

Simeon and Anna: Waiting in Faith

Luke 2:22-38

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

²² 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 ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

*²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant^[e] depart in peace,
according to your word;*

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

*³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”*

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

³⁶ 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, ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ 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.

- Luke 2:22-38, ESV

Have patience, have patience . . .

When I was a kid, one of my least-favorite little ditties was the reminder song, “Have Patience.” For those of you under the age of 40, the song says –

Have patience, have patience, don't be in such a hurry
 For when you're impatient, you only start to worry
 Remember, remember, that God is patient, too
 And think of all the times when others had to wait for you

I would grumble in my mind about this – “Yeah, I know God is patient, but I'm not God. God is all sorts of things I'm not. And when has anyone had to wait for me?” I wasn't patient, and I didn't want to be patient, and this time of year was the worst. I always wanted to know what I was getting for Christmas and if I was getting the really big item I was most hoping to get.

Sometimes waiting is hard. Waiting reminds us that we are not the ones in control of our own lives much less the universe and all eternity. The Bible tells us over and over again to “Wait on the LORD” and makes precious promises to those who wait on the LORD. Waiting in faith is an important aspect of saving faith. We saw last week that Biblical saving faith says YES to what God has spoken and revealed, rather than trying to get God to sign off on our agenda, what we have spoken to Him. And so, if we agree with what God has revealed and we trust Him, we will often have to wait patiently for what God has promised.

A. Waiting on the Promise of God

Simeon and Anna were two old people waiting on the promise of God in the Temple. Simeon had received a more specific personal promise from God, but both of them were patiently and faithfully waiting for God to do what they knew He had promised.

²² 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 ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple when the time to dedicate Him to the Lord had come. This would have been 40 days after Jesus was born. He was circumcised on the 8th day, and then the firstborn males were required to be dedicated to the Lord and a ransom price paid for them 33 days after circumcision, with the day of circumcision counting as Day 1 of the 33. So, 40 days after that

famous first Christmas night, Mary and Joseph obey the Law of the Lord and go up to the Temple.

From this introduction, we learn that Joseph and Mary are obedient to the Word of God and that they are not rich. They offer a sacrifice of two birds, which is the offering for those who cannot afford to buy a lamb. (This also proves that the visit of the Magi from the East had to have come after 40 days, since Joseph and Mary would have been able to afford a lamb if they had already received the gift of gold.) So, Mary and Joseph are obedient and relatively poor.

²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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 . . .

We're introduced to Simeon in verse 25, and we're told four things about him right away:

1. He was righteous, which speaks to his upright moral character.
2. He was devout, which speaks to his sincere devotion to God.
3. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, which speaks to expectant and obedient waiting for the coming of the long-awaited, promised Messiah.
4. The Holy Spirit was upon him., which means he was particularly anointed or blessed by the Holy Spirit, which is unusual because he didn't hold any official anointed office of prophet or priest or king.

Verse 26 then tells us that Simeon had received a very special promise from the Lord, that he would not die before he had seen the promised Messiah, until his own eyes beheld the consolation of Israel he had been waiting for. With this introduction to this remarkable man, we're told in verse 27 that Simeon came that day in the Spirit into the Temple.

We're introduced to Anna at the end of our passage:

³⁶ 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, ³⁷ 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.

Anna had received no special revelation promise from God in the same way Simeon did, even though she was a prophetess. But Anna was an exemplary model of waiting in faith. She was 84 years old and never left the Temple, “*worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.*” What’s interesting is that Herod the Great began a construction project to expand the Temple some 17 years before Jesus was born, and Anna had likely been waiting in the Temple for a long time before Herod even began the expansion project.

Anna is a great example of how we can wait on the Lord, and that’s only by abiding in the Lord. You can’t wait on the Lord faithfully if you’re only checking in with the Lord from time to time. Simeon was in the Spirit and Anna was worshiping with fasting and prayer day and night. They were abiding in the Lord, walking with God. Their relationship with God wasn’t limited to one day per week or a few minutes in the morning.

How are you abiding in the Lord? How are you consciously walking with Him by faith in the Spirit day and night?

B. Praising God for His Faithfulness

Simeon and Anna further showed how they were waiting in faith by the way they responded when they finally saw the One they’d been waiting for:

Simeon: *when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,*

*²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;*

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

*³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”*

- vv. 27-32

Anna: 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. - v. 38

The first thing to note is the most obvious: Both Simeon and Anna are joyful and

thankful. Christian worship should always be both joyful and thankful, for the Messiah has come, the hope of God's people has been realized. Sin has been cancelled, Death has been defeated. Worship that is half-hearted and reluctant is worship not rooted in faith, not trusting the Word of God.

Simeon reaches out and takes the newborn Baby Jesus, just shy of 6 weeks old, into his arms and praises God for keeping His promise. He has now seen the salvation of God. He knows by faith under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that this little baby boy whose name means salvation is indeed the salvation of God for His people. Interestingly, while Simeon had been waiting for "the consolation of Israel," he says that Jesus is God's salvation "*prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.*" Jesus didn't come to be a national hero for Israel. He has a much bigger mission.

Isaiah had foretold this about Jesus. We read this in Isaiah 49:5-6:

*And now the LORD says,
 he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
 to bring Jacob back to him;
 and that Israel might be gathered to him—
 for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
 and my God has become my strength—he says:
 "It is too light 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."* (ESV)

Unfortunately, God's people had neglected this aspect of God's promise and thought the Messiah was only going to be the consolation of Israel and not a light for the nations that God's salvation may reach to the end of the earth. They had allowed a narrow nationalism to filter the Word of God, and so they missed what Jesus really came to do. But Simeon knew it: Jesus is salvation for all peoples, for all nations.

Anna also saw the faithfulness of God in Jesus and she, too, rejoiced. We're told she began to give thanks to God that very hour and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Her joy overflowed in her telling anyone

and everyone who would listen. Of course, not everyone would listen, but those sincerely waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem would.

C. Seeing and Speaking the Truth

And this brings us to the final aspect of the faith of Simeon and Anna: Not only were they waiting patiently in hope, and not only were they then joyful and thankful when Jesus came, but they then saw the truth and spoke the truth clearly. Sometimes we can be tempted to rejoice and be thankful for our salvation but then be very hesitant to speak the truth clearly to those who need to hear it.

Right after God's special revelation promise to Simeon was fulfilled, Simeon received another revelation from God. This time, the message was not for him:

³⁴ 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 ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

It's interesting that Simeon blessed both of them, but then he spoke this hard word directly to Mary. Why? We're not told exactly, but it's likely because Joseph would not live to see Jesus' public ministry or His crucifixion.

What does Simeon's message to Mary mean? Well, Jesus came into the world both to bless and to curse, to bring up those who had been cast down and discarded and to bring down those who had puffed themselves up with pride.

Jesus comes into the world and into our lives to bring salvation, but that salvation definitely comes at a cost: We have to confess two vital things – that we need salvation and that we cannot save ourselves. That's offensive to our pride. We want to think we're basically good people and that God should accept us on our own. We don't want to accept that we are so guilty and vile in the eyes of a holy, holy God that we need a substitute Savior, a redeemer to ransom us from condemnation.

Those who know themselves to be sinners, those who realize they have no hope of being good enough for a perfectly holy God who is also the perfectly just judge of all will fall to their knees and cry Hallelujah! for a Savior who will rescue them from themselves. But those who think too highly of themselves, or those who value their power and position over being right before God, will reject Jesus and want to be rid of Him.

A sword would pierce through Mary's own soul because she would stand at the foot of the cross and watch Jesus be crucified by those who rejected Him. She would not understand in that moment that her Son was willingly laying down His life for her redemption. Thankfully, she had been warned by Simeon that sorrow was coming for her through her Son. And she remembered, because Mary is the most likely source for Luke 1-2, which means that we know these things because Mary remembered them. Certainly, Simeon and Anna would've been long dead by the time Luke wrote his Gospel, but Mary remembered.

How are you waiting in faith this Christmas?

So, Simeon and Anna are truly models of Christian faith for us. They both waited patiently for God to keep His promise. They believed His Word and they did not waver in their hope.

So, my question for you is simple: How are you waiting in faith this Christmas?

Do you know what God has promised? Do you see how He has kept His promises in Christ?

2 Corinthians 1:20-22 says:

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. ²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (ESV)

God has kept all of His promises in Christ. If you believe in Christ, it is God who has established you in your faith and in your position in Christ. As a guarantee of your future inheritance in glory, God has given you the guarantee of the Holy Spirit to seal you for your eternal joy in Him.

Psalm 16 ends with these words of confident hope:

You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. – Psalm 16:11, ESV

If you are in Christ, that is your hope.

1 John 3 says -

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears^[a] we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. – 1 John 3:1-3

We have been forgiven and adopted as children of God. That is the love the Father has given us in Christ. But we are not yet all that we will be when we are face-to-face with Jesus. We long, we groan, and we wait in eager expectation for the day of consummation, the coming day of glory.

Are you waiting in faith, in expectant hope? Do you also believe that the God who has redeemed you and who has prepared such a glorious future for you knows how to guide every one of your days from this day until that day? Are you trusting in His Word and His goodness, waiting patiently, even when you can't see exactly what He's doing? Do you know that God is for you in Christ, and that you can trust what He has written in His book for every one of your days?

This Christmas, rejoice and give thanks for Your Savior has come. And wait in eager expectation, in hope and in faith, trusting God to be faithful until you're home with Him.