



The Sermon

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Luke 2:21-38

"Worth the Wait"

January 7, 2024

TRANSCRIPT

Now, if you have your Bibles, if you could open them up, please, to Luke chapter 2, Luke chapter 2. And I want to read, and then we'll pray from verse 21.

Luke chapter 2, and verse 21: "And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

"And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.'

"And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 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. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Now Lord, You are releasing

Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.'

"And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed - and a sword will pierce even your own soul - to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'

"And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Let's pray.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are so thankful for every grace that You show to us. And we thank You especially this morning for the tangible way that You have shown grace to this congregation, the way that You have given wisdom to the elders to lead and to guide, the way that You have supplied the needs for expository preaching, the way the You have fed the people through that process, the way, Lord, that You have blessed and undertaken.

We pray, Lord, that this church would continue to bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ, and that You would see fit to bless and to multiply the fruit that is evident. We do ask as well, Lord, that You would make us so conscious that we are sinners saved but by grace, and that You would help us in these moment, especially as we come to the word to have that influence of the Holy Spirit upon us that would illuminate the text, that would make our Savior especially clear to us from these pages. We ask, Lord, that you would endear our hearts towards Him, that we would worship

in spirit and in truth through the precious things that we find in this Book. And, Lord, we do pray for the grace to put these things into practice, that we would be more the people we ought to be.

We pray, Lord, for those amongst us who maybe are here for various reasons, brought by friend, family, whatever it happens to be, but as yet do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. And we pray that today would be the day of salvation, the day when You would take the scales from their eyes and help them to see the significance of Jesus, not simply a good example or an interesting character to find out information about, but the Lord and the Savior. And we pray, Lord, that the word that many times can be testified in this room, that has given life, would give life to them also. So, Lord, we ask for that ability to listen and to put into practice the things that we hear for the praise and the glory of Your Son, in whose name we pray now. Amen. [End]

Well, in the UK and Ireland, we have a lot of traditions around Christmastime, but one of the traditions that I'm particularly fond of is the Advent calendar. It's a tradition that you find, started in Germany, but populated all around Europe, especially amongst Christians, and it's a tradition where they would mark the slow countdown through December till they get to Christmas Eve. And I love it, in particular, because normally, at least in Ireland, you get a box with little, kind of, windows on it, and every day you're allowed to open one, and when you do, you find behind that window a chocolate, and for breakfast, you get to have your little chocolate to start the day.

Now, the design of it is not simply to indulge overweight man and chocolate first thing in the morning, but to help mark the progress up to Christmas to slow things down and to allow us to talk and to allow us to recognize that Christmas doesn't just happen, there's a build up to it. And the reason Christians have for a long time done that is because the story about Jesus didn't just start with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Rather, there were four millennia of build-up, of expectation, of looking ahead, and of waiting. And in the particular passage that we come to this morning, that's what we find, really, a picture, a summary of at least two saints, two of the remnant,

two Old Testament characters that have been waiting through the course of their life. They've been anticipating as they live in a midst of a sinful world the arrival of Jesus Christ. And this passage, in particular, reminds us why He is worth the wait. Why, He is so special.

And so the first thing I want us to see this morning, and it's probably the most important thing we'll talk about, is the One they waited for. And if you are writing notes, you could even write the point down differently and note there is one who we are waiting for, because I think part of the lesson we will see from this couple – not that they're married – an older man, older woman, that are awaiting the arrival of Jesus, and His first Advent is the fact that if you are a believer this morning, you're in a state of waiting, too, not for the first Advent, but for the second, for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We find ourselves like this man and this woman living in the midst of a sinful generation, longing and anticipating the arrival of Jesus.

So, who is this One that they waited for? True, there is a constant temptation in our world to want to soften Jesus Christ, to want to think about Him as one like us. Far too much to want to take away any of the Godness that you find and to sanitize Him to make Him smaller and more relatable and more akin to who we are with all of our foibles as well. You can't do that with Jesus. His Godness is what's important. His Godness is what makes Him attractive. His Godness is what made Him a sufficient Savior for every man and woman that would put their trust in Him as Lord. And it's His transcendence that is that quality that probably when it comes to the Christmas season that we have just passed through, that we most are prone to take away from Him.

As we think about a child in a manger, as we think about one dependent upon an earthly father and mother, we have a tendency to cheapen the incarnation and to make it all about His humanness and to miss the divine nature of the One Scripture speaks about. And as we think about the One we are waiting for, I want to notice Luke doesn't give us that option. Luke insists even in the setup for this story that there are aspects about Jesus Christ we need to recognize, ways in which He is all-together different from

us. And the first thing is this, very simply, that He kept God's law. The One we waited for, or are waiting for, keeps God's law.

In verse 21 you have that reference to the circumcision on the eighth day. It points right back to a covenant sign that was established in Genesis 17:12, between God and Abraham. Abraham was told after being given wonderful promises from God about how through his line would come one who would be a blessing to the nations, that the mark of that covenant, a reminder of that covenant was the process of circumcision.

And so, in Genesis 21:4, Isaac is circumcised by Abraham on the eighth day. In Leviticus 12:3, in that section of scripture where they sought to codify all of the laws, and especially the religious laws that the people were to follow, it was spelled out that that pattern of eight days circumcision was to be continued to be followed by Jewish people. Even Paul in the New Testament talking about his credentials, his Jewishness, points in Philippians 3:5 to the fact that he was one circumcised on the eighth day.

And so this little note that we have in verse 21, it's a tiny note. It's one more reminder that Jesus kept the law in its entirety. Even these aspects from a human point of view were outside of His control He kept. You think if we were to go down modern law court and say this individual was not circumcised, it would be the mom and dad that would be held responsible. But even in those areas that were, humanly speaking, dependent on others, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the sovereign will of the Father ensured that the law was kept in every way. As Scripture says, "He came not to abolish it, but to fulfill it." As Galatians 4:4 said, "He was born of a woman, born under the Law."

And so, in Him we see one who is wholly obedient. That's what makes Him a qualified Savior. He did what we could not. We sin and fall short. He kept the law perfectly in every respect and every detail. And that's the guarantee of our salvation. It's what brings blessing in the Christian life. Not only did Jesus die that our sins would be forgiven, but because of His obedient life, we are clothed in that cloak of righteousness. We don't stand

neutrally before God, we are credited with the very righteousness of Christ. That's why God has such favor towards His people.

That's one - we had four: kept God's law. Secondly, He saves. That's the main stress of verse 21: "And when eight day had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb." The name wasn't an accident.

I remember whenever we had our first daughter Isla. We were still wrestling with what to call her, and the hospital wouldn't let us leave until we had made a decision. That was a lot of pressure we had. There just wasn't something clear and obvious at the time, but there was here.

There was no other name that was going to work. There was no other name that was right. First of all, the angel had said this is the name He is to be called, but it was the name that was given because it was fitting for Him. The name Jesus means God saves. And it was so appropriate because here is the Savior of the world. Do you know what the name Andrew means? Strong and mighty. I'm sure you knew that just by looking. Some of us don't live up to our name. But here's one who did perfectly, the God who saves. "There is no other name in heaven or on earth by which you may be saved." He's one, even as a child, that kept God's law, who saves, and who is holy.

Verses 22 and 23 begin to speak of a purification ritual that was demanded in the Old Testament. The mother who had had her first child was unclean for thirty-three days. And at the end of that, she was to come to the temple and to offer a sacrifice as a sign of her need for cleansing. Also linked to that was the idea that the firstborn, because of the Passover - Exodus chapter 13 talks explicitly about this - but the firstborn child amongst the Israelites, the firstborn from the womb was holy unto the Lord. That's what quoted there in the text from Exodus, "holy unto the Lord." The word "holy" just means set apart, a unique purpose. And it reminds us here, in particular with Jesus, that He was in the fullest of ways possible holy unto the Lord, set apart for Him, with a particular work and mission, a unique relationship with Christ.

Again, He is not like us. He is all-together different. We've got to be so careful in our minds to fight a cheapening of the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, we could see even in the text this idea as we think about the ceremony of purification that only Jesus can purify.

Look at verse 22. Verse 22, "And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem." The purification that was required according to Leviticus 12:4 was the purification of Mary, of Mary. And here in the dialog about Mary's greatest contribution to world history – the carrying, the birth, and the care of Jesus Christ – we are reminded that she herself was a sinner like the rest of us in need of purification. She herself was one who needed this application for forgiveness because only Jesus saves.

Roman Catholicism has a corrupt theology that would imply that God the Father is stern and removed and cold. And so if you really want to get the Father to work on your behalf, first of all, you need Jesus the Son to appeal to Him; because what father doesn't like their son? But Jesus Himself, again, is more removed and far from us. So if you're going to get to the Son to get to the Father, you've got to go through, well, Mary; because who can say no to their mom? And because she has this holy and pure relationship, she can persuade the Son to persuade the Father so you can get what you want.

That's broken at so many levels. First of all, there's no one more loving than the God who is love, who cares for His people. But also, this chain of command is corrupt because it left Mary into an equal playing field. And Scripture won't allow us to read it that way. She has to be purified. She has to go through the ritual, for she is a sinner just like us, one commended in Scripture, and a wonderful example of one who acts with faith; but a sinner just like us, in need of purification. This Child kept God's law. This Child was promised. This Child saves. This Child is holy. And yet even more amazing, as we look at the text, we're reminded, and yet in all of that, He was also humble. He was so humble.

Look at verse 24. We have the reference there to the sacrifice that, in particular, it was born out of the idea of "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." Now, the normal sacrifice required for this particular ceremony was a lamb. The turtle doves or pigeon alternative was the impoverished man's option. It was what you did if you didn't have the money for the right sacrifice, and it's testimony to the fact that the King of kings and Lord of lords humbled Himself and came to earth to live a lowly existence, one where they weren't sure each day where the bread would come from.

What a reason to praise Him. And yet when you piece all of that together, the big point is this. This story is not about a cute and clueless baby. Rather, look, insist, even as you consider the infancy of our Lord and Savior: He is our Lord and our Savior. He was all-together different from the start. This Child was the God-man Christ Jesus. And so as you consider Him no matter what stage you think of Him and you must see Him with the reverence, see Him as the Word who became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and worship Him accordingly. Old Testament believers were waiting for this great One to come. And we, too, wait for this great and glorious, all-together different from us One to come. He is the One who is worth the wait.

The text then moves on by introducing two Christmas nativity characters we all forget. We think of the normal American kind of scene that maybe gets put up in the front garden or maybe in front of some churches. You have the little manger in the middle, you have some shepherds there, maybe a star and some wise men. But nobody thinks to put a little Simeon and a little Anna in the corner.

But Luke does. In Luke's infancy narrative he insists that they must be brought in there. And if we're going to understand why, there's a few things we need to recognize. In the Old Testament, credibility was established by two or three witnesses. And so Luke brings into this scene two witnesses – a man and a woman – brings them into to the scene to testify that the Lord has come, and the Lord does save, and the Lord can be found.



Also, these two, we've got to recognize they're not normative for that time and period. They're living amongst a faithless generation. Israel at this time is largely an apostate nation. The religious system really broke down into two areas. You had the religion of the Sadducees that was one that denied all the truths, all the miracles, all the God activity of the Old Testament. They're kind of like Christian liberalism today, a dead token gesture. And the alternative was the religion of the Pharisees. It was moralistic, legalistic, dangerous.

Both of these systems were man-centered and weren't focused on expectation of a work done by God to save. But all the way through history, God has always preserved for Himself a remnant, even in the world's darkest of moments. And so Simeon and Anna kind of come into the scene as a reminder that there was even in this dark moment a remnant.

Lastly, they also stand in this period or this moment as a reminder that there is a transition. The Old Testament is moving in the New Testament, and they are to be thought of, I think, very much as a kind of picture of Old Testament faithfulness, the Old Testament character who had expectation that the Messiah by God's grace would come. Here's a very old man, a very old woman, who are looking ahead, anticipating the coming Jesus. And that longing affecting every part of their life. That longing shaped them. So as we think about Simeon for a few moments, I want you to notice the way he's described as waiting and longing, and from his to see a picture for how we should wait for the Lord's second coming.

Look at verses 25 and 26: "And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 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."

Notice how he's described as waiting, the posture that marks his waiting. He's described as righteous and devout. Now, that doesn't mean he was

perfect, "For there is no one perfect, no, not one," but it means that he was a man who knew his sinfulness, who was quick to acknowledge his wrongdoing before God, quick to seek the means of forgiveness and determine to try and put into practice the God-prescribes means for righteous living.

He's also one who is trusting the promises of God. Verse 25 tells us, "He was looking, anticipating the consolation of Israel." In other words, he knew the Old Testament story, and he held onto every promise it contained, and he was expecting a definitive work of God through Israel that ultimately would bless the world. He, in other words, expected that what the Bible said would take place. He expected, funny enough, it would take place. And it shaped him, it filled him with hope. He didn't run around complaining about and panicking about the Roman occupation. He wasn't crippled with despair by the sinfulness of the legal system of the day. He wasn't depressed over the state of religious apostasy in the church at the time, because he had hope, not in the present circumstances, but in the promises of God. And he had hope that God would bring to be all that He had promised.

This man also shows us a great example in his dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God being at work in his life. It's true, Simeon was, indeed, righteous and devout. But do you notice the text makes clear that that's not what brings him to the temple. That's not what causes him to know and to recognize Jesus, where his moral piety doesn't qualify him. Rather, the Holy Spirit is the one that prompts and aids him to recognize and to confess Jesus at the temple that day. The Holy Spirit is the one who gave him eyes to see.

And so, look at verse 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. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law." It's interesting that people talk about being under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and normally what they mean by that is something crazy, chaotic, and out of control. This isn't out of control, this is one foot in front of the other. This

is steady, stable, and determined to come and to focus and to appreciate and to use our words to express gratitude for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, all of that together gives us a very simple picture of how when the Lord comes again – for He is coming again – how we should long for the Lord to find us righteous and devout, and anticipating the fulfillment of all He has promised, dependent upon the Holy Spirit, and as we hear, obeying His word until He comes. The One we wait for, the way to wait. The third thing I want you to see this morning is the reason we wait, the reason we wait.

Look at verse 28 and this great son or prayer of Simeon. It says, "Then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all people, a Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for Your people Israel.'"

Here this man, he puts a child in his arms and he doesn't just see a little child. I had the privilege in between services of holding one of the little babies that has been born in the last number of months, and it was wonderful. We prayed for that child; and so delighted to finally get to meet her. But Simeon looked at this child in a very different way a few moments ago. He looked and didn't see a cute and cuddly child, he saw his Redeemer, his Redeemer.

Again, the Holy Spirit gave him the eyes of faith. In fact, look at the words that are used at the end of verse 26. He had the ability through the Holy Spirit granting faith to recognize that this one was the Lord's Christ, the Lord's Messiah, the Lord's Anointed One, one that God the Father had ordained would come and He would work through. He perceived that. And so naturally out of his mouth bursts praise. This praise flows from understanding His position.

Verse 29, if you look at it again, "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant in peace." That word "Lord" isn't a normal word. It's not the normal word translated "Lord" through the New Testament. It's a particular word. It's a technical word. It's really the word that means slave owner, slave owner. And he does then imply the word to describe himself. It is much more common through the New Testament, *doulos*, the word "slave." And, in particular, here in verse 29, he has in vision his pending death. The Lord had told him He would keep him alive until. So he's expecting his death. And as he thinks about his death, he says to the Lord, "You are in full control. You have the orders here, and I simply have to follow." But he trusts Him with it. He accepts it. In fact, he accepts it with a confidence that the word assured him, "This is right and proper."

Again, the end of verse 29, he says, "according to Your word." This isn't despair and panic, "Okay, now I have to die." This is an anticipation, that even in death the authority of God's word has promised great hope through the Redeemer that he holds in his hand; and that's what he's trusting in.

Look at verse 30. You see that personal expression and hope all the more clearly: "For my eyes have seen Your salvation." How can he be so unafraid of death? Because his eyes have seen God's salvation, redemption. Simeon is ready to die because he is seeing God's salvation. He is a realization that this is the Redeemer, and that the Redeemer isn't a methodology. You don't get redemption through doing A, B, C or steps 1, 2, 3. Rather, redemption is found only in the person of Jesus Christ.

It's very similar. It reminded me of Job 19:25. Job, that old man who thought he was affected deeply through ailment, who expected his own death to come at any moment, declares, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. And even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God." He has hope that there will be a resurrection and that he will stand and gaze face to face with his Redeemer.

Simeon is talking in similar language here. He has confidence that even in the face of death, he can have confidence, for he holds, very literally, Christ close. He has every hope and confidence that the baby he holds in his arm redeems. That's faith, isn't it, able to see what everybody at the temple missed that day. You see it again in what comes next.

Look at verse 31, "which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." The climax, the headlining note in Simeon's song of praise here is that Christ will accomplish a work not just for Simeon, and not even simply for the Jewish people, but a work for all peoples.

And again he comes back in the last verse and he stresses the Gentiles. In fact, he doesn't say the Jews and the Gentiles, which is the normal pattern. He says the Gentiles and the Jews. In declaring God's work through the Messiah, he quotes here from Isaiah 42:6 and Isaiah 49:6 that speak of these very things.

But in his day Simeon is really recovering a theological truth everybody else forgot. Those two verses, Isaiah 42:6 and Isaiah 49:6, they are almost never quoted in the rabbinic literature. They're ignored. They're missed. Lots of other commentary about lots of other verses, but not about these verses that Simeon is quoting from.

It's really a reminder that often in those religious broken systems, and even religion today, that people can read the Bible, people can go to Bible college, people can do whatever they're going to do and still not see the obvious because you need the work of the Holy Spirit to illuminate truth to you. It's not enough for somebody to get a degree in Bible. That doesn't save. It's a work of God that saves. It's a work of God that takes the scales from the eyes so we can perceive wonderful things in His word.

The One we wait for, the way we wait, the reason we wait. Fourthly, a division while we wait, a division while we wait. Naturally, that great song

of Simeon's, Mary and Joseph, their heads are spinning as they hear it. It's beyond their natural comprehension.

Look at verse 33, "And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed - and a sword will pierce even your own soul - to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'"

There is a change in tone here in Simeon's song. If the first part was very much a major key, this is a minor key. If the first part was talking about the glorious reality of what God will do in the end that we eagerly anticipate, here he comes down to the day today and talks about the difficulties and the hardships and the plaud of the path carved out for all who will follow Jesus.

And I think of sin itself important. Maybe the last number of weeks you've been coming to church, there's something about this Christianity that you see and you're curious about and you want. Maybe you're wrestling with making that true commitment, asking for forgiveness, putting your hope in the work of Jesus Christ. Friend, if you are wrestling, you need to understand that the gospel does come with a cost.

Jesus says Himself, Luke 9:23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." You need to know that this life will come, as a Christian, still come with trials and with difficulties; that being a Christian, just as it did for Christ Himself, it draws attack, it draws to it resentment. And so if you're considering coming to Jesus Christ this morning I want to say to you He is a good Lord and a wonderful Savior. But you need to understand, following Him comes at a cost - cost, I believe, worth paying - but a cost nonetheless.

We see that expressed here in what Simeon says because Jesus, He divides the religious. Look at verse 24. He speaks of the fall and rising of many in Israel. Now, a few verses before, he was singing about how the gospel

brings the Jew and the Gentile together, and now he's saying, "And you know what else it does? For the Jew and Jew, it splits them. It separates them. It causes division amongst even the Jewish community." That's normal the more you know about the gospel and ministry of Jesus Christ. For He always causes this type of division. There's always false among the true, and He exposes it. There are always weeds among the wheat, and He calls attention to it.

There's a lot of falsehood in modern-day Christianity just as there was then. A lot of people who are religious, who are Christian, and they quite happily talk about Jesus being a great example to us, one to be admired, a great teacher. And then out of the same mouth they begin to talk and deny the deity of Christ. They deny His resurrection. They deny the nature of the atonement. They deny the requirement for sexual morals that He has given. Jesus says of this sort of religious crowd, "They honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are from Me." Their ways are not His ways, and one day they will hear those sad words, "Depart from Me, I never knew you."

And yet, that same Lord and Savior also reveals people who do love Him, who do revere Him as Lord, who do know Him as the sole source of their salvation, who do worship Him in spirit and in truth. Jesus divides the false religion, the true and false, and He continues to do the same today. He's obvious about it.

Look at verse 34 again. It says, "He is a sign to be opposed." In other words, those who are not for Him, it's not just that they're neutral, they have to be against Him. He is a sign to be opposed. You either worship Him as Lord or you have deep animosity against Him. Jesus isn't like other religious figures. Do you know how I feel about Confucius? I don't. Until this moment, I hadn't even thought about his name in probably about four years.

But non-Christians aren't like that with Jesus. He provokes, He demands reaction. That's why in some Muslim countries fathers will kill their daughters the moment they convert to Christ. That's why our secular world

is not content with Christianity just being put in the background, they want to stomp it out because they are opposed to the worship of Jesus. Their heart is neutral. Their heart is rebellious.

And the reality we see here as we think about that division is God's people are affected by that. I think as one thing we can draw from that very small note at the beginning of verse 35 about Mary, "and a sword will pierce even your own soul." Very tangible, clear declaration about the hardship Mary will go through as she cared for this boy. She watched Him grow up. She loved Him dearly, and she saw, she saw how He was despised and rejected. She saw how He was so grossly treated. And because she was united to Him as mother, but even more so as a follower, the animosity that came towards Jesus hurt and pierced her soul, too.

And yet, as we think about this division, verse 35 finishes by stressing that division is first and foremost a division at the heart, "to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." Jesus isn't just revealing your, kind of, skeletons in the closet, those outward things that mark our behavior and conduct. Rather, He reveals the very nature of the things we care most about.

Simeon has just spoken about Mary and the pain that she very truly would feel, the sword that would go through her soul as she stood by the cross, and she wept. You can picture this scene. You can hear the cries of Mary around that cross. But do you know what else you hear if you listen carefully? Laughter, scorn, mockery around the exact same cross and the exact same moment. Why? Because there were hearts around that cross that had very different dispositions to the one of Mary.

As we talk about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ – for He is coming again – how do you feel? When the preacher talks about the second coming of Jesus, you just, "Oh," roll your eyes? Maybe you even feel some animosity towards this type of a talk at church? That's not a declaration about the second coming, that's a declaration about your heart. Your heart is being revealed by your thoughts about the second coming.



If we talk about Jesus coming and that He will be here, He is coming back, if that fills you with joy and peace as Simeon describes it here, that's a testimony about your heart, a positive one that you can gain hope through. How you feel about Jesus is revealing. It's important. And sometimes there may be some here that need to cry out, "Lord, create in me a new heart."

The one we wait for, the way we wait, the reason we wait, a division while we wait, and you'll be glad to know, the end of waiting, okay. That's our last point this morning: the end of waiting. Oh, we have this wonderful character that comes at the end.

Look at verse 36: "And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eight-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

Anna forms our last picture of one who waited a long time in obscurity; and yet, when her Savior did come, she is bursting into the scene with thankfulness. You see her testimony come up in lots of ways through the small details of this text. You think about the names that are used, we're told that she comes from the tribe of Asher. Now it's not one of the southern tribes, it's one of the northern tribes, one of the lost tribes of Israel. When the Assyrians came in, they plundered the land. They took the people and they scattered them. There were some that fled to Jerusalem, but the majority were scattered, the records lost. The tribe, for all human events and purposes, disappeared.

Except God did preserve some, and Anna is testimony to that. Even amongst the lost tribes, God kept a remnant. And then we're told about her daddy's name: Phanuel. It means to see God face to face. One who sees God face to face tells us not something about him but about Anna's grandparents. They,

too, were looking ahead with anticipation, with expectation, maybe hoping as they name their son that in his day this Messiah would come. He would do the work they were hoping in.

And it didn't happen in their day, didn't happen in the day of their son, but it did happen for Anna. How or why, we may ask. Why is she in this scene? Why is she the one chosen? Well, her name tells a story, too. Do you know what the name Anna means? Grace or favor. Why is she here? Why is she in the corner of the stable nativity scene? Because, very simply, God was kind to her. God was good to her. She didn't deserve, but she received good gifts from God, just as we all do, when He shows kindness and salvation to us.

It's not just a testimony in the names here, there's a testimony in the birthdays, testimony of age. There's a lot to be at how to translate verse 37 and how to do the math. And the debate really centers around the fact that this woman's quite old, and then that can be hard to compute for many of us. We're told that she got married. Most girls got married between the ages of, the earliest, really, twelve; more normally, fourteen. And she was married seven years. And then she was a widow for eighty-four years. That's how the text literally reads. You do the math and you've got a hundred and five, give or take, years. It's an old woman waiting for a long time in a society where that was not easy – an old woman, a woman, a widow in a misogynistic world that would have made her life so difficult.

And her long, hard life reminds us of so many in the Old Testament that share her longing, her hope, and her desire to see the Savior come. A long time she had been longing for His coming. And every day she displayed that longing, we're told, through prayers and fastings. Fasting is that process where you don't eat. There's something that you hunger for more than the food on the table; and so, rather than have it, you pray about that. Well, what is this woman so hungry for? Hundred and five? What's she hungering for at a hundred and five? She's hungering for the coming of Jesus. It consumes her. And so, this unlikely, vulnerable woman saw the one she longed to see on this particular day.

We're told that she was a prophetess. That meant that she shared words about God with the people. But how does she express her joy? How does she explain it to the people? What are this prophetess' words all about? Well, verse 38 says, "She spoke of Him," because here was the redemption of Jerusalem.

I think you miss the whole point of Simeon and the whole point of Anna if you don't see, very simply, they were obsessed with Jesus. That's the big point. The Redeemer of a lost and broken people had arrived, and so all the focus was on this person Jesus Christ.

A lot of people think they've maybe tried religion, tried to clean up their lives, tried to make it work, done the books, gone to the classes. But Christianity, as we said earlier, is not a program. It can never be a program. It's about a person. It's about the Person: the Lord Jesus Christ.

And very simply, the question bubbles out of the text, "Do you love Him? Do you long for Him?" And that's the right question. For He is not just the summary of this sermon, He is the summary of the whole Christian faith: the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you do love Him, it will always manifest itself in your life in some way. And you see that here with Anna. How does it show up in her life? Look at verse 38: "At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

The word there for "thanks," it's a particular word as well, a technical word. It means to give thanks publicly, not in private prayer: public thanks, to speak out loud to others, to give testimony about. And the word is also in the imperfect tense. That means she just didn't get up and for ten seconds say, "Oh, I'm so thankful to God," and then go about her business. The imperfect has the idea that this is an ongoing disposition. She continually gives thanks.

You want to know if you truly love Jesus? It'll show itself in what comes out your mouth. And here is a woman who has been thinking and longing and waiting for Jesus so much, that then when she sees Him, then when she beholds Him, all within her bubbles out in thanksgiving for the One, the Messiah, the Savior who has come.

It's a great reminder, isn't it, that one day we will see our Savior face to face. And on that day, you'll not be able to close your mouth either. You have so much to sing about. You have so many thank yous to echo, so much to testify about in terms of His kindness, His goodness, His patience, His longsuffering with us, and especially how everything needed for our salvation is found in Jesus Christ.

He's coming again. He is coming again. Are you ready? Are you expectant? Are you longing for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ? Let's pray.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we love You, and we love our Savior, and we're so thankful for that work of the Holy Spirit by which He illuminates and helps us to see that which by ourselves we cannot. We thank You for the evidence and testimony of Simeon and of Anna. We thank You, Lord, that many in this room are able to echo that You have also worked in their life. And for that work, Lord, we give You thanks.

We pray and ask that You would help us as a people to treasure our Lord and Savior for the work He has done in our life, and that we, too, would be filled with this deep longing for His return, deep longing for that day when we will see Him face to face and open our mouths to express our thanks to the One who has done so much for us. We ask, Lord, that You would undertake for us and You would help us to leave this place with a renewed vision of Jesus and a determination that when He returns, He would find us righteous and devout, hoping in the promises, and busy in expressing our thanks and testifying about the work that Jesus has done to all who will listen.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.