

Waiting and Witnessing at Christmas

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 2, beginning at verse 21. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

When the time of their purification according to the law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

[1 : 18] For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then she was a widow until she was 84.

She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth, and the child grew and became strong.

[2 : 35] He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. We'll leave our reading there. Waiting and witnessing Christmas as we see it in the life of Simeon.

Now, boys and girls, let me begin here. Let me begin with a story of my eight-year-old Christmas. So I remember as an eight-year-old getting what I thought was a wonderful gift.

I got a tiny snooker table, probably about the same size as this thing here. I was really excited. I always liked sport as a kid.

But I remember the first thing that I did that Christmas morning when I got that present is I went through to my grandpa's bedroom. Grandpa was staying with us for a while. I went through to wake him up so that he would come and see and share that joy.

I wonder if you recognize that. You have great anticipation around Christmas for sure, waiting to see maybe what's going to be in those presents.

[3 : 38] And whenever you get a present, usually as kids and also as adults, we like to show off that present to other people. Look what I got. We're really excited. Maybe you'll be saying, this is what I always wanted.

That's a really wonderful thing to be able to say. I wonder why we do that. Why is it when we get a gift and we want to tell others about it? Well, C.S. Lewis, who wrote the Chronicles of Narnia, he said it's because when we praise something, it completes our joy in that.

And if we do that for small gifts, if we do that for things that we get at Christmas time, how much more if we receive a gift that's truly life-changing?

How much more if we receive a great gift should we then tell others so that they can enjoy it too? And that takes us to the story of Simeon.

We find Simeon as someone who is waiting. He is waiting for God's great promise to come true. And what happens when Jesus comes?

[4 : 46] Instantly, we find him praising God, sharing that good news with others. It's a great pattern for the life of faith. And when God opens our eyes so that we see that Jesus is the Savior, when we see him as good news for ourselves, we then live so that we might share him with others.

But of course, first, we need to see in Jesus that he is God's promised King and Savior so that we would have faith in him.

So let's notice together how Simeon waits with faith. Now, this is the only time in our Bibles we meet Simeon, but we learn lots of significant things about him.

Most of all, we learn that he is a man of faith. So look at verse 25. And you will discover there that Simeon is righteous and devout.

So here is a real believer in God. And we're told he was waiting for the consolation, for the comfort of Israel.

[5 : 53] So he's waiting with faith that God will do what he has promised to do, that he will bring salvation and deliverance for his people.

We're also told in verse 25, the Holy Spirit was on him. And indeed, we know that the Holy Spirit speaks to him in verse 26.

And in verse 27, he is moved by the Spirit to go to the temple as Jesus is brought in. So the Holy Spirit is on him, and he is someone who is listening to, who is directed by the Spirit.

So he is a man of faith. Faith for Simeon looks like trusting God and his Word, even when many other people who are claiming to be worshippers are straying from God and his Word.

So he is surrounded by people who are worshipping with hypocrisy, saying one thing, doing another thing. When people are selling a saviour self-religion, what God wants is for you to work really hard to keep all these extra rules.

[7 : 01] And if you can do that, if you can live like a Pharisee, then God will be pleased with you. In spite of those false messages, he is a man of true faith, who continues to listen and to wait on God's promises.

Even despite the fact that for those 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the time that we're in here, there was some 400 years of silence, still we find Simeon exercising faith and learning to wait on God's promises.

Specifically, we're told that he is waiting for the consolation of Israel. He is waiting for the comfort of God sending his saviour into the world.

And he'd received in verse 27, in verse 26 rather, a remarkable promise. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

So this Christ that was promised throughout the Old Testament some hundreds of years beforehand, and all of God's people were waiting with great expectation, well, Simeon is told he would have the privilege of seeing the rescuer in the flesh.

[8 : 19] And so Simeon will find the joy of salvation from getting to meet for himself, Jesus, God's Christ.

And part of Simeon's faith is that he can look at this young baby, maybe seven weeks old at this stage, an ordinary child.

We read verse 22 to 24. We see that when Joseph and Mary came to the temple to offer a sacrifice, they offered the sacrifice of those who were poor. Jesus comes in poverty and humility.

But by faith, Simeon is able to look on this child and see here is God's promise kept. Here is God's great gift now arrived.

And again, Simeon presents us with a pattern of life as a Christian. We're waiting in faith for God to do what he has promised. We're waiting in faith for the return of Jesus to make everything new so that we might be with him forever.

[9 : 22] And we are a people who are called to hold on to God's word and to hold on to God's promises. Even when we're surrounded by unbelief and hypocrisy and different messages about how a person can be saved and be truly human and enjoy the good life, we believe that we are saved by faith in Jesus and we place our hope firmly in him.

And so he waits with faith. I wonder, boys and girls, at your stage, have you ever received a gift and you thought, this is the one thing I always wanted? Maybe you've not had that yet.

Maybe you have had that joy. I remember one time that happened to me. I was probably about 13. I really liked music and I got an electric guitar. I realized it was a lot more hard to play an electric guitar than it looked when I was watching my favorite bands.

But I was so excited that Christmas to receive that wonderful gift. But I can guarantee you this Christmas, any Christmas, no matter the best gift that money can buy, it is not going to come near to what Simeon has been given when the Savior of the world, God's King, is in his arms and he knows God has kept his promise.

And Simeon appreciates that. Look at verse 28. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and straight away, what's he doing? He's praising God. There's joy in his heart because of Jesus.

[10 : 47] I wonder, do we understand why, whether we're boys and girls, whether we're older, do we understand why Jesus is the greatest gift of all? We'll sing at the end of our service, Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

Some wonderful lines. Our Christmas carols are full of really great truth. So in that carol we'll sing, Christ by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord.

So the child in Simeon's arms is the eternal Son of God, worshipped for all eternity by the angels. We'll sing, Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see hail the incarnate deity.

We're invited to worship a God who has taken on human flesh, who's taken on a true nature, becoming one of us. We'll sing, Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die.

Jesus had all the glory of heaven, but willingly left it to become one of us so that he might suffer in our place, having fulfilled God's law, so that he might die in order for us to be forgiven and to receive eternal life.

[12 : 07] Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. It's the great hope of the gospel. It's the good news of Christmas.

Jesus is the answer to peace with God, to peace in our hearts. The only way for us as sinful people to be reconciled to a holy God is through Jesus coming to die for us, to take our sins on himself, to be punished for our sins, to have his righteousness gifted to us so that we might be accepted and be brought into God's family.

So Simeon waits with faith, and when Jesus arrives, he's filled with joy. Today, do we see the baby in Simeon's arms as God's great gift to his world?

Do we see Jesus as God's great gift to you and to me today? Do we see it as good news that God the Son has left glory to become one of us in order to die to save us?

Do we see in the story of Christmas, stage one in this great salvation plan? It was important for us to remember, the baby Jesus couldn't die for our sins.

[13 : 32] We need one who stands in our place, one who is able to succeed in keeping the law where we have failed. And so Jesus must live a life of perfect obedience.

He must suffer as one of us and then die in the place of lawbreakers. It's the whole story of Jesus that gives us joy and that causes our hearts to sing.

Are we waiting in faith, like Simeon, for Jesus coming? Not this time for his first coming, now waiting for the return of the King, for his final victory, when he'll make everything new, including us, when our faith is in him.

Are we able to trust God's promise? Trust in God's goodness, even in perhaps the silence that we feel like we're living in, in the darkness of our own experience.

Can we hold on with hope and with faith to the word of God and his promise? So Simeon waits with faith, but we also see Simeon witnesses by faith.

[14 : 49] Boys and girls, again, I wonder, maybe at this time of year, but sometimes, have you ever been excited for something to arrive? Yeah, this time of year can be quite exciting because there's lots of parcels that maybe come to your house.

So maybe waiting for the postman, the delivery man can be good news when that bell rings. Or perhaps it's you're waiting with expectation for a family member or a friend to come round to play or to come for a holiday and you're waiting at the window or waiting at the front door and you're excited, a sense of anticipation for that arrival.

Well, Simeon, Simeon was given a job by God. He was a watcher. He was like a watchman waiting for God's promise, waiting for God's gift.

And as we saw, when it comes, he's full of praise, he's full of joy. Let's look at his words as he begins to praise God, to see his faith in action as he witnesses for God.

Sovereign Lord, verse 29, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. Now here is faith.

[16 : 00] Now that I have seen God's promise kept, I am ready to be dismissed in peace. He is ready to die. He has seen God's salvation for him.

He understands by faith that in the coming of Jesus, there is the hope of forgiveness. There is the hope of restoration, reconciliation, and eternal life. There is peace in this child, in his arms.

And he is ready to die because he has met God's Christ. And it's true to say that anyone who has seen Jesus with the eyes of faith is ready to die.

We are ready to meet our maker if we have faith in Jesus. But the flip side is also true. If you haven't seen Jesus with the eyes of faith, you're not ready to die.

You're not ready to meet your maker. And so, if that's you, ask for the gift of faith. Ask for faith to see Jesus and to turn from sin and to trust in him as Simeon does.

[17 : 15] There are two things that Simeon is a witness to. First of all, he's a witness to the fact that Jesus brings salvation. Look at verse 30 to 32.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

Jesus brings salvation. And Simeon announces this wonderful promise that it's not just for some, it's not just even for Israel. This is a global salvation. This is a message to anyone and to everyone who will hear and believe.

As Simeon is witness to the fact that here is Jesus, he is God's light to the world. He is the glory of God in human form and he reveals to us the glory of God's plan of salvation.

That if we are to look to him, we will be saved. And this is a great free gift available for everyone to open, receive, and to enjoy.

[18 : 17] Over our Christmas season as a church, we've been privileged to be able to support the work of Blytheswood. So some folks have sent shoeboxes out to Eastern Europe.

We were able over last weekend to support the work of local food banks here in Edinburgh. We'll be able to support the work of crisis at Christmas. There's a reminder to us that for some people, Christmas is a time of plenty.

Some people get lots, but others get little or nothing at Christmas. It can be one of those points of sharp distinction and division between the haves and the have-nots, but not when it comes to the gospel, not when it comes to the good news of Jesus, because we're being told that Jesus comes for everyone.

And the Bible tells us that he comes as a gift of God's grace. He comes to us freely as a gift of God's love. So whether we're rich or poor, whether we're old or young, whatever country we're from, this is good news for you and for me today in this Jesus and the salvation that he brings.

And Simeon witnesses to that. But also, Simeon witnesses to the reality that Jesus brings struggle. Look at verse 34 and 35.

[19 : 44] Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

So Jesus comes as God's light to the world, but people, we're told in John's gospel, love the darkness more than the light. People don't want the light of God's perfection to shine in the darkness of our hearts.

We don't want to be exposed and so some people walk away from Jesus. And Simeon is very honest at the very beginning of his life to announce that Jesus is the great divide in history.

Jesus is the great divide in every human heart. That what we do with this Jesus, the baby in the manger who'll grow up to be the Christ on the cross, reveals our true character.

And so Jesus brings struggle. His coming and his call, his message brings conflict.

[20 : 55] It divides people into faith and unbelief and we see that all through his life. You know, for every wise man who comes to worship Jesus, gladly, there is a religious leader who stands on the sidelines doing nothing or criticizing.

There's a King Herod who wants to get rid of Jesus. While some cry, Hallelujah, and see salvation in Jesus, others will cry, Crucify Him. There is faith and there is unbelief, there is struggle.

Jesus said that in his own ministry. He said, Whoever is not for me, whoever is not with me, is against me. I wonder if there's anyone here today and you're in the middle of that struggle, beginning to see the true identity of Jesus, that he's not just another man, he's not just a great teacher, that he is, in fact, the Son of God, that you're beginning to see his mission, his purpose for coming, that he's died, not just to set a good example, but he's died in the place of sinners so that we might be reconciled to God.

Perhaps you're beginning to count the cost, realizing if Jesus is Lord, then I'm going to need to die to self, I'm going to die to making myself number one in order to live for him.

Jesus brings struggle. If that's you today, then don't fight against his Lordship, but rather submit gladly and be saved and find your joy in living for him.

[22 : 26] Listen to Simeon, Simeon who clearly says, Jesus is more precious than life itself. When I know God and God's salvation, I'm ready to die. Speak to other Christians, you know, why is Jesus worth following?

Why is it worth the struggle against sin, against unbelief, against pride, struggle to submit? Because we also know that Christianity is a battle, not just externally dividing people, but it's also a battle for our hearts and our minds.

Because the message of Jesus uniquely among all the religions says that we're saved by God's grace and not by our merit and effort. Every other religion will say you need to work hard and perform well and to do certain rituals and sacrifices and perhaps your God will be pleased with you.

And that suits human pride because then we can earn our salvation. But that's not the way Christianity works. Christianity is very clear that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves.

We cannot be good enough. We stand in need of a rescue that we cannot provide in and of ourselves, but Jesus comes from outside of us, from God Himself to be one of us, to save us.

[23 : 43] So it challenges our pride. But Jesus also brings that struggle against our independence. It can be hard for us in our lives to submit to God's ways.

And we might find ourselves wanting to sort of make compartments. Jesus can have Sunday. He can have some family time. But, you know, when I'm at work, you know, there's difficult decisions to be made or there's conversations that everybody else in the office has.

It can be really hard to submit to following God all the time as He asks. It can be a struggle against the sin in our own hearts.

The Apostle Paul could say, I know right and wrong and I know that I want to follow God, but I find that there's the other rule that's pulling me a different direction. So I do the things that I don't want to do.

And so there is struggle in our own hearts. So why go through that struggle? Why not just live for our own glory rather than living for the glory of God? Why struggle to go the way of Jesus rather than just living our own way?

[24 : 51] The key to answering that question is in understanding who Jesus is and what He has done for us to see Jesus with faith, to recognize that He has left glory for you, that He's entered a suffering world for you.

He has lived in perfect obedience for you. He will go under the sword of God's judgment for you to see that He will be pierced in order to bring us peace.

Simeon then is presented to us as a man of faith, waiting, hoping in God's promised Savior and when that Savior comes he praises joyfully.

I wonder this morning do we see in Jesus God's promise kept? Do we see in Jesus God's great gift? And by faith are we waiting on Him?

Waiting for His promised return when salvation will be finally completed? And are we sharing the wonder of God sending Jesus with others?

[26 : 05] Are we sharing the good news that we have? Well may God give us all the ability to see as Simeon saw, to see where Jesus fits in the great story of God's plan of salvation and to see Jesus as hope for the world?

And to see Jesus as hope for the world.