

“What Must You Do to Die in Peace?”

Luke 2: 25-35

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I wonder how many babies he held before he cuddled the baby Jesus in his arms? Surely Mary and Joseph's infant was not the first. I suspect Simeon had approached many parents and asked to hold the child they were bringing to the temple to dedicate. I can hear and see him now.

“Is that a baby you are carrying? May I see him? Could I hold him? Oh, he is a beautiful child. He has your eyes and such a sweet smile. He looks like he will be a scholar. Yes, he is a beautiful baby and will grow to be a fine lad. Take good care of him.”

I am sure, though, he tried to conceal his disappointment as he handed each baby back to his parents, knowing that he had not yet held God's anointed one. But then, that special day arrived. The day he had longed for and had looked forward to finally came when, led by the Spirit, he walked up to Mary and Joseph and asked to hold their baby.

Instantly, he knew that he was looking into the eyes of the long awaited Messiah. Immediately, he spoke these words, *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared, in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel”* Luke 2:29-32.

I must tell you the part of this story that captures my attention this morning. It is Luke 2:29-30a, *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.”* I find this part of Simeon's monologue fascinating and it raises a question for us to answer. **What must happen for you and me to die in peace?**

Luke does not tell us Simeon's age but I assume that he was an old man. Evidently dying was on his mind because he mentioned it twice in this passage. I would imagine Simeon was growing restless wondering if time would run out before God's promise to him would be fulfilled, that he would see the Lord's Christ. He wanted to die in peace, as all of us do, but that possibility was growing slimmer with each passing day. And then, that anticipated day arrived and God's promise was fulfilled. Now, Simeon could die in peace.

What must happen for you and me to die in peace? Surely you have thought about it whatever age you are. Before I attempt to answer the question, may I tell you about one of the most moving experiences of my life? It was my grandmother's death.

My Grandmother Hays died in 1989 at the age of ninety-seven. She passed away very peacefully in her own bed. It is what occurred days before she died that touched me profoundly.

My grandmother enjoyed good health all her life. She was a patient in a hospital only one time and she felt that was totally unnecessary.

About a week before she died, she began feeling badly. After two or three days, she and my mother realized her condition was serious and getting worse. A couple of days before she died, my mother called me and told me that my grandmother was not

doing well and the prognosis did not look good. I lived two hundred miles away and quickly arranged things so that I could go home and see her.

When I walked into her bedroom, she smiled. She told me she was dying but that it was all right. She was tired and ready to go. I looked on her dresser and saw something that let me know she was truly prepared to die and die in peace. On her dresser was lying her funeral clothes, including accessories such as her necklace and ear bobs. I looked at them and then I looked at her. She smiled and asked, "Do you think I will look nice?" I assured her that she would.

She died the next day. To me, she modeled that quote I read years ago, "So live your life that when it comes time to die, that is all you have to do." I think this is the secret to dying in peace.

Now, let me return to the question I asked earlier. **What must you and I do to die in peace?** I would never be so bold as to tell you what you must do. I can, however, give you some suggestions and encourage you to think about some things.

To die in peace, I think you need to be in a right relationship with God. Simeon evidently was. Luke said he was a devout man and that was seen in the way the Holy Spirit led him through this process. Twice, Luke mentioned that Simeon was led by the Spirit to do the things he did. Only someone in a right relationship with God could be so finely attuned to God's voice. Simeon strikes me as a humble, grateful, obedient servant of the Lord. I think this is what it means to be in a right relationship with God.

Secondly, to die in peace, I think you need to be in a right relationship with people. Luke said of Simeon that he was not only devout, but also righteous. This means he was in a right relationship with God and others. He did the right thing in the right way at the right time. He treated people fairly. He lived by the Golden Rule. This is my understanding of what it means to be righteous. This is what leads to a peaceful death.

I think there is one other thing you must do in order to die in peace. You must be a good steward of the time, talents, resources, influence and opportunities that God gives you while you are here. Did you hear the quote I mentioned a few moments ago? "So live your life that when it comes time to die, that is all you have to do." I have known too many people who have died with regrets. They died wishing they had one more day to correct some things. I don't believe they died in peace.

In Harold Kushner's book, Living a Life That Matters, he makes an interesting statement. After spending time with people in their final hours or days of life, Kushner concluded that what frightened them was not death but insignificance, the fear that they would die and leave no mark upon the world.

This is vividly portrayed on screen in Jack Nicholson's latest movie, *About Schmidt*. Nicholson plays the part of a retired insurance executive that is struggling to find his place in life after his wife's death. One of the most poignant scenes occurs when Nicholson asks two questions. "What difference have I made in this world because I have lived? What have I done with my life to make the world a better place to live?"

I think dying in peace is the result of knowing that you used your time on earth to make it better. Somehow, you die in peace when you know you will be missed.

What must you do to die in peace? I cannot answer this specifically for you. Only you can do that and I hope, with our Lord's help, you will as we begin a New Year. I can think of no better time to evaluate our lives and rearrange values and priorities if necessary.