

Great Expectations: Simeon and Anna (Evening Service)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 December 2017

Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] Almighty God, who made your blessed Son to be circumcised and obedient to the law for man, grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit, that our hearts and all our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey your blessed will.

The same your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Well, thank you for coming out tonight.

On the way in, I heard that it's 21 below in Montreal. Ah, I bet you're glad you're here. Not there like me. And you probably could be doing something other than being here tonight, but it's great to be together to hear God's Word and what it is that He actually has to say to us.

This is just a great text. I really love it. And as you heard it, you would have noticed just how it begins and how it ends, and I just kind of prayed about that.

And I'll close with a prayer that's also from the prayer book that draws in what is said at the end of this text as well. But as you know the text, you can turn to it.

[1 : 17] It's on page 857 of your Bibles. And it just begins with the eight days after Jesus' birth. And of course, He's circumcised and He's given the name that was already actually given before He was born, which is Jesus, which means Yahweh saves.

And this is all actually happening in the temple. So that's how it starts. And the way that it ends is with Jesus returning to the hometown of Joseph and Mary.

And there we find that Jesus grows strong. He gains wisdom. He's filled with that. And God's divine favor or grace is upon Him. So that's how it begins and that's how it ends.

I just want to keep it really simple tonight and just look at who is Jesus? What did He come to do? And how does that actually impact or influence our lives? So something really kind of simple in those terms.

So let's just start out with who is Jesus according to this, but also kind of in a bigger kind of swatch, as it were, in the Gospel of Luke. So Jesus is actually coming into this world.

[2 : 18] We see that He's a child. It's actually, we know that because it's only eight days since His birth. But the word child is actually used a number of times, verses 24, 34, and 40.

And in verse 24, He's related to us as the one who's come to actually fulfill what is foretold, but also He's brought to the temple to satisfy the obligations of the law.

Verse 34, He's appointed, is what Luke tells us. So we're learning that actually this is divinely ordained. This isn't something that actually happened by accident.

It was intentional and God's hand is written all over this. And then in verse 40, the child grew and became strong. We see that He's a child like anyone else, has to go through some human development.

But there's something else that's going on there that's quite significant. Because God's favor, His grace, is actually upon Him. But here's the big idea in the Gospel of Luke that I think is related to this and what comes and follows.

[3 : 20] And that is that for Luke, Jesus is the one who came to seek and to save those who are lost. So it's really interesting that this child, the one of whom people are seeking, is the one who's actually brought in to actually seek us and save those who are lost.

And you know the context of that probably. Luke chapter 19, verse 10, there's a lost coin, a lost sheep, and the lost sons. And Jesus is the one who's come to seek the lost.

It goes back actually to Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve's sin. And what's God's first question when He encounters them? Where are you? They're lost.

Not what did you do? Why did you do it? But they're dislocated. They're disoriented. They're wayward. They're rebellious. This is Jesus who comes to pursue us then from the bottom up as a child.

He doesn't do it from the top down, but this child will seek us from the ground up. Not with a bang, right? Not dropping down onto the scene, but born through a woman's womb.

[4 : 28] That's how He comes into the world. And it's kind of peculiar, you've got to admit. Since God begins in this world as a child. And after all, He's like you and me.

He's human. But in some ways not like us as humans because He's sinless. He shows what it actually looks like to be fully human. And this is Jesus, the Lord who has come into this world to seek and to save us as a child first.

So that's who He is. He's the child who seeks us. What is it that He came to do? And Simeon and Anna are really helpful with respect to this. Right? After the circumcision, the dedication, the purification of Mary.

Jesus then actually encounters and Simeon and Anna encounter Jesus. First Simeon, then Anna. We know this. They're really old people that make a really big difference.

And I think that it's a warning to the young who think that maybe the old don't have something to offer. But it's also a wonder to the old who maybe think that they don't have something to offer.

[5 : 33] They do. It doesn't look like they do very much except keep up with noticing, announcing, declaring salvation. And how do they do it?

Just by naming what's going on. So first, let's look at Simeon. Here's what Simeon, I think, says about what Jesus came to do. Quite simply, verse 25, the second half to that.

But Jesus came to console Israel. That's why he came. So Simeon is righteous. He's devout. He's Holy Spirit sensitive. And he's really, really patient.

Because remember, he's actually quite old. And he's been waiting for a long time. Waiting for the consolation of Israel. And now, Israel is supposed to be this holy nation. But they're not so holy anymore.

But they are a chosen people. Nevertheless, they're in great need of God's consolation. Their consolation, their desire for that may be actually quite low.

[6 : 34] But this is what God is actually going to give to them. And what is consolation? Well, consolation suggests loss. Which isn't the opposite of winning.

But it's actually like grieving. Things didn't turn out the way Israel thought. Or they wanted it to. They're captives of another.

They're not captains of their destiny. So they're in great need of consolation. A true consolation. Not a false consolation. It is they've grieved God by their sin.

Rebelled against him. And they need something. Some of them may not even actually know it. We need consolation too though, don't we? Some of us think that things aren't actually going the way that it should for the church.

Publicly. Privately. Some of us think that it should be going a different way. And so we need consolation. Sometimes we go about it in ways that aren't helpful.

[7 : 35] We start thinking differently about the world. We maybe think of ourselves as victims. Or maybe we think of we must become victors and winners about this.

In terms of consolation, we might look to products to console ourselves. Or even another person to console us. But Jesus is the only consolation.

That's what Simeon is saying. And in the Old Testament, the consolation that God promises for his people is always with respect to their sin.

Console, console, console is what they want. And God's saying, I will. But don't forget this. It's about your sin. And here's the really curious thing about it.

I'll think of Jesus as being the Prince of Peace, which he is. But if you look at verses 34b and 35, Jesus is, before he brings consolation, he's actually going to bring confrontation or conflict.

[8 : 41] Let me read these verses for you. It says, And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and the rising of many in Israel, for a sign that is opposed.

And a sword will pierce through your own soul, so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Jesus isn't conflict averse. He's going to confront sin and sinners.

I won't take you there, but just read the last half of Psalm 110, which was actually read this morning. And it describes what it is that the king, when he comes into the world, is actually going to do with respect to other kings in the world, those who actually oppose him.

So this is who Jesus is, and this is what he's come to do. He's come to bring consolation, but not necessarily the kind of consolation that we expect or on our terms. He's the savior of the world, and he'll confront, and he'll do conflict with respect to sin, and ultimately achieve consolation for us on and through the cross, always with respect to our sin.

That's Simeon. Anna shows something similar to that, but a little bit different. Jesus came, in her words, to redeem. Jesus is the redemption of Jerusalem.

[10 : 01] She's a prophetess, an Asherite, and a widow after being married only seven years. And she, too, is really patient.

She's been waiting for a long time like Simeon, but not for consolation. It says for redemption. Jerusalem is this city of God.

She says redemption of Jerusalem. This is the place where God reigns. It's where he rules. But that's not happening for Jerusalem anymore.

Israel's need for consolation is great, and so is Jerusalem's need for redemption. And what is redemption? This is economic language.

It's marketplace language. It suggests value. And Jerusalem and God's people lost their value because, again, of sin and rejection of the Lord.

[10 : 58] So it's occupied, that is, God's people in Jerusalem, and ruled by another king and a Lord. And Jerusalem and the church sometimes want to redeem their own value.

And the church, like Jerusalem, is held in low regard and not esteemed. So sometimes we bring this upon ourselves. But the church has an interesting relationship with the culture in which we live.

Right? You can think of them in the terms of the way that they might think of actually a church. But sometimes we bring that actually upon ourselves. Other times, though, we can actually expect the world in which we live in to think less of us because of the gospel.

But here's the thing about Jesus, who is the Redeemer, who will bring redemption to Jerusalem and to cities. It's always this idea of cities with respect to order, which is why law figures in significantly in these 21 verses.

And what Jesus will do as the Redeemer, the one who brings redemption for the city, will actually bring order. He will redeem. He will restore. He will reclaim the value for his people that they cannot do for themselves.

[12 : 15] And the way that he will do that, again, is actually through the cross. The only way that sin can ultimately be dealt with. And Jesus actually then redeem us. So that's what Jesus does.

Consolation of his people and the redemption of this city, this order, this place where he will rule and reign. All over, over creation because of his death on the cross.

So just to close then, how does this life of Jesus then influence the way we live? Two ways. First is blessing and the other one is prophecy.

Jesus comes to purify our hearts, I think, so that we can bless him like Simeon. Simeon is an example of what it means to know Jesus as the consolation of the nations.

But what is it that Simeon actually does? He blesses the Lord. He knows that he's been blessed. He's waited for a long time for this day.

[13 : 18] He knows grief. He knows sadness. He knows suffering. But he doesn't shrink back from it. He leans into it. And as he does this, knowing his own sin, and that this person who's come is his consolation, he then actually turns that outwardly and blesses the Lord.

Look with me at verse 28. Later, he actually blesses Joseph and Mary.

Just a simple response. It's not grand. It's not complicated. But I think we're called through this to bless the Lord. It's amazing that the creator of the universe will actually receive our blessing to him as he's actually blessed us by grace and the good news.

That's the first thing. The last thing then is this. That's not very kind of difficult to understand. This one might be a little bit more. Who is Anna? She's a prophetess, right?

She too is known suffering. Married seven years and then a widow. Not easy to be a widow for the time that she has. But here we are.

[14 : 42] She actually then turns what she's experienced and what she's known by the Holy Spirit to not only bless the Lord but to prophesy.

The text tells us that verse 38 that she spoke of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. It started with the redemption of Jerusalem.

But what comes before it is really important. She spoke of him, that is Jesus, to all who were waiting. Now, we know that from Peter's letter to the churches that were scattered, that he considered them to be the priesthood of all believers.

There was another bishop who came much later by the name of Augustine who believed in what he called the prophethood of all believers. And I think as we read St. Paul and his letter to the church of Corinth, he seems to prioritize prophecy above the other gifts.

And it strikes me that the role of the church, and wouldn't it be great actually in 2018, if we understood and we grew into what it means to be the prophethood of all believers, and we spoke to all about him.

[16 : 05] Just as Anna did that, so too can we speak to everyone, to one another, about this Jesus. But not only one another as we're gathered here in the church, but day in and day out, in our workplaces, in our places of where we're coming and going, when we're going about hobbies or other interests.

What would it look like if we, like Anna, spoke to all about him? And we became a prophethood of all believers. So I think this is the call, the response actually, in light of who Jesus is and what it is that he came to do.

That we bless the Lord and are always actually speaking to others about him. Let me close up with this other prayer for this day, the eve of New Year's.

Immortal Lord God, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.