

My Eyes Have Seen

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. Thirteen and a half hours to go to the new year or thereabouts.

Thirteen hours, forty minutes. The ritual of making new year resolutions is clearly to the fore once more as you've looked at newspapers this week.

And the lists include the usual suspects, things like stop smoking, getting out of debt or at least reducing debt, spending more time with the kids, getting fit.

And what would be a list of the top ten resolutions without, you guessed it, beating the battle of the bulge. The American TV night show host Jay Leno is famous for his funny but often biting interviews.

Each night as he starts his show he opens up with some one-liners and jokes. Like all of the night show hosts they're of varying quality. A few nights ago he opened with this.

[1 : 04] He says Google, for the ones who are not internet friendly, that's a search engine, Google is now offering maps of the moon for internet users. Let me tell you, if you're so lost that you need a map of the moon, you better just simply stop, pull over and ask someone for help.

Friends, in the lead up to new year, Leno had used statistics to avoid the emotional meltdown of failed new year resolutions concerning weight loss.

This is his answer. Now there are more overweight people in America than average weight people. So overweight people are now average, which means you've met your new year resolution.

Now this morning I don't want us to focus on new year resolutions, which are of very limited value. Rather I want us to contemplate one question.

Simply this. What is it that we're looking forward to in 2007? What is it that we're looking forward to in the new year?

[2 : 14] And if I was to quickly pass around some pens and paper, we would generate quickly a rather long list. And it might have things like this on it.

Maybe for regular emailers, you would look forward to a spam-free universe. You might look forward to completing a course of study or perhaps starting one, of having a baby, maybe finding a life partner.

Perhaps you're looking forward to retirement, a promotion, a pay rise. In a country that prides itself on justice, spare a moment then to think if you were David Hicks, what you would be looking forward to.

Five years. Still no trial. I want us this morning to meet two people who have been looking forward to an event for a long time.

Great expectation and perfect fulfilment. And as we come to these two little cameos in verses 25 to 38, first of all, Luke sets the scene.

[3 : 24] So if you turn with me to Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2. And in verses 21 to 24, we just get this setting of the scene. We see that Jesus was born into a pious Jewish family.

Jewish family that kept all of the required laws. So we read in verse 21 that Mary's child was circumcised as any eight-day-old Jewish boy would be in accordance with Genesis 17.

He was officially named Jesus. That was the name, of course, given to Joseph by the angel of the Lord. We read in Matthew 1. You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. I wonder how might Joseph and then Mary, as he would have, I'm sure, passed that announcement on to her. How might they have interpreted that expression, his people?

Would they have seen that in a purely Jewish context? A pious family keeping the required laws.

[4 : 39] Verse 22. There's a purification ceremony. It's involving Mary. It's 40 days after the birth. And you could read about that, for example, in Leviticus 12. And then there's a presentation of the firstborn to the Lord in accordance with Exodus 13.

There's a making of sacrifice of birds. Note that. Birds rather than a lamb, signaling this very lowly, economic lowly, probably poverty family.

And as this lowly family approaches the temple in Jerusalem, amazing words of testimony come from two prophets.

And the first person we meet is Simeon in verses 25 to 35. We could just simply think of Simeon as a man in waiting. We're not told anything about his age, but at the end of verse 29, the inference is that Simeon was certainly not a youngster.

We're not told anything about his vocation. But we are told about Simeon's spiritual condition. He's a devout believer in God.

[5 : 52] Simeon lives in hope that God's promise will come to pass.

So we read in verse 25, he was looking forward to the consolation of Israel. And that phrase, consolation of Israel, refers to the hope of deliverance of the nation.

So he wasn't just righteous. He wasn't just expectant. Simeon had been blessed.

He'd been blessed by a special work, a special ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. Because you'll see there in verse 26 that Simeon had received a promise. A promise that he, that God would not let him die without seeing the Messiah.

There's no suggestion in this text that Simeon's just simply looking forward to a national political deliverance. Here is a righteous Jew with an understanding of God's revelation in the Old Testament scriptures.

[7 : 03] Of God's salvation extending to all peoples. We see this later on during his proclamation. I want you to look particularly at verse 25 and halfway through.

It's an important verb. It's translated for us simply as looking forward. And friends, the world in which we live often expresses expectations of the future.

Especially at this time of the year. As I've looked at many of those this week, I've realised that most of them, the great majority of them, are very egocentric.

And they're very fleshly. I mean, there are dozens of examples. But just one that caught my attention was this one. I read that accountants in the UK are looking forward to massive wage increases in 2007.

In fact, figures released by a recruitment agency over there show that they're anticipating a wage increase of more than 25%. Indeed, accountants and others working in the financial sector are expecting major bonuses.

[8 : 14] From someone who's spent many years in the financial sector, I can tell you as the new year approaches, that's high on the mind of finance executives. But what about in the sporting arena?

I mean, there's been so much discussion, hasn't there, in the last week or two about looking forward. Some of the events we look forward to have now passed. One of the things that the nation looked forward to was Warnie's 700th wicket.

Now it's 7.06. There's been sort of looking forward just in recent days to a five-zip whitewash of the POMs in Sydney.

That's with apologies to any English visitors who are here with us today. We're delighted that you're here. And just for your sake, let me share with you a quote of one of the English cricketers who was looking forward.

Steve Harmison, the fast bowler. He's looking forward to the next series. He wrote in a newspaper column, Australia's a great side, very hard to beat in their own country.

[9 : 17] But in two years' time, when they come back to England, I can look at our group of players and say, with luck, with injuries and form, maybe 95% of them will still be playing.

I can't see many of the Australians still sticking around. In fact, I can see a few of them packing up at the end of this series. He then goes on and simply says this. Because they've had their day, speaking of Australians.

We have our best still to come. Now, I reckon that would be a great definition to put into a new revision of the Macquarie Dictionary under optimism. And let me tell you, this column was penned during the Perth test.

I wonder if he would still write it now. Friends, Simeon's life was focused on Yahweh. Simeon's life was focused on Yahweh's promises and their certain fulfilment.

And that's an important reminder for each of us as we head into a new year. So, again, it's that question. What is it that we're most looking forward to?

[10:26] Is it, for example, God continuing to fulfil his word in our lives? So, for example, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, are we looking forward to almighty God who began a good work in you, bringing it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ?

Question. As I've reflected on Simeon this week, I've found actually this passage very challenging. As I've asked myself in my life, to what extent is my looking forward Godward?

What about you? To what extent is your looking forward with a Godward focus? Are we looking forward to God fulfilling his word in the world around us?

Are we looking forward to God continuing his merciful plan of salvation, where he promises that he will bring peoples in from all tribes and nations into his kingdom?

A plan of salvation that he promises will be consummated at the return of Christ? The Holy Spirit leads Simeon to go to the temple.

[11:41] And Joseph and Mary are taking baby Jesus there. They're taking him there for the dedication of the firstborn. And as they're doing this, Simeon stops them.

Just sort of imagine the scene. These parents are dedicating Jesus to God, and God testifies to Jesus through Simeon.

And notice Simeon's proclamation in verse 29. Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your word.

Master, the sense of the word that he uses is ruler, sovereign lord, almighty king, the ruling monarch of everything. Simeon praises God.

He praises the promise making God. He praises the promise keeping God. Simeon had been given a job by God.

[12:42] The job was to announce the appearance of a unique person into the world. The task has been performed, and Simeon says, well, Lord, do with me as you wish.

He's a great example, isn't he, Simeon, of faithfulness. Faithfulness to a faithful God. Simeon trusts that God will fulfil his word.

And for those who've been with us through the month of December, as we've looked at these opening chapters of Luke's Gospel, again and again we've been reminded of our need to always trust God and his word in every situation in life.

And as I sort of look out on the congregation this morning and know many of you, I know you face lots of different situations. But in a fallen world, there are great difficulties that the people in this congregation face.

Difficulties of severe physical pain, of racking pain. That perhaps great emotional pain, of human relationship loneliness, of financial difficulties.

[13:56] As Christians, we're clearly not immune from all sorts of difficulties. So daily, literally daily, we need to appropriate the biblical truth.

The biblical truth that God is absolutely trustworthy. What he says will be, what he promises will come about. And that is great comfort.

If you've placed your trust in Jesus Christ. Because even if you are to experience human difficulties, and even if those human difficulties are to extend right through this life, God promises with absolute certainty an exhilarating future.

Simeon's a great testimony of trust. I want you to notice particularly verse 30. Salvation is directly linked to seeing Jesus.

With Jesus' birth, salvation comes. And verse 30 and 31 describe that salvation. It's a salvation that's been prepared by God.

[15:04] It was designed by God that a deliverer would come. The deliverer would come through the nation of Israel and would bring salvation. It wouldn't bring salvation just to one ethnic group.

But indeed across the whole human race. And what's this salvation? Verse 32 simply describes it as light. We've already sung that in the chorus this morning of Behold the Lamb.

Light illuminating darkness. And Jesus in his earthly ministry went on and said these words. I've come into the world as a light.

So that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. And the modern songwriter pens these words about Jesus.

Light of the world, you step down into darkness. Open my eyes, let me see. Beauty that made this heart adore you. Hope of a life spent with you.

[16:12] Jesus says, I've come into this world as a light. So that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. So perhaps this morning as we head towards the end of 2006, I may be speaking to just one person this morning.

And you know deep inside that you're actually stumbling around in darkness. You're stumbling around in darkness without Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord.

Jesus has come and he's come as the light. The one who brings life. Well, Luke describes this light in verse 32.

He describes it two ways. He says it's a revelation to the Gentiles and it's a glory to Israel. You see, salvation comes through Israel in the person of the Messiah.

The one named Jesus back in verse 21. He's the Saviour. He's the rescuer. But he's the rescuer of the world, not just of the Jewish nation.

[17:19] And in verse 33, Joseph and Mary, they marvel. They marvel at what Simeon is telling them. And God, through Simeon, is revealing more information to them.

You see, when the angel gave Joseph the name of Mary's child, it's likely that Joseph would have seen that comment, save his people, in a purely Jewish context.

But those words, his people, are actually full of meaning. And God unpacks the meaning of those words as the gospel unfolds. And God uses Simeon, senior citizen Simeon, expectant Simeon, patient Simeon.

He uses Simeon to open the vista of Joseph and Mary. See, there is a universal scope to the mission of this little baby boy.

But the universal scope will not be without pain. See, firstly, in verse 34, there's going to be division in the nation of Israel over him.

[18:36] Those who reject him are headed for a fall. Those who accept him in faith are headed for vindication. Jesus' ministry will reveal the condition of people's hearts towards God.

That was the case in first century Palestine. That is absolutely the case in 2006 in Doncaster and Templestowe.

Jesus' ministry reveals the condition of our heart towards God. Secondly, in verse 35, Jesus' mission is going to cause a sword to pass through his mother's own soul.

See, he's going to bring extreme emotional pain to his mother. And that's going to happen as Jesus follows the will of his heavenly father.

In fact, just later on in this passage, we see the first fulfillment of that in verse 49, when Jesus remains behind in the temple. Just these few verses, it's a great little cameo.

[19:40] Simeon is a wonderful example. He's a wonderful example for each of us as we head into a new year. What is it that we're primarily looking forward to in 2007?

Simeon was waiting trustingly to see Jesus. The second cameo. We meet Anna.

She's an elderly widow prophetess. She is very devoted to God. Look at verse 37. She never left the temple, but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

And Anna approaches Joseph and Mary and she testifies to Jesus. Firstly, she offers up thanksgiving to God. She praises God for God's gracious act of sending Jesus.

And secondly, she addresses those who are around her. And they're described as those who were literally looking forward. Looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise.

[20:48] God's promise that he would send a deliverer. The redeemer. Heartless contact deer.

They were looking forward. They were awaiting expectantly. Tragically for many living in our world.

the world and its prospects are dark and depressing. I noticed the words of one writer this week.

The evasive plastic bubble of our present cultural freeze frame context is born of a lack of future.

We're holding onto illusions of prosperity because all we see ahead of us is loss, emptiness and desolation.

He then goes on and he quotes a contemporary philosopher. War, pestilence, hunger and stupidity we have in abundance. That's true.

We no longer look to any dream to give us guidance to live into. The future from here is an unavoidable nightmare. They're kind of dark words, aren't they?

[22:10] They're dark words but they're not surprising sentiments for anyone who does not put their trust in a sovereign God. A sovereign God who's promised that he will physically and literally

return to this world, this fallen world and bring in, usher in a new and perfect order.

That's his promise. It will happen. Well twice in this little passage Luke emphasizes a Godward focus of waiting for God to fulfill his word.

And so that little verb which we've got translated as looking forward is actually used in the New Testament in two ways in the sense of waiting.

The first way that it's used is how we've seen in this chapter. The way it's used with Simeon and Anna it's the sense of awaiting the in-breaking of the kingdom of God.

It's actually the way that Joseph of Arimathea used the word. Remember he was the one who took the body of Jesus down from the cross. So later on in this gospel in chapter 23 we're told that he was waiting expectantly.

[23 : 27] That's the word. Waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God which was ushered in by Jesus' death and resurrection. So that's the first way the word is used in the New Testament.

But it's used in a second way and it's used of the Christian's future expectation. So here are some examples how it's used. In Acts 24 it's used in the sense of the resurrection of the dead.

In Titus 2 it's used of believers awaiting the hope the certain confidence of the Lord's return. in that little book right at the end of the New Testament Jude in verse 21 it's used in the sense of believers awaiting the mercy of God at his return.

Again the question goes through my mind at least. What is it that we are looking forward to? What are you awaiting as you look to the future?

Is it for example to be perfected in the presence of the Lord himself? One commentator has rightly said those who take their eyes off the future hope will find that their love for God is slowly evaporating.

[24 : 56] and it will be evident that their real love is for the present evil age. Those who take their eyes off their future hope of the Lord's return will find that their love for God is slowly evaporating.

What is it that we are primarily looking forward to in 2007? Because at the beginning of the message I listed off numerous items of expectation and that list of items is actually morally neutral. You see you're not sinning if you've got an expectation of having a baby or starting a course of study or finishing a course of study or going on a special holiday.

There are just so many things for each of us to enjoy in God's world even in this very fallen world. but the Holy Spirit challenges each of us, challenges me, challenges you to get our priorities right. First and foremost, our expectations, our looking forward needs to be God would to God and what he's doing, what he's doing in our personal lives, what he's doing in the church, what he's doing in the world around us.

[26 : 26] God's plan is to bring all things under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That's his plan, that's his promise, and it will happen.

So I trust that for each of you, you have a wonderful new year. I trust for each of you that you rejoice in your salvation in Jesus Christ. looking forward expectantly to the consummation of the kingdom when Christ returns.

Is that going to be in 2007? Well, it could be. But if it is, that actually hasn't been revealed to us in scripture.

But the Lord has called each of his children, everyone who's put their trust in Jesus Christ, his people, to await expectantly, to look forward to the fulfillment of all of his promises.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your merciful and great plan of salvation. Father, we thank you for sending the Lord Jesus.

[27 : 41] We thank you that he has come, died on the cross, risen from the grave as a saviour for all peoples. Lord, help myself, help each one that's here this morning to look forward to wait expectantly with a Godward focus, with what you're doing in our own lives, in your church, in the world around us.

Help us to look forward with great expectation, with certain confidence, of the consummation of the kingdom, when the Lord Jesus returns. We ask this for the sake and the glory of the Lord Jesus himself.

Amen.