

The reward for waiting patiently

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[0:00] You know, the Bible's full of interesting characters. And we know some of their stories. And others, we only have the mention of a name.

I don't know about you, but I've always wanted to know a little bit more about their backstories.

What they were like. What it was like when they grew up. Where they lived.

How they lived. What their relationships were like. Now, I'm going to introduce you to two people this morning.

Simeon and Anna. They're not young. And they've certainly seen a lot of life. So, first of all, we're going to look at Simeon's backstory.

And I've written it in the first person. So, it's as if Simeon himself is speaking to us. Hello.

[1:06] I'm Simeon. No, it's not Simon. It's Simeon. I know it's a bit confusing. You know, it's a confusion I've lived with all my life.

And now that's a very long time. My legs remind me of just how long it is. Aches and pains of old age. It would be lovely to move freely and do all the things I once did.

But that's another story. And you don't want to hear me moan on. Today, I want to tell you about the time God spoke to me. I was a young man back then.

So, you can't put it down to old age. And I know that it was God. He really did speak to me. I've been brought up to go to the synagogue every Sabbath.

And once a year, I'd gone to Jerusalem with my family to worship in the temple. All my life, I have followed God's laws. I have done what it says in the scriptures.

[2:13] I've never worshipped anyone or anything other than the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel. And I couldn't imagine life without following and worshipping God.

Eventually, I moved to Jerusalem to be near family. And that allows me to go to the temple every day. Sorry, I'm straying off the point again.

I do want to tell you about that time God spoke to me. It was a bit like today, really. Today, I knew I should come to the temple.

You could even say I felt compelled to come. Back then, God's presence had been so real. I now know that it was the Holy Spirit.

God said something really strange. I mean, totally off the wall strange. He told me I wouldn't die until I'd seen the Messiah.

[3:20] Well, you know, it's going to have to get a move on now because I can't have too many more years left. Seriously, though, it was amazing. To be honest, I didn't really understand what he meant.

And if truth be told, I probably still don't. But you see, I've always trusted God. He knows what he's doing. And as the years passed, I almost forgot that God had spoken to me.

It sounded impossible. But the everyday things of life, making a living and looking after the family and, you know, just getting through life, pushed those sort of thoughts out of my head.

But as I've got older, I've had more time to sit and think, not just to do things. And I've been reminded of that promise so long ago.

And it's been nagging at the back of my mind. I can't shake off the thought that the Messiah will come in my lifetime and I will see him.

[4:41] I think I said I felt compelled to come to the temple today. The outer courts are as busy as ever. I don't know where all these people come from.

The stalls for changing money. Those regular coins into temple shekels are doing a roaring trade. And so are the dove and pigeon sellers.

There's a couple over there. They've got a new baby. They must be bringing the wee man to present him to the Lord. Maybe God's brought me here today to meet them.

Even with my failing eyes, I can see there's something special about that child. Can I see your baby? Oh, yes.

He's very special. What's his name? Oh, Jesus. And you are?

[5:41] Mary and Joseph. Can I hold him? Bless you, Lord. I can now die in peace.

Mary. I have seen the one who will save all your people. He will bring light to dark places and dark minds and bring glory for your people, Israel.

Mary. Mary. I can see you know it's true. But even if you don't know how important this baby is and who he'll grow up to be.

But it will break your heart. There was, of course, another character to mention.

And that's Anna. She also noticed what God was doing. And in keeping with Scottish law, where for something to be proven, you need two witnesses.

[6:48] Anna is our second witness for corroboration. We can trust what the Bible says to be true because we have two witnesses.

We've heard from Simeon. Now we're going to hear from Anna. I married young. But my husband died after just seven years.

So I found myself widowed in my early 20s. And I've been on my own ever since. I'm 84 now. But, you know, I haven't been lonely.

I came to live here in the temple. I have a big family. My family is part of the tribe of Asher. And together with those Samaritans that you hear about, we're the northern tribes.

If you like, we're the lost tribes of Israel. And it was hard when I moved south as I got married. You know, people can be very prejudiced and very cruel, can't they?

[8:00] They mocked my northern accent. They even said I wasn't properly Jewish. It was very hurtful. I only wanted to follow the Lord, the God of Israel.

And now here in the temple, I've got plenty of company. I go about and I chat to people as they come to worship. The priests and the temple staff, they're very good.

They look out for me. And God has brought me to people. He gives me insights into their problems. He gives me words to say, to speak out against corruption and injustice.

But he gives me a compassion and a heart to reach out to everyone. I don't show any favoritism.

I just pass on what God has given me to say. But mostly, I spend my time praying. I suppose I pray most of the day.

[9:07] And even quite a chunk of the night as well. It doesn't feel like an effort. It's just something that's part of me. It's who I am.

I worship God. And I ask him to look after his people. To forgive them. To forgive them when they're foolish and sin.

When they turn their back on him. To heal their sicknesses. It might sound quite radical or even extreme to you.

But I fast. I fast to show God how much my prayers mean. How much I want him to answer those prayers.

To redeem his people. Now I'm older. I don't get out much. In fact, I rarely leave the temple. I don't need to.

[10:10] Because everything I need for my life is here. It comes to me. There's Simeon. He's a friend.

And he's talking to that lovely young couple with the baby. I do like it when they bring the little ones to the temple. To be presented to the Lord. Can't have a better start in life than that, can you?

I'll just go over and see. I can't resist a newborn baby. I'm sure there's something different about this baby though.

God's showing me that he is the one. He's the one that he sent. He's the one that will bring salvation to us.

He will rescue us. God. In this child. Who will grow into manhood. That Old Testament covenant. That God made with his people.

[11:08] Is going to be fulfilled. And a new covenant will be begun. Sorry. I'm going to have to leave you now. I need to go and tell everybody the good news.

God's redeemer is here. Hey. Hey. Two characters. Simeon and Anna. Their stories run very much counter to our culture.

Don't they? We live in a time when we want everything instantly. We want it yesterday. And the idea of waiting for a lifetime.

For God to fulfill his promises. Sounds really too much to ask of us. Doesn't it? But patience. Is an important part.

Of faithfulness. Patience and faithfulness. Are two of the fruits of the spirit. And the other thing.

[12:10] That. Is counter to our culture. Is it. Concerns. To. Older people. People. And as a culture.

We tend to. Put. Set great store. By youth. And young people. And. Perhaps as we get older. We feel. Maybe we feel ourselves. That. We haven't got much more to offer. And perhaps young people. Don't feel. We have anything to offer. But here.

We have two. Older people. People who are rich. In years. Projected in a very positive light. And. A man.

And a woman. Very inclusive. And not. Very. PC. At the time. That it was written. They are both.

[13:05] Out and about. They move around the temple. And they seek to engage. With people. And they have encounters. That God can use. And they.

Draw on a lifetime. Of experience. Not just of. Of physical life. And of doing the things. That we do in our lifetimes. But a lifetime.

Spent with the Lord. A lifetime. Worshipping. A lifetime. Building that relationship. With God. And Mary.

Well we reckon. She was a teenage mum. Possibly. Under 15. She features in this story too.

And so. We have this balance. Between young and old. Nobody. Nobody. Should be despised. For their age. For whatever their age is.

[14:07] We all have. A role to play. But this isn't just about. One person. Sitting. Waiting. Patiently. For God to bless.

It's about God's world. Waiting patiently. Or. Or perhaps not quite so patiently. Doesn't scripture say. That creation.

Is groaning. Groaning. In its waiting. For redemption. But the thing is. Here.

We have. God's word. Coming for everyone. That waiting. For the fulfillment. Of Isaiah's prophecy. Someone who will make.

Who will be a light. For the Gentiles. That God's salvation. Will reach. To the ends of the earth. And nations. Will come to your light.

[15:04] And kings. To the brightness. Of your dawn. Next week. We'll look at something. Of those kings. Coming to the brightness. Of. Of the baby Jesus.

Is dawning. But Simeon recognizes. That this promised light. Has dawned. It will no longer be important.

To. To say. Which tribe. You were born into. What. What your nationality is. What your ethnicity is. What your gender is. It's about being born. Into a new relationship. With Jesus. Paul writes. There's neither Jew nor Greek.

Slave or free. Male nor female. Because all are one. In Christ Jesus. And. Simeon. His eyes.

[16:01] Have seen. God's salvation. A salvation. That was prepared. In the sight of everyone. Even though. No but.

So many nations. Even Israel. Didn't realize. What was happening. And it's a light. Not just for Israel. But for revelation.

Of who God is. To the Gentiles. And it's a crowning glory. To God's people. Israel. Simeon sang. That wonderful. Song of praise. Over that. Over the. Over Jesus. Who was only. Days old. At the time. And it wasn't just.

Simeon's personal salvation. It was salvation. For the whole of the world. Salvation is not something.

[16:55] That would start. In 33 years time. In the future. When Jesus was fully grown. And had it. Had lived a life. With his teaching ministry.

And his healing ministry. Calling and equipping disciples. Didn't even start. With the crucifixion. In fact.

Didn't even start. When Jesus was born. When the incarnation happened. It started way back. When God planned it.

As the way. Of overturning. The effects. Of the fall. This child. This baby. Is God with us. He is Emmanuel. Almighty God. Taking on human flesh. Becoming truly human.

[17:51] In Mary. And now. He begins. The process. Of redemption. Of reversing. The curse. Of the fall.

Restoring. God's image. Restoring. Us. To the people. That God. Intended us. To be. Jesus. Has made. God's forgiveness. A reality. But that process. Of transformation. Is ongoing. It isn't complete. Yet. Is it. We all know.

That. We stumble. And fall. Yet. Even though. We know the Lord. Even though. We've got him. In our lives. We still make mistakes. We still.

Don't get things. Right. That work. Is ongoing. In my heart. And I'm sure. You'll acknowledge. It's ongoing. In yours too. We need.

[18:49] To be patient. Just like. Simeon. And Anna. Were. And we'll not. Be disappointed. We will see. The Lord. In all his glory.

In the fullness. Of time. But for now. We can take. Great encouragement. That God. Is at work. In us. It began. Before we knew him. Before we were aware. Even of who. Jesus was. And that a relationship. With God. Was possible.

And it will go on. We will be changed. From glory. Into glory. Until. We are with him. In glory.

The important thing to know. Is Jesus. Is our saviour. And Lord. And we can trust him. We can trust him. In all things.

[19:44] To God. So whatever age we are. We need to have an ear open. To listen. To God. And to respond.

To him. Thank you.