

Old Simeon's Bucket List

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to look at the passage we read shortly, but first off, I would like to ask you how you enjoyed the end of the world. Did you get a ringside seat? Was there anything interesting or unusual that happened in your neck of the woods?

If anybody's completely lost at what I'm just saying or referring to, unless you've been hiding away somewhere out of society, you wouldn't have missed the fact that 21st of December was noted to be the possible end of the world according to the ancient Mayans.

Now, this was really something which was hyped up beyond belief. It really had its origins in the fact that somebody once a few years ago spotted that the ancient Mayan civilization had a calendar which had different units of time measurement.

But even at its longest count, and that's why it's called the long count calendar, even by the longest count it only lasted 5,125 years, which I say only, which was set to end on the 21st of December 2012 by our calendar reckoning.

And they didn't predict any time after that. Some alarmists in the world interpreted this as meaning that the Mayans had predicted the end of the world.

[1 : 34] However, I think we all know by now that the world didn't actually end on the 21st of December. And as we look a bit more closely at it, you'd actually discover that experts in ancient Mayan culture simply understood it as meaning that the Mayan long count calendar was reaching the end of its cycle.

Nothing more than that. And some modern Mayan elders, indeed there are Mayans still in the world today who possess that heritage, that civilization, some Mayan elders have said the same thing has happened five times before.

Now, I don't know what proof they have of that, because that would mean the world was at least 25,000 years, well, who knows. It depends on your view whether you're a young earth or an ancient earth person.

Anyway, it provided Hollywood, among others, a first rate excuse for disaster movies like 2012, which I enjoyed enormously, or a second rate love movie, which I didn't enjoy, called Seeking a Best Friend at the End of the World.

I wouldn't recommend that one. At school, we were also given the opportunity to explore ideas, you maybe don't know this if you're from outside the congregation, but I teach religious and moral education, which really is badly named, because really what we're into is not just teaching bits and bobs of phenomena about religion, we're into ideas and beliefs.

[3 : 04] So this was right up my street, and towards the 21st of December, as the term was coming to an end, I constructed a lesson around the title, Ten Ways the World Might End.

And I've got my pupils into groups four, usually, and so what they came up with, what was on their list of ten ways in which the world might end, playing around with this idea, and we got asteroid impact, thinking possibly a few years ago to our film Armageddon, or Deep Impact, with global plague, some people that solar explosion, by the way, do you know if the sun exploded, do you know how long it would take you to know about that?

Eight and a half minutes. So that's how long it takes for the heat and light of the sun to reach us, travelling at the speed of light. Other possibilities were super earthquakes and super volcanoes, and even some Christian young people in our classes were brave enough to put the return of Jesus Christ to judge the world.

Which please me, no end. However, the interesting thing about this phenomenon is it really did make people ask questions that they might not otherwise ask.

You know, the sort of questions that occur to you at two o'clock in the morning when you wake up, and you can't get to sleep again, and you wonder what's death really like, what's beyond that, and what's at the end of the universe, those sorts of questions.

[4 : 28] Questions such as what's really important to me, or what do I want to accomplish before I die? Well, if the world had been going to end, I suppose it would have given people food for thought of what they might like to accomplish before the death.

And that brings me on to another film, this is becoming faster sermon about films. Another film made in 2007 called *The Bucket List*, which followed the fortunes of two men, played by Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, two men who were both diagnosed with a terminal disease. And believe it or not, the film is actually a comedy, just to reassure you of that. These men make a very, very serious reflection point. These men make a wish list of things I would like to do before I kick the bucket.

So that's why it's called *The Bucket List*. And the term bucket list, by the way, didn't originate with that film. It originated in America somewhere about 2004, and it was used for the film.

And the film shows these two men deciding to spend their last year doing things like skydiving or driving a Shelby Mustang, flying over the North Pole, visiting the Taj Mahal, and riding motorcycles along the Great Wall of China.

[5 : 48] Climbing to the top of the Great Pyramid. And each time they fulfill an item, they score it off their bucket list. And that gave me a grand excuse to ask you, do you have a bucket list?

What things would you like to do before you die? What's on your list? What would be on my list? In Luke 2.25, we're introduced to a man with a bucket list.

It's an old man called Simeon, who lived in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death. And his bucket list contained only one item, just one.

Before he died, he wanted to see the Lord's Christ. That's what was his bucket list. Nothing else as far as we know that he wanted.

And I want to ask two questions to explore in this next section. What did Simeon hope for? And on what was Simeon's hope grounded?

[6 : 51] What was the ground of that hope? So first of all, what did he hope for? We read there in verse 25, he was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And that means, if you're a theologian, the Messianic hope. The hope that in Israel, and for Israel, that the Messiah would appear.

Now this hope had been rising towards a crescendo ever since the days of the Maccabees and so on, when they believed that a deliverer would arise from within Israel and deliver the people, God's people, from the clutches of the people who depressed them.

Ever since the days of the Babylonians, there had been the Medes and the Persians and there had been the Greeks and there had been the Romans. And one by one, these militaristic civilizations had oppressed them.

And that had raised the idea that an idea which was well implanted within Jewish thought that one day Messiah would arise to be their saviour, to be their redeemer.

[8 : 07] To redeem them out from oppression and the slavery of oppressive nations. Much the same way as God had done in the days of Moses, delivering them from Egypt.

And so this means that as he was looking for the consolation of Israel he meant he had every reason to expect that it was going to happen during his lifetime.

And he believed that time had now arrived. As he says in verse 30, God's salvation which he had prepared before the face of all nations a light to reveal God's truth to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.

And these words, they're not basically Simeon's own words by the way. He's recalling some, that's what we're going to come to soon. But he knew that the saviour which God had prepared wouldn't suit everybody.

As I've told you, the Jews had been downtrodden by many civilizations and the main kind of salvation they hoped for was a similar salvation to the redemption out of Egypt.

[9 : 14] A physical military salvation, a general to lead them out. That was the main idea that most people in Israel had at the time.

Messiah was going to be their general king. God's man for the job. And everyone has even now, even now in our day, everybody has their own idea of salvation or what will make society much

better to live in.

A brand new, brave new world, socially, politically, economically of course. And Simeon knew that Jesus, the Jesus who was to come for Jesus' own name means salvation but if I had a salvation he's really referring to Jesus.

He knew he'd be rejected by many. If you skip on to verse 34, he says that this child, says to Mary, the mother of Jesus and the child is destined to call the rising and falling of many in Israel and to be a sign that we've spoken against.

He knew even then that Jesus was going to be rejected largely by his own people. John tells us this in his first chapter. He came to his own things and his own people didn't receive him.

[10:36] So Simeon saw that, however also that the good news out of all this that although many would reject the Messiah, there would be others in Israel who would receive the Messiah.

It wasn't just that many would fall because he'd be a stumbling block to them, but many would rise to newness of life because of him, not just in Israel but also many other nations across the world because Simeon was aware of something we're going to come to in my second point and that was that God never ever intended to stop short with Israel.

He intended Scotland as well to come within the scope of his promises. And Christmas reminds us that we too have an opportunity to welcome the Lord's Messiah, the Lord's Christ, into our lives.

And it does beg the question, what kind of Messiah or Savior are you looking for? There's so many as we've heard from Derek's ministry last few weeks, so many are happy to have the little baby in the manger to trot out every Christmas and say, we can all go Goo Goo Gaga, but that's not what Jesus came to be, that kind of Messiah, that kind of Savior.

He came to radically shake up our lives and challenge our lives. Anyway, moving on, that's my first point, that Simeon's hope was for a Messiah, a Messiah who would provide not just a superficial, skin-deep kind of salvation, but to go to the root of the problem, which was people's hearts.

[12:21] Simeon actually saw even the cross in all of this. He saw that, speaking to Mary, he said, the sword will pierce your whole heart as well. He saw that Mary was going to suffer through her son's suffering.

So this man, in other words, was a very spiritual man, and he saw very, very deeply into God's purposes. Well, question two, on what was Simeon's hope grounded?

It was grounded, first of all, on a revelation by God's Holy Spirit. Verse 26, it had been revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

He was a man who lived his life being led by the Holy Spirit. This implies he was a man of prayer. He lived his life speaking to God and listening to God.

I was intrigued by what several things that Jeremy had to say this morning about how important it is to listen, as well as to speak to God.

[13:22] Simeon was a very good listener when it came to God's purposes. And with regard to the Holy Spirit in his life, that's one of the ways the New Testament defines what a Christian is in Romans 8.14.

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. Although the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out with the special New Testament outpouring on God's people generally, he still guided and still empowered the believers in Old Testament Israel, which this technically was still part of.

And so Simeon was a man who was a spiritual man in the fullest sense that he was led by the Holy Spirit. Even that day he was led by the Holy Spirit to come in just at the time that Jesus and his mum and dad were in the temple.

And you'll notice also, his hope was not only through special revelation from the Holy Spirit, but his hope was also grounded in the Scriptures.

There are many people who will say that the Lord told them to do this or the Lord said that to them or whatever. But Simeon was not that kind of abstract spiritual person.

[14:39] He was a spiritual person who could show how grounded he was in the promises of God as already given. See, that's the thing you see. Someone who claims all sorts of spiritual revelations but we cannot actually root it to anything or ground it on anything, we've got to be very cautious about that type of person and what they say.

But somebody who says something and who actually points to the Scriptures and who grounds what they say in the Scriptures, that sort of person is worth listening to.

When Simeon took up the infant Jesus in his arms, his words were based on the prophecy of Isaiah. If you have your Bible hand, if you look up by Isaiah 52 verse 10, at Isaiah 49 verse 6, that's somewhere in the previous parts, around about page 740 of it abouts, you'll read these words in Isaiah 52 10, all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

And in 49 verse 6, I will give you, that is God speaking to the Messiah, I will give you as a light to the Gentiles that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth.

That's what Simeon was quoting and you might as well proclaim it from this, what Simeon was saying is this is coming through. So he was actually quoting Scripture or paraphrasing Scripture at that point, basing his beliefs, basing his actions on Scripture.

[16:26] Let me just say this also, if Simeon was also familiar, as I think probably the Jews would be more familiar with their own Scriptures than even many Christians are today, if Simeon was also familiar with the prophecy of Daniel chapter 9 verses 25 to 27, then he would also have been actively looking for the coming of Messiah around that time, because the Messiah was expected to come 483 years after the giving of that particular prophecy in Daniel chapter 9.

And because of what it says, if we just, you may say, well how can you be so precise as that? Well, Daniel, Book of Daniel, and I'm just going to leave this for you to reflect on rather than expound it, the Book of Daniel page 895 says about the 77s, what we understand from this is, particularly verse 25, no one would understand this from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed one, that's the Messiah, the ruler comes, there will be 77s and 62s.

It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but times of trouble, after the 62s, the anointed one will be cut off and will have nothing. So 77s are 49, there was 49 years from the restoration of Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the temple and of the walls, and then there were 62 7s, that's 62 times 7 years from that point until the coming of the Messiah.

As an American would say, do the math. And it's a fact that over, as Jeremy said also this morning, that for over 400 years from the days of Malachi, in what we call the intertestamental period, there was no new scripture from God, but there were men like Simeon who were prophetic in their life and in their liaison, in their communication with God, and men who knew the Old Testament scriptures which had been given.

God was not speaking gratuitously when he gave that prophecy in Daniel, he expected to be taken notice of by people like Simeon who would take note of the fact that they were now living in the era when Messiah was due to arrive.

[18:58] We know from Peter's letter that there were people who inquired and searched carefully with regard to the grace that would come to them, searching what or what manner of time the Spirit was indicating when he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Simeon, I would suggest to you, had a very clear understanding of these things. If he could even hint in verse 35 of Luke chapter 2 of the sufferings of Jesus and those of his mother in losing him. So, Simeon's hope, what Simeon was a spiritual man and he was a scriptural man as well. And so, when he came in led by the Spirit that day, his wish was fulfilled.

Somehow we don't know exactly how, the Scripture doesn't say how as he entered that maybe Jesus was the only child that day, I don't know, being brought in for his mother's purification.

Whatever was the case, he knew that Jesus was the Messiah. And I take it he would have asked Mary if he could hold the baby, or just come and grab him away from her, but however it happened we read that he did take Jesus in his arms and praised God in these terms that we've seen there.

[20:21] So his wish was fulfilled. He had now seen the Christ, the Messiah. So somehow he knew this is he. And this was now the fulfillment of his heart's desire and he was now ready to leave this world.

His bucket list had been fulfilled, tick. And he was ready to leave faithful and without any fear. The word Simeon uses for God at this point, or Lord, as it's translated in some versions, see here sovereign Lord.

It's used very rarely, it's only used four times in the New Testament, and every time it's used it has the idea of acknowledging someone who has full authority, sovereign Lord.

Despotis is the Greek word, you can see how that's been translated in some ways into English. It's as though Simeon has been standing as a guard of honour, waiting for the arrival of the king, and now that the king has arrived he can stand down and go home.

So consider however that this was just the foyable of an old man, where we should be very much mistaken. In fact unless we understand that Simeon's wish should be on everybody's bucket list, that's the point.

[21 : 40] If we don't get that point then we've missed the point. Salvation as Simeon understood it is not, first and foremost, to do with being saved from outward oppression, such as Israel experienced under the Romans.

It's not majorly to do with our nation being saved from economic recession, so our lives can be made more comfortable. It's about experiencing a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and living our lives led by Him through His Spirit.

Simeon knew that, and he desperately wanted it to become the experience of people across the world, in other lands, like Scotland. A light for revelation to the Gentiles, all the non-Jews across the globe, as well as the glory of His people Israel.

So that's something that as we said about Simeon's bucket list, it should be on everybody's bucket list. And there's another major difference as well however, between this and that film I mentioned. It's crucial we understand this, for the actors in that film, called the bucket list, it was for them the beginning of the end. We understand this from the way that the film's name was translated into some other languages, like Swedish and Danish and Turkish.

[22 : 58] If you take it what they said for the title of the film in those countries, it's called Now or Never. The Armenians, in their language, translate the English, the title would be Why Alive Alive?

In Czech it's translated as Before it Comes for Us. Romanians and Serbs call it the list of last wishes.

However, for Old Simeon it wasn't the beginning of the end, for him it was just the end of the beginning. And that's really important to understand. The getting ready for a journey to another place, a place where he knew he would have all eternity to fulfill his wishes with the one he loved the most, and for whom he'd been waiting all those years well into old age.

So the big question is, for us, if this is on our bucket list, the question is, have we seen the Lord's Christ for ourself?

Have you? Have I? I don't mean obviously with physical eyes, if you go to Jerusalem, there's no temple there anyway now. Nobody's saying you have to go and see Jesus, a physical Jesus with physical eyes, but it is essential that we should see him with the eyes of faith.

[24 : 20] When a person is awakened to faith by God's Holy Spirit, and what we call being born again, then they're able to see Christ in a way that they never saw Him before.

And it's that special way which has that look, that looking upon Christ within the mind and spirit's eye, which has more than an air of dependence about it.

It has the air of commitment about it. And as a result, having seen Christ in that way, you are able then to say, no matter what happens to me now, no matter when my life here ends, I'm ready to leave the world at a moment's notice, firmly trusting that my life is safe in the hands of the one who came to earth for me, who lived and died for me, and who rose again for my salvation.

And as we conclude, let's just reflect for a moment on this thought. Just as old Simeon knew that he held in his arms the Lord, and indeed Jesus is the Lord, let's make no mistake.

He would also have been aware that at his passing from the world to that which lies ahead, when the Lord dismissed him to leave this life, his soul would be held secure in the everlasting arms of the one in whom he had put his trust, for time and for eternity.

[25 : 50] So it wasn't really that Simeon was doing the holding, it's that the one in his arms was actually holding him. Let's pray.

Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you that Jesus came and that he lived in this world a very human life, a very, in many respects, a very ordinary life, up to the point where he was revealed as the Savior.

And we thank you that those last few years of his life showed very eloquently in the Gospels that what he did, he did for us, that he was rejected and despised by men, that he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the scourging which brought about our peace was laid on his back.

And at last he went to the cross. And we thank you for him, we thank you that he was prepared to do all that so that we might be secure, not just for this life, but also for all eternity through faith in him.

And we pray that we would be given grace and faith to have that belief tonight as we enter a new year soon. May it be that we enter the new year with the Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us.

[27 : 20] In his name we pray. Amen.