fulfillment of a life-long hope, he asked permission to take the Babe in his arms.

Simeon was one of a group who cherished the Messianic hope when skeptical Sadducees had given it up, and formal and pedantic Pharisees had forgotten it. Simeon and others like him had kept alive the best piety of the nation. Society has no greater benefactors than those humble souls who keep religion alive and active by their own faith and hope.

Why were priest and scribe passed by, and Simeon selected as the one to whom the great disclosure should be made? Inspiration answers that question. This man was "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him." He was not in the rut of formalism; he was not enamoured of rationalism; he was not besotted with worldliness; he was not satisfied with himself, and therefore careless about the approaches of God; but he was "just"—faithful in external duty; "devout"—his soul turning toward God as flowers turn to the sun; "the Holy Ghost was upon him." He was waiting, listening, looking and expecting the divine manifestation.

What a biography of a man! How short, and yet how complete! Short biographies are the best, when they give concise and exact accounts of men. We have a very concise account of Simeon's life, and that is enough. His "name was Simeon"; he lived "in Jerusalem"; "the same was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him."

Simeon was "just and devout." Thus his character was summed up in two words. The first word is from the realm of conduct, and the second is from the sphere of worship. He was just in the sight of men, and devout as before God, and the two were intimately connected. So they must ever be in true Christian character. We must never make devotion a thing by itself. The devout man must be righteous, or his religion will be sickly. The righteous man must be devout or his religion will be a sinful self-righteousness.

Simeon was a spiritual man. He was upright, devoted to the service of God, and living in the expectation of the salvation of Israel. He was eminent in the two great relationships of his being. Toward man he was just and toward God he was devout. "Just" describes his character before men. "Devout" summarizes his character before God. To be "just" means to be upright; to be upright means to be righteous; to be righteous means to live right. Right living is an essential element in any spiritual character. Simeon was devout. Devotion is not a passive state of being; rather, it is active, aggressive, and embracing wholeheartedly that which one believes and accepts as being true. To the devout, God is not a vague idea but a living Person. He is not an indefinite influence but a vitalizing presence. He is not a ruthless autocrat but a sympathetic companion.

Simeon was a true man of God. He paid attention to both the tablets of the divine law. He was keen on his duty to his neighbor and equally keen on his duty to God. Neither can be fulfilled properly without the other. We cannot walk humbly with our God unless we do justly and love mercy and kindness.

Simeon was a true patriot. His thoughts and desires were centered not on himself but upon his country. He had only one ambition. That was not to amass wealth, to achieve fame, or to enjoy pleasure, but to see the healing of his country's wounds and the raising of the nation from its spiritual and moral degradation. Simeon's patriotism was founded upon and sustained by the Scriptures. He knew that the consolation of Israel was bound up with the coming of the Messiah. His yearnings for a better day for his sorrow-stricken, sin-laden countrymen found expression in one passionate petition for the advent of the Lord's Christ. He knew full well that apart from the coming of the Messiah there could not be any consolation for Israel. Not only was Simeon a Bible-taught patriot, but he was a magnificently hopeful one. He knew that Christ was coming in his day.

Simeon was a man of spiritual intuition. "It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." A man who lives in fellowship with God and in harmony with men is likely to have revelations made to him, for God tells His secrets to those who love Him. God wakens the ears of His saints to heavenly voices, and opens their eyes to visions unseen by the earthbound. How He does this we cannot say. It is like inspiration itself—a fact of the greatest certainty, though of method undefined.

Simeon was a man who had spent his life in looking for the consolation of Israel. His life had been prolonged for this purpose, that he should finally see what he had been looking for all those long years past. Simeon was not a man of narrow and selfish mind. His thoughts, desires, solitudes and hopes were not limited to himself, nor even to his own nation. His heart was burdened for the public good. He was a close observer and an accurate interpreter of public events.

Simeon was favored with spiritual guidance. "He came by the Spirit into the temple." He was in the temple often, but this time "he came by the Spirit." Had somebody met him and asked why he was going to the temple on this particular morning, he might have said, "I feel I must go. God has something to communicate to me." Those who walk with God will do many things for which the worldly wise can find no reason or motive.

Simeon was granted the grace of spiritual insight. In the temple that day he saw what he must have seen hundreds of times, a young mother presenting her firstborn son. But this mother was Mary, and the Babe was Jesus, so named on the eighth day when He was circumcised according to the law. Now it was the fortieth day, and by the law the firstborn must be redeemed from the temple service. The usual redemption price was a lamb, but that offering was too costly for the poor. A merciful provision to meet the case of the poor ordained that two young pigeons, or a pair of turtledoves, could be a substitute for the full offering, and these were brought.

The same Spirit that moved Simeon to go into the temple bore witness within him that this Babe was the Lord's Christ for Whom he had been waiting and looking. While he had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah, expectation had been the habitual attitude of his spirit, the theme of his conversations, the breath of his prayers, and the bright beam that ever cheered the long path of his pilgrimage. Because he had long been a diligent and devout student of the Old Testament Scriptures, it is not surprising that he readily recognized the Christ in this lowly child.

Trembling with holy awe, the old man approached the young mother and asked to hold the Child in his arms. Wonderingly, she yielded up the precious Babe to his care, watching with anxious gaze Simeon's emotion. The venerable old saint said, "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."

This spiritual insight is the privilege of those who walk with God. They see more than others in the Bible, for example. They see God at work. They see Christ and hear His voice. They see more in the sermon. Others may not see anything in it, because they lack spiritual discernment. Some may be interested, and others may follow the discussion and admire the illustrations, but spiritual minds see more. They hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and feed out of His hand.

"A light to lighten the Gentiles." Christ has indeed proved to be the light of the nations. Look at the map; see the places where womanhood is honored, childhood is loved, family life is pure, liberty is cherished, and obedience to law is an honored tradition; trace out the history of these moral virtues where they have flourished, and you will see that it is impossible to give the credit to anyone but Christ.

As Simeon stood holding the Saviour in his arms, he did not pray that his life be extended any farther, so that he could find some years of happiness ahead to replace his lifetime of waiting. He was not ambitious for anything else in the present life. Note his language carefully. He did not present a petition, but he made a declaration. Simeon viewed the last scene of his life as overspread with peace. Death had no terror for him. He had seen all that any man needs to see to be satisfied and blessed. He declared himself ready and willing to leave the world. He said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation." With Christ in his arms, peace in his heart, and praise upon his lips, he was ready to die. His willingness to depart suggests that a sight of Christ by faith makes death welcome.

What a dreadful thing it is to see death before we see Christ! See death we must, and that perhaps soon and unexpectedly. But, have we seen Christ and accepted Him? Have we seen the grandeur of His person, the excellence of His character, and the preciousness of His cross as the medium of pardon? If we have seen and accepted the Saviour, then all will be well; then we shall not be alarmed when illness comes; then we shall be willing to leave the dearest friends we have and to pass through the valley of death.

Simeon's prayer was an unusual one. It was not a catalogue of endless human desires and cravings. It was not a detailed confession of human sins and weaknesses. It was rather an outburst of spontaneous adoration and thanksgiving.

So many of our prayers are not so much like thank-you notes as they are like week-end shopping lists. They are not so much like love letters to one we adore as they are like complaints to the management of what we think is a poorly supervised hotel. We live more by our grievances than we do by our gratitudes. We are long on complaints and we are short on compliments. When we turn, however, to the prayers of the saints, both ancient and modern, we are carried up to God by a veritable tide of adoration, wave upon wave of thanksgiving, a tireless telling of His mercies. The prayer that is characterized by adoration and thanksgiving and praise will keep the focus on God instead of on ourselves. Our being the children of God gives us the privilege of access to the divine presence and petitioning the Father in heaven for what we need.

This biography of Simeon is enough for any of us. If, when we die, so much as this can be said of us--our name, our business--"waiting for the consolation of Israel," our character--"just and devout," our companionship--having the Holy Spirit in us,--that will be sufficient to hand us down to posterity and eternity memorable among the just and estimable among the devout.