

My eyes have seen your Salvation

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. Great to see you. You should have one of these handouts, which has the passage and an outline of the sermon where we're going today. I think I'm on.

Yep. No worries. I guess given where we are in the year, I'm required to ask you how your Christmas was. A few nods there. Good. This year, we were really waiting for Christmas, weren't we? Premier Daniel Andrews was working hard to give us a COVID normal Christmas, whatever that means. And so how was it for you? Was it extra special because of the year we've had? Or when it came down to it, was it fairly normal stuff? I think I've said a couple of times before that my auntie is very sick. And we thought, now we know for sure that this will be her last Christmas. And so we all cancelled our plans with in-laws and all the nephews and children all gathered across the street at my place to celebrate with her. And on the surface, I guess my household would have looked like many households in Melbourne, unless you could see the real story underneath and knew the significance of what was going on. And that is the kind of theme of our passage today. On the surface, the first Christmas, it looked very normal, very ordinary, in fact, unless you knew the story underneath. God promised his all-conquering king, the Messiah. But when Jesus arrived, if you blinked, you would miss him. Jesus wasn't born in Rome near the corridors of power, but Bethlehem and Nazareth, two tiny specks on the empire. He was David's promised heir. But instead of being born in a palace, it was a stable and a manger. We tend to think of the nativity as lovely and soft and warm. But if you ask any farmer what a sheep's feeding trough is really like, they'll tell you it's pretty disgusting stuff. And sure, Jesus had angels singing for him, but they only visited some random shepherds in the field. We only know about them because Luke bothered to write it down for us here. But how come Luke doesn't mention the wise men, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, bowing down to Jesus the way Matthew does? Why does Luke rub our noses in how ordinary this Christmas looked? He is writing to a Christian called Theophilus. Theophilus was taught about Jesus, just like us, but now Theophilus is lacking confidence in the story. Perhaps the birth seemed too poor and humble for God's king. Perhaps the miracles and the teaching are in doubt because Jesus ended up in his life abandoned and crucified and humiliated. You see, if Jesus' first coming seemed to over-promise and under-deliver, why should Theophilus wait for his second coming? Why should he serve him until that time? For us, haven't we been promised a better life in Jesus? How is it going?

Being a Christian, sometimes it was promised shiny and new, but sometimes it feels a bit underwhelming and a bit weak and perhaps even humiliating. Luke wants us to be confident that despite appearances, Jesus, being a Christian, will exceed our expectations. And in the passage, what he does is hold out two people who model a confidence in the story, confidence in Jesus. The two people, Simeon and Anna, they have waited their whole lives for that first Christmas and Jesus to arrive.

So Simeon, he's the first one. Verse 22, have a look. When the time came for the purification rites required by the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took Jesus 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. These verses are very standard stuff for Jewish babies. The idea is that in the law of Moses from Exodus, you'd have to offer purification rites for the newborn baby after their birth. Strictly speaking, you had to offer a lamb. But if you're too poor, too cash strapped, a pair of doves or two young pigeons would do the trick. Clearly, Mary and Joseph are pigeon poor. But they're still good Jews. They're doing their duty. And I guess that day they look like every other family in the temple doing their duty. Every other family since the Exodus, that's how they looked. But not to old man Simeon.

[5 : 08] And he breaks all the rules when it comes to meeting babies. Do you know the baby rules? When you meet babies? Well, here are some of the baby rules. So don't tell mum how tired she looks.

Don't comment on how messy the house is. Do offer a meal or to make a meal. Do stay away if you've got a sniffle. Don't mention how big the baby's head is or what a little ugly spud the baby is. Do pretend that you really love the name. Inglebert or something like that. No one would do that, would they? Well, in verse 28, old man Simeon, he breaks the rules. He takes Jesus in his arms without even asking mum's permission. He says, sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. Now I can die happy, he says. Last year on my wife's side of the family, a firstborn son also arrived. And out of his 20 cousins, little Oscar is the first son of a son. In other words, little Oscar will be the only child amongst 20 grandkids to be able to carry on the Horn family name to another generation. But when granddad took little Oscar in his arms, I don't remember him saying, now I can die happy. You see, meeting baby Jesus, it was a bucket list moment for old man Simeon. Verse 26, it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he'd seen the Lord's Messiah. Typically, bucket list things are, you know, meeting a, seeing a superstar in concert for my mum, that would be Cliff Richard, I don't know about you. It's probably round the world travel for most of us, exciting experiences like skydiving, that sort of thing. Well, one day at that very first Christmas, old man Simeon ticked off his bucket list because he got to see God's Messiah, the baby king. Another rule for meeting babies, you're not allowed to crush them with too much expectation. But Simeon says that baby Jesus will, verse 32, be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel. One day, he says, this baby will grow up to save the world. How's that for expectation? Normally, another rule, it's adults who save the baby. So I'm always, you know, protecting my kids from electric sockets. And when I go fishing with my son, I sort of protect him from falling off the jetty. But baby Jesus, it's the other way around. He does the saving. Verse 30, he is God's salvation for all the nations. And it's not that old man Simeon sees Jesus with rose-colored glasses. In verse 34, he acknowledges Jesus' weakness. Through the verses, he says that Jesus will be spoken against. That is, that Jesus will be opposed. But he's able to look beyond the poverty, beyond the humility, beyond the opposition, and still be excited at this king. Anna is the same. When she meets Jesus, verse 38, she gives thanks to God. And Luke holds these two people out to us as a model for how to approach Jesus. They've only seen a baby, not the grown-up man. We're years away from any miracles, but they're already overjoyed.

[8 : 53] They only glimpse Israel's hope, but that's all it takes for Simeon to want to die happy, and for Anna to give thanks to God. And for us in the room, when it comes to glimpsing Jesus, we're in a much better position. We have all of Luke's gospel, not just a story that day. We've got all of the gospels. The whole Bible, in fact, does knowing Jesus make us feel that our lives are complete, that we could die happy? Are we as excited as Simeon and Anna in our own way?

Imagine on our bucket lists, above the concerts and the overseas travel, it said, going to church this Sunday. Why? Because that's where we get to glimpse Jesus in the word.

Imagine if that was on the top of our bucket list, just going to church on a Sunday. Luke says that, like Theophilus, we need more confidence in the Christ. And the key is how good your eyes are. This is our second point, how good your eyes are. You see, in the passage, Simeon and Anna have very special eyes. Three times, verse 26, 27, sorry, 25, 26, and 27, we're told that the spirit is moving in Simeon. In verse 36, we're told that Anna is a prophet. That means that they have God's eyes, God's point of view on the situation. Heavenly eyes, spiritual specs, if you like. See, on the surface, everyone sees another poor Jewish family commemorating the Exodus. But only Simeon and Anna see that that past rescue is a shadow of the real rescue in Jesus. It all depends on how good your eyes are.

Notice the emphasis on eyesight, verse 30. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

[11 : 10] That is a quote from Isaiah 42, our Old Testament passage, which Jennifer brought to us. Isaiah teaches that the Messiah won't look strong and imposing when he arrives, but gentle, a bruised reed he will not break. Isaiah says that he'll be pierced for our transgressions, actually crushed for our iniquities. And there's just a glimpse of it in the story.

And if you blink, you'll miss it. You see, the whole time old man Simeon is breaking baby rules, Mary has been holding two dead pigeons in her hands. The two pigeons are lifeless and bloodied, the way one day she'll be holding her son lifeless and bloodied. The pigeons were offered for her purification, her cleansing. One day her son will be offered for everyone's purification and cleansing. The Christmas and Easter, they appear on the surface to be very different. One is about presents, the other is about chocolate. But for us in the room, they're tightly linked together. Simeon is able to see past an ordinary Jewish ritual and Mary's poverty to a Messiah underneath. He's confident that even though Jesus looks humble, he looks weak, that he will be opposed, that in him is God's answer to salvation for the nations.

I don't know when you last had your eyes tested. Do you get your eyes tested very often? I had mine tested for the first time this year at OPSM. You know, they put you in that, it looks like a Victorian contraption, you know, the big thing that does this.

[12:50] And they put me in, they say, right, Mr. Henderson, read the bottom line. A-E-I-O-U. And they said, they're all numbers, Mr. Henderson, actually. I know I'm getting blind as a bat.

But Simeon says that the test of our eyes, the test of our eyesight depends on what we see when we look at this baby. Verse 34, this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against. Why? So that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. In other words, our falling or rising before God depends on how we see this baby, whether we speak against Jesus or not. That is a sign to God of what our hearts are like.

In Australia, the test of our hearts is the good bloke test. It's all about pleases and thank yous. It's about road manners. You know, when you're driving on the road and you allow someone, if someone's rudely trying to get in and you slow down like a good person to let them in and they don't give you a thank you wave, that's pure evil, isn't it? That's the Aussie heart test.

But for God, it's about whether we speak against Jesus or not. And so for those who want to, or who think their lives are fine without Jesus, who want to be their own saviors, who speak against Jesus as it were, that is a sign to God of what their hearts are like.

And they will fall when it comes to God. They will fall on that last day. For us in the room, for us who can't take our eyes off Jesus, who know that without him there is no rescue for us, no salvation possible, that is a sign to God of what our hearts are like.

[14:56] And we will rise on that last day, even though we die in the meantime. But that is a tough challenge because the Christian life requires enormous stamina.

Time is a huge factor. Eyes on Jesus means we are waiting and waiting and waiting for him, just like Simeon and Anna. When we first put our trust in Jesus, you know, oh so many years ago, it was a joyful, life-changing decision. But as we've been battered by the ins and outs of life, has that amazing decision now just become a bit ordinary? Does the Christian life feel a bit underwhelming? Promised a lot, but some days a bit ordinary actually. I think that's why Luke gives us Anna's backstory. Just quickly, verse 36.

There was a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel of the tribe Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow until she was 84. See, Anna was once married and all the excitement that comes with that, you know, planning kids, planning a life together, building a home. But after seven short years, her husband passed away. And so now she has been grieving for 50, 60, 70 years as a widow. But look at how devoted she still is. Verse 37.

She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. And when she finally saw Jesus, verse 38, she gave thanks to God. She spoke to everyone she saw at the temple about us.

And she speaks to us today. She tells us to give thanks to God despite our circumstances. Giving thanks to God is an awesome spiritual discipline. It lifts our eyes to everything we have in Christ, not what we have given up in this world. To count our blessings.

[17:12] It enables us to be excited about Jesus above the disappointments in this life. And another important thing, the more thankful we are for Jesus, the less likely we will be to leave him. You don't leave the things you're thankful for.

Giving thanks to God for Jesus. It's like doing your own spiritual eye test, as it were. Many things will disappoint us. Marriage and family, jobs and money, politicians and governments. But Jesus never, ever will. It is right for us to give thanks to him, to watch out, keep our eyes on his arrival, his return. It's the end of the year. So I'm required to ask, what's on your bucket list for 2021? I

suppose, what do we say? Just not another one like this one, perhaps is the answer. Sometimes we forget to put the coming of Jesus in our diaries or near the top of our bucket list. It could be any day now. Are we as excited about Jesus' arrival as we are the next family event or investments coming to life? Have we become short-sighted about Jesus over the years? Are we blind to his arrival because of disappointments in life? If so, Luke wants us to have confidence in the Christ, in the story. He presents two people with perfect eyesight for us to copy. Old man Simeon, he says, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation. Let's pray that we would be like Simeon and Anna.

Father God, we thank you that you tell us the truth. And we thank you that regardless of the appearances, that Jesus is everything, that he is your king. Please, Father, would we never take our eyes off Jesus? Would we never stop waiting expectantly for his return? Please remind us of all we have in Jesus so that we are more excited about him than we are disappointed with the things of this life.

[19 : 43] Please make us like Simeon and Anna. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.