

“Simeon and Anna: Prepared to See Hope in a Baby”

Introduction: (Read Luke 2:21-38) When I had prayerfully committed to spend this year preparing with you for Christmas by following along with Luke I have to say that I did not expect to preach what I preached about the Angel Gabriel’s visit to Zechariah to announce the miraculous birth of John (cf. Luke 1:5-25). Neither did I expect to be moved by this passage to preach what I am sharing with you this morning. Gabriel’s visit to Zechariah and Mary and Joseph’s visit to the Temple with Jesus, are among the least familiar of the birth and infancy narrative to the average person/Christian considering God’s Word as in their celebration of Christmas. As I thought about this text I found myself moving away from the consideration of much of the discussions of the context and the details compelling Jesus’ parents to go to the Temple that day. My focus fell much more on Simeon and Anna and their response to the infant Jesus. Having said that I do want to briefly not the context.

The Context Simply Addressed – (cf. Luke 2:22-24) I would like to say two very simple things about the context without further explanation.

- **First** - Joseph and Mary’s visit to the Temple with the infant Jesus on this day involves three separate ceremonies to be performed according to the prescriptions in the Law of Moses. Mary’s purification to take place forty days after the birth of a son (cf. Leviticus 12:2-4, 6 and Luke 2:22, 24); the presentation of the firstborn to the Lord according to the requirements of Exodus 13:2, 12, 15; 34:19; Numbers 18:15-16); and the dedication of the firstborn to the service of the Lord (cf. 1 Samuel 1-2).¹

- **Second** – Irrespective of the discussion of the details of the context, if we are to address the things I intend to address from this passage, we must consider that all of this took place in the course of normal, daily activity in the Temple. There was nothing that on the face of it was in any way extraordinary. These were two humble Jews doing the things prescribed in the Law to mark the birth of their firstborn son.

This is important for our discussion for two reasons.

First – this simple and “ordinary day” was a day in which the Lord would present His Messiah to the nation in His Temple. The promise was being fulfilled on this “typical” and “ordinary” day. The events recorded here were under the sovereign direction of God (Note that the Holy Spirit is mentioned 3 times in these verses 2:25-27). **This is a reminder that on any given day – any ordinary day – in any place – ordinary or noteworthy - the Lord is sovereignly moving in the lives of His people to reveal Himself to them!! This is the reason I preach – bear witness – offer biblical counsel in crisis – the reason you do the same – study His word, pray, share, show kindness, are generous, etc.**

¹ See Darrell Bock in “Baker Exegetical Commentary,” “Luke: Volume 1,” page 234 for the discussion cited.

Second - on this day there was an older Jewish man, named Simeon, and a very old Jewish woman, named Anna, *who saw something extraordinary, something that no one else saw!!* There were no doubt dozens, if not hundreds, of people who saw Joseph and Mary pass by with the infant, Jesus, in their arms. *None of them saw what they saw!!* The question that I want to ask and answer is *“What enabled Simeon and Anna to see in Mary and Joseph’s baby the promised Messiah?”*

I believe that Luke is revealing to us the things about Simeon and Anna which uniquely prepared them to “recognize” and “receive” and to be used of God to “declare/proclaim” this baby as the Christ/Messiah. **Moreover**, I believe it is these very things which uniquely prepare us, not only to “see” Him and receive Him and the salvation He brings but also, in the “seeing,” to live transformed and enduring/triumphant lives, lives of profound witness, in this very broken world.

Simeon and Anna Were Uniquely Prepared to Recognize and Receive the Lord’s Salvation/Consolation – (cf. 2:25-34) *Note*: It seems to me that Luke would have us understand that the things which are said to be true of Simeon are implicitly true of Anna. Most of our time will be spent on Simeon with reference made to Anna along the way. I want to caution that some of the conclusions I draw are drawn from inferences – I begin with such an inference.

- Both Simeon and Anna were old (cf. 2:28-29, 36-37a). Luke explicitly says that Anna was very old (perhaps 84 years old). However, I am inferring that Simeon was old because of the implication that he was hanging on until God allowed his “eyes to see your (the Lord’s) salvation.” **Now certainly** – getting old is not a decision of the will, something we make a conscious choice “to be.” Neither is old age, in and of itself, an advantage. However, Luke adds two factors to his description that make it relevant.

1. Simeon and Anna were of *Godly character* which, when coupled with long life, uniquely prepared them to “see” and rejoice in the infant Jesus. Luke tells us that Simeon was a righteous and devout man (2:25) and implies as much for Anna (cf. 2:36a-37).

2. Here again I will assume some things between the lines of the text. It was their long life as those who devoutly sought the Lord that enabled them to be fundamentally discontented with the offerings of the world and of this life. It all paled in comparison to the pleasure of God!!

I make these assumptions based on what is said about Anna’s life as a widow and the specific “longings” they are said to have or the thing for which they both are “waiting” (cf. 2:25, 38). *They might agree with the assessments of John* (1 John 2:15-17) *and Paul* (Ephesians 2:1-4; 4:17-19) with respect to the bondage and dangerously empty promises of the world and our own “flesh.” **It is often the fundamental desires of our “flesh” and the hope we place in the world for their satisfaction – for our contentment – which dulls our senses and clouds our vision for God Himself. There were no doubt many genuine believers among those in the Temple**

courts that day who simply had their eyes down and not up – under the world’s weight and facing life’s disappointments – they could not “see” what was right before them!!

- This led to lives, for Simeon and Anna, which were characterized by *the posture of waiting* for the Lord’s promise. Simeon and Anna’s long life of pursuing the Lord, and their fundamental disillusionment/discontent with the condition of the world, is further highlighted by *this posture of waiting* – cf. 2:25b. *This posture is made up of two critical pieces from our perspective.*

- Simeon “*was waiting for the consolation of Israel*” and Anna “*was looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*” - **It is here that waiting turns to anticipation.** The encouragement of the Apostle Paul is grounded in this sort of “waiting” or “anticipation.” It is part of his call to intentionally set our minds and hearts on the life that is in Jesus and to “look” to the hope which awaits us in Him - Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:1-4. Peter fortifies the suffering church with reminders of that which awaits the believer who endures – cf. 1 Peter 1:3-9.

- It is an anticipation or waiting which led to a sensitivity to the Spirit and the illumination He brings in Simeon’s life (this appears to be how the text should be read in 1:25). This is not something we accomplish or do in our own strength. It is a posture of waiting, anticipating, of looking for the hope that is ours in Jesus born of and leading to a sensitivity to the Spirit and His leading (cf. Luke 2:25c.). *Paul alludes to this sort of thing* as we pursue the Lord as our soul’s deepest joy – our peace or rest is found in the experience of the pleasure of the Lord (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; also 3:18).

This leads to the point I want to really emphasize - *love for or longing for Jesus!!*. This is what moves our hearts from obedience in anticipation to deep, compelling, joy filled endurance. Admittedly this is beyond the explicit teaching of the passage - but it is everywhere implied and explicitly declared in other key texts of scripture. It is **THE THING** that moves the needle in the Christian life...when waiting and anticipation is turned to deep longing or love for the appearing of Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 - “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (NIV) (v.8b - οὐ μόνον δὲ ἐμοὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἠγαπηκόσι τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ - BGT)

Hebrews 9:27-28 – “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and *he will appear* a second time, not to bear sin, **but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**” (NIV) (v. 28b - ἐκ δευτέρου χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας ὀφθήσεται τοῖς αὐτὸν ἀπεκδεχομένοις εἰς σωτηρίαν- BGT).

(See other passages in this light - Paul's prayer - Ephesians 3:14-21; Paul's testimony - Philippians 3:7-11; His admonition Philippians 4:4-9)

Simeon (And Anna) Was Able "To See" This Hope Was Only To Be Realized At Great Cost – cf. 2:33-37 – This in no way diminished his joy – rather it deepened it and gave it substance.

– Simeon and Anna were able to see that the “Consolation of Israel,” and the “the redemption of Jerusalem,” “the salvation of the Lord...prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” was ***a person*** - this baby – ***It was Jesus!!*** It wasn't something He brought with Him – ***He is our life, our joy and fullness, our true heart's desire!!!!***

- Nonetheless – no sooner had Joseph and Mary marveled at what was being declared that Simeon helps them/us to see a reality far beyond the typical declarations we make and the joy we declare at Christmas (cf. 2:34-35). This seems like such a joy destroying – at least diminishing “blessing.”

Three points of application:

1. The world system, established by the enemy and with the complicity of fallen humanity, would not yield its power easily to this new King. The fall permeates every aspect of life, culture and government/structures of power. We tend to want to see cohesive largescale movements which oppose us/Him and His purposes – things outside of us – because it makes the “enemy” tangible and identifiable. It puts them out in front of us. However, the brokenness and horror of fallen humanity and the fallen creation which we occupy is everywhere and in every moment – it is among us and often very subtle.

However, the lesson is that the governments and rulers of this world will not willingly yield their power to this baby (cf. Matthew 2:1-18). The universities and institutions of learning will oppose Him in every discipline and use the power of shame and denied honor to bend the message of this glorious One and to diminish His glory even in the declarations of the church. The power of culture to define acceptable norms – for ourselves – and to pursue lifestyles which accommodate the flesh, will never openly yield to the light of His glory and the love and grace and transformation He brings with Him. Certainly, the enemy himself will not go quietly into judgement and the reign of sin and death which he oversees will continue to harm and destroy lives and families and threaten us with the grave.

2. But Simeon saw that Mary's horror and grief – the breaking of her heart – would bring our hope, our life, our joy and the re-making of our world. In her sorrow at her beloved Son's suffering and death the reign of sin and death would finally be broken (cf. Romans 5:12-21).

3. Perhaps the best thing about this COVID lockdown and the political divide and unrest is that it has pressed on and identified the glaring weaknesses in our message and the life of the western church. We are quickly being disabused of our false conceptions of hope and joy in Jesus – of

life without suffering and trouble and even death. This is happening as we are stripped of all but Jesus Himself and the pleasure of deep relationships with those who have a common love for Him. ***But we know what Simeon and Anna knew – these all are the last gasps of a dying curse and of a broken kingdom. We can know that every loss and the sorrow it brings is a reminder of the One who has come and has done away with the “horrors” of this broken world. Every death and loss, every broken relationship, every deep disappointment and the heartache and sense of the temporary and fleeting nature of this life and the inadequate joy it offers – serves to remind us that He has come and that He is our fullness, our joy, our salvation, our inheritance!! It is then they we look up to Him with an ever deepening longing – with an eager anticipation to see Him born of a “love” for His appearing!!***