

What two words would you use to describe yourself? If you could only use two words, what would they be? Young and beautiful? Handsome and charming? I think some of you would choose old and tired. The words we choose would likely be very different from the words others would choose for us. The way others see us is hardly ever how we see ourselves.

Simeon, in our text, might choose for himself words like old and dying, or better yet, waiting and hopeful. We assume he is old. And we assume he is close to the end of his life. But we do know that the Holy Spirit has promised him that he will not die until his eyes behold the promised Savior. More important than the words Simeon might select for himself are the two words that God uses to describe him here in our text. And they are: righteous and devout.

Would any of you have chose these words for yourself? Perhaps not. And very likely, Simeon would not have either. Yet this is how God sees him: righteous and devout.

Now some of you who would have chosen old and tired for yourself will remember the singing duo, The Righteous Brothers. But this is hardly what God means by righteous to describe Simeon. He is righteous not because of how well he might sing. His righteousness has nothing to do with how good a person he may be. Simeon is righteous for one reason: God declares him righteous.

And Simeon's righteousness is ever so closely connected to the child he is holding in his arms. This is the Lord's Christ. The Savior of sinners. This is the Child for whom Simeon is waiting.

Now why would someone wait so longingly for this Child? The only kind of person who would do that is someone who knew that he was a sinner; a sinner in need of a Savior. If you or I believe that we are righteous enough, good enough for heaven the way we are, the way we have lived, then we will hardly have any kind of longing whatsoever for Jesus.

This describes those who are of the world, and sadly, even far too many who say they are Christians. They connect their righteousness to the way in which they live. And they can always find someone who lives worse than they do. Compared to that person, they are righteous; at the least, righteous enough that they do not long for a Savior to save them from their sins.

The only one, however, who is righteous enough is the Child in Simeon's arms. This is the Lord's Christ, the Holy One of Israel, the only One without sin. But this one came to be born of Mary, to be held in Simeon's arms, and to be held by nails to a cross. And why? Because He came to be our Righteousness; to make everything right between God and us. He came, not to make us good enough for heaven, but to give us a place in heaven through His holy life and His sufferings, death, and resurrection.

Can you see why Simeon rejoices to hold this Holy Child in his arms? This Child is Simeon's righteousness. This Child, the Lord Jesus Christ, is why he, now, can depart this life in peace. Simeon's place in heaven is assured because it does not depend on how well he has lived, but on what this Child would do for him.

And this Child has done the same for you. The very last thing you need to be concerned about is whether you will, when the day comes, depart this life in peace. There is assurance also for you. Your righteousness was born of Mary, held by Simeon, and nailed to a cross. He is your assurance, for He makes everything right between God and you. There is nothing you need to do, nor can do, to make yourself righteous enough for a place in heaven. Jesus is your righteousness. He is your salvation.

And so, hold on to Him. This is the second word God uses to describe Simeon. The word devout. And this word actually means *taking hold well*.

I'm sure that Simeon was very careful in how he held Mary's Child in his arms. Yet devout means to hold, not with our arms, but with our heart, and then, too, with our mind and with our life. God declared Simeon righteous for Jesus' sake, and Simeon took hold of this well and believed it. And believing it, he lived it.

I do think that you and I would do a much better job of taking care to hold Jesus well if He was a tiny baby placed into our arms, than we do with our heart and with our life. We would take hold well of Jesus as a tiny child, but how do we do with holding in our hands His Holy Scriptures to us? We would do well to take hold of Jesus with our hands if He was a baby. But how well do we do with our hands with folding them in prayer to Him who is our living Lord and Savior? God calls Simeon devout. Would He also call you devout?

My friends, look carefully with me at your salvation. It is not in your taking hold well of Jesus. It is in His taking hold well of you. He took hold of the cross and would not let go. He took hold of you in your baptism, and He will not let go.

Jesus does not give up on you if you have been less than devout. Instead, He forgives you. He truly does. Each and every one of you is forgiven by your gracious Lord. And this same Jesus who forgives your sins, devoutly takes hold well of you.

Your assurance is not in how well you take hold of Jesus. Your assurance is that He takes hold of you. And don't you think that His hands, which felt the nails for you, can take hold of you well no matter what you go through in life?

And so, I want you to leave here today believing this – that the two words which describe you best are these: forgiven and assured. Amen.