

# When The Waiting Is Over

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Merry Christmas, church family. It's good to see you all this morning. Our sermon text is from Luke chapter 2, verses 21 through 40. That's page 805 in the Pew Bible.

Let me encourage you to turn there. We'll have it on the screens when I read it the first time, but it'll be good to have it open in front of you as we kind of walk through the text today. As we come to God's Word, let me pray for us.

Lord Jesus, before your resurrection and ascension, you promised your apostles that you would send your Spirit to bring everything that you had taught them to mind and to guide them into all truth.

Lord, we thank you for the work of your apostles preserving for us your Word, and we thank you that your Spirit is still at work today, bringing light and knowledge and love and peace to our hearts as we come to you through the means of your Word.

So we pray now, Holy Father, that as we come to you this morning, you would open our eyes and ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to us through your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] All right, Luke chapter 2, verses 21 through—I'm going to read through 38 this morning. Luke writes this. He says, Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents had brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your Word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed, and a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was 84.

[ 3 : 0 5 ] She did not depart from the temple worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Well, waiting can be hard, can't it? We've just spent a whole month waiting for Christmas, waiting to open presents, waiting for school to go on break, waiting for vacation from work.

Waiting can be pretty hard. But what about when the waiting is over? What about when the thing you've been waiting for finally arrives? Well, that can be hard too.

You spend so much time waiting, sometimes we don't know exactly how to live once the waiting's over. How's life supposed to change? What are we supposed to do now? Now, our passage shows us four people who've spent a long time waiting.

First, there's Mary and Joseph. They've been waiting nine months for their baby to be born. Then Simeon, waiting for the consolation of Israel, but also waiting for the fulfillment of God's particular promise to him that he would see the Lord's Christ before he saw death.

[ 4 : 18 ] Now, we don't know how long Simeon had been waiting, but presumably for many years. And then we have Anna, 84 years old, a prophetess, living a life of prayer and fasting and worship in the temple, waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Waiting along with all the other faithful Israelites mentioned in verse 38. Lots of waiting. But then, at last, their waiting's over.

The thing that they've been waiting for has finally arrived. And how do they respond? You know, this time of year, the Christmas season for Christians is about more than waiting for gifts and waiting for vacations, right?

It's about reliving again that wait and the longing, reliving again that longing for Christ to come. It's about putting ourselves back into this long story of God, longing for our Redeemer.

And then, as we relive this story, Christmas arrives, and the angels sing, and the incarnation happens, and we celebrate with joy all over again, and we light candles on Christmas Eve, and it's a lot of fun. But what next?

[ 5 : 23 ] The waiting's over. Now what? How do we live the day after Christmas? You know, there's an important spiritual principle here, actually.

Sometimes our spiritual life grows stagnant because we don't know what's next. We hear the good news about Jesus. We see our need for a Savior. We place our trust in Him. We experience His love.

But then what? Isn't it true that becoming a Christian is often like realizing that you've been waiting for something your whole life, and you might not even have realized exactly what it is, and then in the person of Jesus, at last, you feel like you've found it.

Or rather, He's found you. And you realize that He's the one you've been waiting for. But what next? The waiting's over. Now what?

But this doesn't just apply to those of us who are new in the faith. It actually applies kind of across the board for us. If you've been following Jesus for some time, you know that your spiritual life can get a little stagnant sometimes.

[ 6 : 29 ] It can sort of feel like that Christmas gift you opened, but then a few years later, it just sort of sits there on the shelf, not really doing anything. The waiting's over. Now what? Right?

Well, this is where our passage comes to speak to us. How do we live the day after Christmas? How do we live when the waiting's over? When we're new to the faith? Or maybe stagnant in the faith?

Well, each of the characters in our text show us something about how to live now that Jesus has arrived in our lives. So let's look first at Mary and Joseph.

And what we see through their example is, is now that the waiting's over, now that Christ has come into our lives, we delight to obey his word. Look again at verses 21 through 24.

At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

[ 7 : 33 ] Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. So we see Mary and Joseph here obeying God's word.

Now there are three ways in particular that Mary and Joseph obey God's law in this short passage. First, as Genesis 17 says, they circumcised Jesus on the eighth day.

And then as Exodus 13 says, they are presenting Jesus, their firstborn son to the Lord. And finally, as Leviticus 12 says, they're coming to offer appropriate sacrifices for ceremonial purification after childbirth.

Now consider all that's just happened to this young couple. An angel has appeared to both of them on separate occasions in Luke 1 and Matthew 1, telling them that their child was going to be the Messiah and to be born to Mary as a virgin.

Then after giving birth in a stable, a group of shepherds burst in with news about angels singing Gloria, excited to meet the newborn king, that's all pretty wild stuff, right? Those are the sort of experiences you could write about and get a book contract in no time.

[ 8 : 42 ] But notice how Mary and Joseph respond to the fact that God has fulfilled his promise. Notice how they respond to the great news that their son is being heralded as the Messiah.

After being such radical recipients of God's grace and favor, how do they respond? They obey God's word. God's law for them isn't some arbitrary code.

It isn't some kind of cosmic killjoy. No, this is the word of their awesome, faithful, loving God, and they delight to keep it.

It's the same for us, you know. When Christ comes to us, when we receive him, when our waiting is over, and we find in him all that we've been longing for, suddenly, God's commands aren't some burdensome, tiresome thing.

No, God's commands are the life-giving paths of our loving God. Maybe you've had the experience of opening up a Lego set on Christmas.

[ 9 : 51 ] Has anyone here opened up a Lego set on Christmas? Okay. Some of you have. Imagine it with me. You open up the package, tiny pieces fall out, they scatter across the table, some of them sometimes are in different bags, and the thing looks nothing like it looks on the front of the box, right?

But then, as the pieces are all over the table and you're looking at the picture, out of the box drops, the instructions. And then, step by step, you see how the pieces go together, how it all fits to make this cool-looking thing on the front of the box.

You know, when we become a Christian, it's a little like that. You open the gift, and on the front of the box is this glorious picture. And the picture on the front of the box is you in all the glory of Christ's likeness.

That's the goal. Your life, radiant with the glory of Christ in you. And then you open the box, and all the pieces fall out. In other words, your Christian life starts, and you realize that you've got a lot of broken pieces, and the pieces don't seem to fit, and there are some pieces you just don't know what to do with.

And you can get a little discouraged. You can get a little frustrated, and you can be tempted to give up. But then out falls the instruction manual. And in the pages of God's word, we see the means whereby God, through his spirit, is going to slowly start putting the pieces where they're meant to go.

[ 11 : 28 ] He'll slowly start building you into the image of his son through the means of his word. Of course, now that Christ has come, we no longer live under the particular customs of the Mosaic law.

Things like circumcision, the presentation of the firstborn, ritual sacrifices after childbirth. These ceremonies are no longer binding now that the Messiah has come. But as you read the New Testament, you see that God has continued to give his church the guidance and instruction we need to become like Jesus in this era of the new covenant.

He's shown us practically how to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He's shown us practically how to love our neighbor as ourself. But of course, some of these instructions seem a little odd at first, don't they?

Even if we're not called to go up to Jerusalem and sacrifice after we have a baby, still, some of the instructions of the New Testament strike us kind of culturally against the grain at times, don't they?

Some seem odd. Some seem challenging. Sometimes God's instruction through his word can seem impossible. But you know, if you look again at our passage here in Luke chapter 2, what you see isn't just a young couple obeying God's word.

[ 12 : 51 ] What you also see here is your Savior coming under the law for you in his circumcision, in his presentation at the temple, the Lord of the universe is taking the law upon himself and he will obey it and he will keep it to the very end.

Jesus here truly is God with us. So when the commandments of God seem burdensome or seem impossible to us, remember that your Savior has walked this road for you and he will continue to walk this road with you.

In his obedience, he accomplished, yes, a perfect righteousness for you, but now through his spirit he's working out this righteousness in you. In other words, he's justified you through his obedience to the law and he will go on and sanctify you as well.

So this is part of what it means to live when the waiting's over. We don't just sort of twiddle our thumbs and wonder what's next. We have the very word of God directing us, showing us how to become the sort of people he created us and redeemed us to be.

We get to put the pieces of our life together according to the plan of our creator and our redeemer and we get to become more and more like Jesus.

[ 14 : 14 ] But that's not all. Because after Mary and Joseph enter the temple, they're met by another person who's been waiting for the Christ and he's been waiting longer than nine months. Simeon's been waiting, it would seem, for many years.

And what we see in Simeon is that now that the waiting is over, now that Christ has come into our lives, we receive his peace. We receive his peace.

Look with me again at verses 25 through 32. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and devout waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple and when his parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. Now Simeon's blessing here in verses 29 through 32 is often called the *nunc dimittis* which is just a Latin translation of verse 29.

[ 15 : 29 ] Now you are dismissing. Now you are letting your servant depart or dismissed in peace. Notice how this peace for Simeon is both personal and global.

It's personal and global for Simeon. On the personal level, Simeon here is talking about his own death. The Lord had promised him through the spirit that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died.

And now that he has seen Jesus, he's seen the Christ, he knows that he can depart from this life. Now the fact that Simeon is talking about his departure, his death, that's what makes us think that Simeon is most likely in his later years, that he's an old man in the temple.

But notice, now that he's held Christ in his arms and seen Christ with his own eyes, he's ready to meet the end of his life with what? With peace. And of course, that isn't just true of Simeon, is it?

It's true of everyone who has seen in Jesus the fullness of God's salvation. Did you notice? Simeon says of the child, my eyes have seen your salvation.

[ 16 : 42 ] Simeon is saying that all of God's saving purposes are found in Christ. There's no salvation apart from him. He's the storehouse where all the rich blessings are found.

And that means that if you have Christ, then you have it all. There's nothing God has withheld from you if you have his son. And that means we can face anything, even death, like Simeon, with peace.

Imagine what it would look like to live your life without the fear of death. Some of us are afraid of death because we're not sure what might happen to us after we die.

But if you're united to Christ through faith, then all of your sins are forgiven and God promises you eternal life in his own presence. So if you belong to Christ, you need not fear what happens after you die.

But some of us are afraid of death because we're afraid of what we might not have accomplished. We're afraid we might not have accomplished all that we want to accomplish before we die.

[ 17 : 57 ] In other words, we're sort of afraid of death coming because we're afraid that maybe we won't have experienced everything we want to experience before death comes. So we're afraid of the end to come. Maybe we won't accomplish everything we want to accomplish.

And so the prospect of death simply as the end of this life fills us with dread. And it casts a shadow over our life, a shadow of anxiety or pressure or fear or regret.

But for the Christian, this need not be the case. We can view the prospect of death not with anxiety or fears of regret, regret, but with peace.

Why? Because we know on the one hand that it's our sovereign God who numbers our days and like Simeon, we can trust God's timing.

Perhaps we don't accomplish all we hope to in this life, but we still live in the confidence that God is doing his good work in us and through us. But you know, on the other hand, we also serve a risen Savior a risen Savior who promises a new creation.

[ 19 : 10 ] And what this means is that this life isn't the end, but just the beginning. Yes, you know, there are notes that are being played in this life full of beauty and full of power and yes, it's very true that we don't want the music of this life to end, do we?

And we think about all the great things and desires that we have and we don't want that music to stop. But if we serve a risen Savior, then these notes that we hear in this life are just a prelude to a greater symphony to come in the new creation.

And so we can face death now, not with despair or with regret of things we may not have done or may not have experienced, but we can face it with peace because we know that God has much better in store.

And you know, Simeon shows us that this is not just a personal peace that we can experience in our own lives, but it's also a global peace. It's a peace available to everyone without distinction. In verses 31 and 32, the salvation of Christ is set before all peoples.

He's a light for both Gentiles and Jews. For Jews, Christ is their glory. He's the one they've been waiting for, the one who sums up their long history with God and brings it to its climax.

[ 20 : 26 ] For Israel, Jesus is their glory. But for the Gentiles, Christ is light too. He's their revelation.

Christ is the unveiling of the one they were looking for when they didn't even know it. So this peace isn't something that greedily belongs only to a select few.

No, it's freely offered to all. It's not just personal. It's global. It's not just for Simeon. It's for you. But Simeon goes on to say that it's not just personal and global.

This peace is costly as well. Look again at verses 33 through 35. And Jesus' father and mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce through your own soul also so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

Now, Simeon here is warning these young parents that the road ahead for this child of theirs will not be an easy one. You know, you might think up until this point in the birth narrative that everything's going to be one sort of triumphant parade to glory.

[ 21 : 44 ] The king is here. The angels are singing. Old men and women are dancing. And yet, the road will not be an easy one for this child.

Simeon says he's going to be sort of like a litmus test. Some will encounter Jesus and they will fall. They will not see in him God's salvation, but in pride they will reject him.

Others will encounter Jesus and they'll rise. They'll behold him with the eyes of faith and in humility call out to him for rescue and he will receive them and raise them up. In other words, Christ, as Simeon says at the end of verse 35, he's going to expose the innermost thoughts of the heart.

And he still does that today. Christ poses a question to each one of us and there's no neutral ground. Will we receive him as king, as Lord, or will we reject him?

Will we humble ourselves before him? Or will we turn away in pride and live for some other Lord of our own choosing? There's no getting around this decision.

[ 22 : 59 ] Each of us must face the question of whether we will bow to Jesus as Lord. But these verses don't just speak of the decision that Christ poses to each of us.

It also speaks of the decision Christ made for each of us. We see here that when Christ came, he humbled himself.

He submitted himself willingly to the rejection of his own people. He was willingly opposed, as verse 34 says. And then Simeon speaks of a metaphorical sword that will pierce Mary's own soul.

And most readers of Luke's gospel have taken this piercing as a reference to Mary's sorrow. Where? At the cross. Mary would see her own son rejected and crucified.

And sorrow would stab her heart like a sword. And so we see in this text not just an old man, Simeon, living in the peace of Christ.

[ 24 : 03 ] We also see our Savior and the costly price he would pay to win us that peace. You see, it's only because our Savior was rejected that we can be accepted.

It's only because he was opposed that we can be received. Why? Because our sins deserve God's rejection. But on the cross, Christ is rejected in the place of our sins.

That's why peace can be ours and is offered to everyone. Because the debt of sin has been paid in full through his sin-bearing death. Now, if we reject him, we will fall, as Simeon says, under the weight of our own sin.

But if we receive him, we will rise, having been released from the burden of sin through his death on our behalf. And for those who do humble themselves and receive this gift in Christ, it is a peace that not even death itself can take away.

Why? Because our Savior has died for us. We can live in peace even in the face of death. So now that the waiting is over, now that Christ has come into our lives, we receive and live in peace with courage and freedom from the fear of death and from the guilt of sin.

[ 25 : 26 ] But there's one more figure Luke wants us to see. One last way that Luke here charts out for us, sketches out for us how to live. And that is Anna in verses 36 through 38.

And what we see in Anna is that now that the waiting is over, now that Christ has come into our lives, we proclaim his kingdom. We obey his word, we live in peace and we proclaim his kingdom.

Look again at verses 36 through 38. And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin and then as a widow until she was 84.

She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Now Anna is sort of this wonderful contrast to Simeon, isn't she? Simeon, you know, after he meets Jesus, he's like ready to retire, right? He's like, Lord, okay, you fulfilled your promise to me, I'm good, let me go.

[ 26 : 28 ] But, we get the sense that Anna is just getting started. If Simeon shows us the serenity, the peace that Christ brings, Anna shows us the vitality, the energy that Christ brings.

She might be 84 years old, but now that Christ has come, she can't help but proclaim the arrival of her king and the restoration of Jerusalem and the arrival of God's kingdom. So friends, let this be an encouragement to you.

If you feel that you are reaching your later years, God still has a plan for you to use you to advance his kingdom. And that's true of all of us.

Just think of all the characters we met in Luke 1 and 2. Young and old, some who work in the temple, some who work in the fields, some who are named, some who are unnamed, but all together, God is gathering his church around Jesus' son, the Messiah, our Lord, and in Anna, we see this first lighting of the flame that will continue to burn through the gospel of Luke and then especially in Luke's sequel, the book of Acts, where like Anna, the early church filled with the Spirit will take this news of their Redeemer and begin telling it to all who will hear.

A message of good news, of great joy for all people. A message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins for all people. A message of eternal life and freedom for all who believe.

[ 27 : 54 ] You see, Anna understood that when the waiting was over, the real mission had just begun. Now that Christ was here, the world needed to know.

The kingdom of God had arrived and the great renewal had begun. So for us, as the year ends and another year begins, who will we tell this year about the good news?

A co-worker, a friend, a neighbor? Who in your life needs to know that God has come in Christ to give us His peace without charge, fully of grace?

Let's begin praying for them. Let's think about how we might open up spiritual conversations with them. And friends, do all of this with a deep sense like Anna of joy and thanksgiving.

God wants to use you to bring this good news to those who need it. What a wonderful privilege to be bearers of good news. the good news that God loves us and sent His Son to be our peace.

[ 29 : 13 ] So the waiting's over, friends. Christ has come at last, but the adventure has just begun. Through His Word, He's making us more like Jesus. Through His peace, He's giving us courage and freedom even in the face of death.

And through His mission, He's advancing His kingdom through us. So church, may we live like Anna and Simeon, like Joseph and Mary, who when the wait was over had their course set by the arrival of their King.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray. God, we thank You for the many pictures that You've preserved for us from this history of the earliest days of Jesus our Lord.

and how men and women, young and old, insiders and outsiders, were all gathered into Your people and given this great purpose to live for Your kingdom.

We pray for a fresh pouring out of Your Spirit, God, upon us as this year ends and another begins. Oh Lord, make us like Simeon, confident in Your peace.

[ 30 : 24 ] Make us like Anna, excited and thrilled to share the news of the One who has come and is coming again. God, do all this for the glory of Your great name and the upbuilding of Your church, we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.