



## Sermon Transcript December 30, 2018

### Behold the Servant! Jesus Our Comfort Luke 2:22-38

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on December 30, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

**Sermon Text**  
**Luke 2:22-38**

<sup>22</sup> And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

<sup>29</sup> “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

<sup>36</sup> And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

## Introduction

This is the time of year when we look back and recount what has taken place in the span of a year. It is always a mixed bag, isn't it? Looking back, there are things to celebrate and there are things to mourn. In fact, one of the lists we often see posted this time of year is the list of people we have lost. It is a list of famous people who have died since the beginning of the year.

This past year saw the passing of significant political figures like George and Barbara Bush and John McCain. We lost some of the most influential thinkers of our time. Steven Hawking and Charles Krauthammer were two intellectual giants of our time and we lost them this year. Some of the entertainers of note that we lost included the likes of Aretha Franklin, Burt Reynolds, Penny Marshall and Roy Clark. We also saw the passing of Jerry Maren at 98 years of age. He was the last surviving munchkin from the Wizard of Oz. And we also lost the evangelist Billy Graham, who was less than a year away from turning 100 when he died this past February.

Of course, the obituaries are filled every day with not so famous people who have died. Death is no respecter of person. It visits the young and the old. Death can be anticipated and it also can come unexpectedly. As some of you look back on this past year, you can speak to this kind of loss in your life and your family. Consequently, 2018 is a year of personal loss for you; a year of sadness. As we stand on the dawn of 2019, we know that this coming year will have a similar list of loss to report. Famous people and not so famous people will die this coming year.

One of the words the Heidelberg Catechism uses to describe life in this fallen world is the word "misery." In fact, before we can find comfort in this life, the catechism suggests that we need to know "how great our sin and misery are." Part of the misery of life is found in the reality of death. I had someone say to me this week, "this side of the door of death, is ugly and hard and painful." It is "misery."

A few years ago I came across an internet conversation on the subject of death. Listen to some of the comments shared about death. You can really hear the tone of misery when people take time to ponder the idea of death. One person posted "We are born and sooner or later we die. All the medicine in the world will not save us from the inevitable end of our lives." In other words, nothing can stop death from coming. Another writes, "I am terrified by the thought that death could really be the end, that there's no more after that." Another adds, "I am afraid of death. I don't believe there is anything after this . . . What scares me about dying is that's that . . . To think that the vast majority of

what we do with life while we have it is completely pointless after we die is scary to me.” Can you hear the misery of meaninglessness if this is all there is and there is nothing after death? One more wrote in, “In a hundred years nobody will know or care I ever existed. I’m not in any way scared about this—I’d be more worried if they were to discover that I didn’t have a life.”<sup>1</sup> Which leads me to ask, “what does it mean to have a life?” What measuring stick do you use to evaluate that? Talk about misery. Is there any real comfort for the misery of life and the misery of death?

We think so! In fact, these comments about death stand in stark contrast to what we hear Simeon say in our passage this morning. He had been told by the Holy Spirit that “*he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.*” And so when Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple, Simeon said, “*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.*” In other words, after seeing Jesus Simeon is saying, “I can now die in peace.” There is something about this Jesus that turns the misery of death into something that no longer causes us to be afraid. In fact, even in the face of death, with Jesus we are filled with real peace. It is not just a slap in the back that tells us to hang in there and make the best of it and to keep a stiff upper lip. The peace Jesus offers is a real comfort that has the power to do something about death.

Here is the question for us this morning as we look at our passage. How do we live and die in the joy of God’s comfort? We don’t know what this next year brings. We don’t even know what tomorrow brings. We do know that this next year will bring a mixed bag of things to celebrate and difficulties to navigate. We do live in a fallen world and the misery of this world can come to us in many different forms. But we also know what Jesus brings. In spite of the circumstances that await us in the coming year, we can live in peace and we can die in peace. What can we learn from Simeon about how to live and die in the joy of God’s comfort?

### **Our COMFORT rests in the PROMISE of JESUS**

Our text introduces us to this man named Simeon. I love the way this passage introduces us to this dear elderly man. We are introduced to him this way, “*Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon.*” Do you know what that means? You wouldn’t know who this guy is. You won’t find his name in lights. He is not an Abraham or a Moses or a David or a Paul. He is just your average guy. He happened to live in Jerusalem, and by the way, his name is Simeon. In fact, you never heard of him before this passage, and you will not encounter him anymore on the pages of Scripture. He leaves the pages of Scripture just as fast as he is introduced to us.

But then what was said of this common “layman” is what I would want said of myself, and I am sure it is what every Christian would want written on their tombstone about them when they die. It was said of Simeon that he “*was a righteous and devout man.*” Do you know what that means? He didn’t just “talk the talk, he walked the walk.” He was a man of strong spiritual conviction who lived the life of faith.

One of the characteristics of Simeon’s strong faith is found in verse 25. Notice what it says about Simeon in this verse. “*He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.*” What is “*the consolation of Israel?*” The word “consolation” is just a fancy word for “comfort.” Simeon was waiting for the “comfort” of Israel. What is this “comfort” that Simeon was waiting for? It takes us right back to where we have been all Advent Season. Isaiah 40 begins the second section of the book of Isaiah. It is in this second section of Isaiah that we are introduced to the promised coming servant of God through the four servant songs we looked at this past month. It is here where Isaiah gets our attention by saying “*Behold, my servant.*”

Isaiah begins this entire second section of Isaiah with these words, “*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*” This theme of God’s coming comfort runs through the rest of the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 51:3, we have the promise that the “*Lord will surely comfort Zion.*” Isaiah 61:2 speaks of the year of the Lord’s favor that will be a comfort to all who mourn. And then, in Isaiah 66:13, God promises of a day when he will comfort the nation of Israel like a mother comforts her children. Technically, the consolation of Israel is “the restoration of Israel under the good reign of God.”<sup>2</sup> So the Old Testament prophets are saying over and over again to this world in misery, “comfort is coming and God is the one sending this comfort.” “*Behold the Servant!*”

Now, the prophet Isaiah wrote these words close to a thousand years before Simeon; and Simeon, being the devout and righteous man he was, trusted the promise of God for the coming comfort of Israel. I guess you could say that there may have been a lot of forces working against him that may have caused the greatest of faith to doubt whether there ever would be real and genuine comfort for Israel. After all, these are the promises of the ancient prophets, but where is the comfort? Where is the Messiah? Simeon could look around him, in his day and age, and he would see little hope of comfort in the misery of life. It was pretty miserable in Jerusalem at this time in history. Rome was now in charge and the Jews had many burdens placed on them because of Rome’s presence and power. Their own religious institutions were fraught with corruption and legalism that placed heavy spiritual burdens on the people. On top of that, there hadn’t been a prophet of God to speak the word of God to Israel for 400 years. They went for

400 years without hearing a single word from God. These 400 years are called “the Silent Years.” Some God of comfort! The signs of the misery of life persist and are present all around him. Sure, the ancient prophets told of a coming comfort in the coming Messiah. But when will he come? Yet Simeon was found trusting the promise of God.

Herein lies the first place where you can find genuine comfort in life and in death. Our comfort is anchored in the promise of God. Ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God has promised man that God will overcome our misery through the seed of the woman and redeem all of creation. It is a promise that is reiterated throughout the entire Bible. We sing of this promise during this time of year.

Come, Thou long expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.

But you know the skeptic could turn around and say to us, “well, if Jesus came, why are we still locked in misery?” You call Jesus the solution to the misery of life and death? Well, you claim he came and we aren’t any better off than what we were 2,000 years ago.” The list of people we lost from 2018 is just a precursor to the list that will emerge in 2019—just different faces. Where is the comfort?

Like Simeon, we wait for the promise of God to be fulfilled. We have more to go on than Simeon did. Jesus has come and died on the cross and rose from the dead. He said that he is coming back. That is the promise of God. We are given a sneak peek of the end of the story, and what do we find? We read in Revelation 21 of a New Heaven and a New Earth that is to come. Listen to the comforting way in which it is described. *“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* Be comforted with the promise of God. There will be no more misery and there will be no more death. This is the promise of God. Let this be your comfort.

So where is our comfort in the misery of life? Well, like Simeon, we are called to wait with eyes of faith in the unfailing promises of God. That is what it means to be righteous and devout. You trust God! This is what sustains us in the midst of the mess of life and the prospect of death. This is why Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians about the return of Christ. He writes, *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead*

*in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”* Did you get that last part? *“Encourage each other with these words.”* Just like Simeon, we are comforted with the promise of the coming comfort of Christ. Trust the promises of God.

### **Our COMFORT rests in the PERSON of JESUS**

As the story of our text unfolds, we find Simeon being led by the Holy Spirit to go into the Temple Courts on a certain day. Now we know from this passage, it had been revealed to Simeon that he would see the promised Messiah with his own eyes before he died. And so on this day, Mary and Joseph were bringing the baby Jesus to the Temple for the first time to offer Him to the Lord, as was the custom prescribed by Moses for the first born son.

Simeon sees this couple with the baby Jesus in the Temple and he takes the baby in his arms and says some amazing things about this infant. What he had to say about Jesus here are words filled with comfort. Notice the first words out of his mouth. *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace, according to your word: for my eyes have seen your salvation.”* As he is gazing into the eyes of the baby Jesus, holding the baby in his arms, he says *“my eyes have seen your salvation.”* God’s salvation is a person. Our comfort is a person. Simeon is quoting from Isaiah 52:10, where it says, *“and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”* This is right before Isaiah leads into the fourth servant song of Isaiah where we read of the coming suffering servant who dies for us. Simeon goes on to say that this salvation is *“prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”* These words are taken right from the second servant song where we are told in Isaiah 49:6, *“It is too light of a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”* These are great words for a world living in misery. And Simeon was holding this comfort in his hands when he held the baby Jesus.

In Isaiah we are told that the hope for this world locked in misery is found in the Servant. Through the four servant songs we learned that the coming Servant will set things right in this broken world. We saw in the second song that he is not just coming for the household of Israel. Rather, he is coming for all people, including you and me. He is able to bring us comfort because the third song tells us that he was obedient to the

Father. Because he was obedient, the fourth song tells us that he was able to atone for our sin through his death on our behalf. Here we read those familiar words, *“He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.”* This is why Jesus reads from the words of Isaiah 61 when he begins his ministry in Luke 4. He picks up the scroll and reads these words, *“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.”* The promise is that there is coming a day when God will address the misery of man through a coming Messiah—a person.

Have you ever stopped to consider the statements Jesus made about himself as he walked this earth? He claimed to be the comfort of man who lived in misery. Consider the “I am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Jesus said of Himself in John 6:35, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”* In John 8:12 He said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* In John 10:9 He says, *“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”* In John 10:11 He says, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* In John 11:25 He says, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”* In John 14:6, He tells His disciples to not let their hearts be troubled. Why? *“I am the way and the truth and the life.”* Jesus offers Himself to you as the comfort to the misery of life and to the misery of death.

When touched by the misery of life and death, where do you turn for comfort? Some people turn to a bottle to try to drown out the misery. Some people turn to entertainment to push the misery to the periphery, trying to forget about it. Some people look to the security of money to make sure they are prepared for any kind of tragedy. Some people try to beat the misery of life like Ernest Hemingway did. His philosophy of life was that life was “a short day’s journey from nothingness to nothingness.” So he decided to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow he dies. And so he grabbed life by the horns and became a big-game hunter, an adventurer and a womanizer. And at the age of 61, he sat in the foyer of his Idaho home and took his life.<sup>3</sup> The message of the Bible, and the message of Christmas to a world in misery is simply this—your comfort has come. Look no more. If you are looking for comfort, there He is. His name is Jesus. Our comfort is found in the “person” of Jesus.



## Our COMFORT rests in the PASSION of JESUS

But how is Jesus our comfort in life and in death? The Bible promises comfort in this life and the next through Jesus. But how? The Heidelberg Catechism says it this way. “He has fully paid for all my sin with his precious blood.” The “passion of Jesus” is a reference to the suffering of Jesus. It is a reference to the cross. The paradox and the irony of Jesus is that he brings real comfort to us through his own death. This is how he brings us salvation.

Simeon’s final words to Mary and Joseph are rather sobering. I am not sure that Mary and Joseph felt the full impact of his final words, and they probably did not fully understand them. I often wonder how I would feel as a parent if this word of prophecy was spoken over my new born son or daughter. But Simeon said this to Mary, *“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”*

When I read what Simeon says to Mary—*and a sword will pierce through your own soul*—my mind immediately goes to that dreadful scene where Jesus is hanging from a cross. Looking down from the cross he sees his mother standing next to his disciple, John. From the cross, Jesus says to Mary, *“Woman, behold your son!”* This was in reference to John, who took her into his own house. Mary stood there watching her son die, and any parent who has walked down this road knows what Mary felt.

But it had to be this way. This is why Jesus came. The eternal Son of God took on human flesh and died for us. Our misery in life and in death is the curse of sin. Because of our sin, we die and then comes the judgment. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that we are by nature objects of God’s wrath. We are alienated from God because of our sin. The comfort Jesus offers is the removal of the judgment of God on our souls because of our sin—forgiveness of sin—and the promise of eternal life.

Do you walk around this morning with the guilt of your sin? There is no comfort in that. Do you feel distant from God? There is no comfort in that. Do you live in fear of death? There is no comfort in that. Jesus came to provide real comfort. What is that comfort? He brings God to us through removing the guilt of our sin through His death on the cross. I need not fear the misery of this life, because, through Jesus, I know God is with me; nothing can separate me from His love. I need not fear the misery of death, because, through Jesus, even though I die, yet shall I live, because Jesus has risen from

the dead!

And so Simeon says, this child will cause some to fall and some to rise. Who will fall? Those who are overcome by their misery, never receiving the comfort that comes through the person of Jesus, because, in their pride, they failed to turn in faith to Jesus. But who will He raise up? Those who turn to Jesus, and, with faith, put their trust in the work of Jesus on the cross for the removal of their guilt. Now there is no peace like Jesus, and it comes from the passion of the Christ, the work of the cross.

### **Our COMFORT rest in the PRAISE of JESUS**

There is one more place where we find our comfort. We find it in our praise of Jesus. In verses 36-38 we are introduced to another godly saint—again just an ordinary woman of faith. Her name is Anna and she too is elderly. Here is what Luke tells us about her. *“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”*

Clearly, like Simeon, this prophetess was devout. She was a constant presence in the temple, *“worshiping with fasting and prayer.”* She saw the same thing in Jesus that Simeon saw. Her response was to give thanks. Luke describes this scene by saying, *“she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”* You can sense the joy of her praise because the long awaited hope—Jesus—the redemption of Jerusalem has finally come.

I want to make a curious observation of Luke’s account of the birth of Christ. Simeon and Anna aren’t the only elderly people in Luke’s account of the birth of Christ. John the Baptist’s parents—Zechariah and Elizabeth are also older, at least they are beyond the years of having children. Nonetheless, Elizabeth gives birth to the last of the prophets. It is through John the Baptist that God breaks 400 years of silence and John the Baptist gets to point to the one Isaiah spoke about a thousand years earlier.

It has been suggested that the presence of Zechariah and Elizabeth and Simeon and Anna—each noted for their advanced age—that they represent the passing of the old covenant. They represent the era that spoke of a coming Messiah who would make all

things new. And now, the long awaited promise of God has come and it fills their mouths with praise and thanksgiving to God. God is now doing something new.

That is true of us too. When we come to Christ by faith, not only do we have peace and comfort in the face of life and death. But we become new. This becomes a source of praise and thanksgiving, just like Anna. Paul says of us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ has reconciled us to himself . . . In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.”* This is the source of our praise. Like Anna, we too “give thanks” because in Jesus redemption has come.

When we praise God and sing of Christ, we are reminded that the promise of God is sure and our faith rests in something solid. It strengthens our peace and fills us with joy because Jesus has indeed set us free.

## Conclusion

How do we live and die in the joy of God’s comfort? We may not know what 2019 holds for us. But we do know what Jesus holds for us. He is our peace! He comes into the misery of life and brings us real peace.

Our comfort rests in the promise of Jesus.

You can trust God’s word.

Our comfort rests in the person of Jesus.

Your hope is in the person of Jesus.

Our comfort rests in the passion of Jesus.

Turn in faith to Jesus who died for you and rose again.

Our comfort rests in the praise of Jesus.

Sing of his redemption and give thanks.

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<sup>1</sup>Living and Dying? [Http://www.boards.ie/vbulletin/archive/index.php/t-178906.html](http://www.boards.ie/vbulletin/archive/index.php/t-178906.html)

<sup>2</sup>Joel B. Green *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 145

<sup>3</sup>Chuck Colson, *How Now Shall We Live*, (Wheaton: Tyndale: 1999) 260

<sup>4</sup>Words by Dustin Kensrue, arrangement by Kings Kaleidoscope / © Dead Bird Theology (ASCAP), It’s All About Jesus Music (ASCAP)

## All Glory Be to Christ<sup>4</sup>

Should nothing of our efforts stand  
No legacy survive  
Unless the Lord does raise the house  
In vain its builders strive  
To you who boast tomorrow's gain  
Tell me what is your life  
A mist that vanishes at dawn  
All glory be to Christ!

All glory be to Christ our king!  
All glory be to Christ!  
His rule and reign we'll ever sing,  
All glory be to Christ!

His will be done  
His kingdom come  
On earth as is above  
Who is Himself our daily bread  
Praise Him the Lord of love  
Let living water satisfy  
The thirsty without price  
We'll take a cup of kindness yet  
All glory be to Christ!

All glory be to Christ our king!  
All glory be to Christ!  
His rule and reign will ever sing,  
All glory be to Christ!

When on the day the great I Am  
The faithful and the true  
The Lamb who was for sinners slain  
Is making all things new.  
Behold our God shall live with us  
And be our steadfast light  
And we shall ere his people be  
All glory be to Christ!

All glory be to Christ our king!  
All glory be to Christ!  
His rule and reign will ever sing,  
All glory be to Christ!