

Luke 2:29-32

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. Merry Christmas. Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2. We are looking at the Song of Simeon.
- We've looked at the four songs which open up the Gospel of Luke over the four weeks of this month. And today we are looking at the last one. We're actually going to look at two people, both Simeon and Anna.
- That are in this passage. We're going to read Luke, chapter 2, from verse 25 to verse 38. So you can turn there.
- If you're looking at a pew Bible, it's page 857. So Luke, chapter 2, starting at verse 25.
- Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.
- [1 : 0 6] 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 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 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. And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher.
- [2 : 1 5] 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, worshipping 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.
- Christmas is finally here. How many kids have been waiting and looking forward to Christmas for a long time?
- Right? Anybody been counting down the days through the month of December? Looking forward to seeing friends or family? Maybe visiting from out of town and eating special foods?
- Giving and receiving presents? For the adults, maybe you've been looking forward to Christmas too. Perhaps it's the end of all the frantic preparations. Making food, buying gifts, delivering gifts, writing cards, mailing cards, cleaning house.

[3 : 20] Now you can finally sit back and relax. At least for a little while. After all the waiting and preparing, Christmas Day is finally here. But what exactly is it about Christmas that makes it worth waiting for?

What is it that we look for and long for and hope for this time of year? Is it just food, presents, getting stuff? Is it being with people? People we care about?

Friends and family? Or is it something bigger? A hope that somehow love and peace would prevail in our fractured and frenzied world?

You know, Christmas is one of the very few days in the year when you can walk through the city of New Haven and it actually seems to be at rest.

No rushed drivers running red lights. No stressed out students burning the midnight oil. No weary workers toiling from early morning to late night. For one day in the year, the city finally seems to rest.

[4 : 27] The only other day like it, I think, is Thanksgiving. But even on Thanksgiving, the stores open at six. So really, Christmas is sort of the only full day that the city seems to rest.

But of course, the rest and joy of the holiday season doesn't seem to last forever. To be sure, some of it carries over through the next week. Perhaps until the day after New Year's or this year, January 3rd, when the world will go on much as it was before.

So what is it that we look forward to at Christmas? Is it just something temporary and fleeting that comes and goes each year?

Is it a mere projection of our wishes that will inevitably slip out of our grasp? Or are the longings and hopes that we experience in this season, the hopes for family and fellowship, for peace and rest, for joy and beauty, are those hopes and longings perhaps a window through which we glimpse a more enduring reality?

Even a transcendent reality, something that's not of this world. And we hope and long and wait for that.

[5 : 46] And we glimpse it at this time of year. The passage we read this morning from the Gospel of Luke, we see a man and a woman who had been waiting a long time. In fact, waiting their whole life long for what we celebrate at Christmas.

Until this moment, Simeon and Anna, their lives were characterized by waiting, longing, hoping, anticipating. Verse 25 says, Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Verse 37 describes Anna. She did not depart from the temple worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. The practice of fasting in particular was a sign of longing, literally hungering for God to come and transform this world.

One person described fasting as a kind of spiritual protest, an assertion that all is not well in this world. So Anna and Simeon were among those who, as verse 38 says, were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

They were waiting for the liberation of their people, praying for the day when those who were mourning would be comforted, hoping for the day when God would come, as he had promised long ago.

[7 : 02] By this time, though, both Simeon and Anna were quite advanced in years. We don't know Simeon's age, but verse 26 tells us, That word Christ just means king or Messiah.

So it's likely he was getting older, realizing that death might come to him soon. And Anna, Anna was certainly quite elderly. According to verse 36, she had been married for seven years, then lived the rest of her life as a widow until she was 84.

It's also possible that the text could be translated, she lived as a widow for 84 years. In that case, she would have been over 100. Either way, she had lived quite a long time. She had seen a lot, and she was still waiting.

But in the child whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, what we see this morning is that Simeon and Anna finally found what they had been waiting for. Their whole life long.

And I want to look at each of them this morning, Simeon and then Anna, what they were waiting for and what they found, and what that has to offer us this Christmas.

[8 : 21] So first, I want to look at the rest that Simeon found. Simeon's song in verse 29 to 32 is at the heart of this passage. It's the last of four songs that open up this gospel.

We've looked at Mary's song of joyful praise. We've looked at Zachariah's song of confident hope. We've looked at the angel song of glorious news. And finally, Simeon's song. And more than anything else, Simeon's song is a song about peace.

It's a song of someone who finally found rest. Now, in order to understand Simeon's song, I want you to imagine a security guard who works third shift.

Someone who's responsible to watch over a building or a neighborhood or a city through the long night hours when most other people are asleep and unaware. In the ancient world, the city would often have a night watchman whose job it was to patrol the city walls to make sure the city was kept safe from potential threats during the most vulnerable and potentially chaotic hours of the night.

Through the whole long night, the security guard has been pacing back and forth, going from station to station, sometimes yawning and trying to stay awake and stay focused, sometimes shivering and trying to keep warm, sometimes yawning, always alert to signs of potential danger, all the while waiting and anticipating the time when the sky would gradually brighten and the sun would rise above the horizon and flood the world and the city with light.

[9 : 59] And then he would report to his boss and say, Now, my job is done. Now, I can go in peace. That's how Simeon's song begins.

Lord, now, you are letting your servant depart in peace. The word now is actually the first word in the original Greek.

That's the emphasis. For my whole life I've been waiting, watching, hoping, looking forward to this moment, and now I can rest. Simeon speaks to God as if he's speaking to a trusted boss.

He addresses God as Lord, Master. He acknowledges God's rightful authority over him. He calls himself your bondservant, one who owed everything to God.

And yet he trusted God to ultimately do him and his people good. You are letting your servant depart. Literally, that means you are releasing me from the duty you have laid upon me.

[11 : 05] Just as you said you would, according to your word. Your word is good. Simeon describes himself as one who has been waiting through the long, dark night, through years and decades, when God seemed distant, silent, or even absent.

When at times chaos and danger and evil seemed to reign unchecked. But now he sees the dawning of a new day. And even though the sun was only peeking over the horizon and beginning to shine its light over the world, he says, now I can go in peace.

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all the world to see. A light for revelation to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Simeon was most likely thinking of words that the prophet Isaiah had spoken hundreds of years ago to the watchmen, literally the security guards of Jerusalem. Isaiah wrote in chapter 52 of his book, the voice of your watchmen, they lift up their voice.

Together they sing for joy, for eye to eye, they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people.

[12 : 24] He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Simeon knew of that prophecy, and he said, now it's come to pass. Now is the day of God's salvation.

Now God has come and returned to Zion to comfort and redeem, to heal and liberate his people. And God's light would shine not just on Israel, but on all the nations of the world.

Simeon says, that's what God is doing through this child, Jesus. And so Simeon says, now my job is done.

Now I can die happy and at peace, because this child has come to do what I never could. He's come to complete what I couldn't even start.

[13 : 26] I'm just the night watchman. He's the son of righteousness. I'm not the Messiah. He is. You know, the message of the Bible, at the heart of it, is not about what we must do to draw near to God, to fix ourselves and fix our world.

It's about what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ. And the posture it calls us to is the posture that Simeon adopted to receive that.

Simeon saw the child, Jesus, and he took him in his arms, received him, and he said, now I can rest, because he is going to complete the work that I could not do.

Many years ago, Timothy Dwight said, Christ is the only, the true, the living way of access to God. Give up yourselves, therefore, to him, and the great work of life is done.

Now you can rest. You see, Simeon saw Jesus, and he found rest. Now it wasn't the self-indulgent sloth that comes from turning a blind eye to the pain and anguish and brokenness of this world.

[15 : 00] Not that kind of rest. That's not true rest. Nor was it the deflated weariness of cynicism and resignation that makes you want to just crumple up and lay down on the floor.

Not the anxious striving and stressful rushing that characterizes so much of our lives, so much of the time.

But Simeon found peaceful rest. Knowing that God was in charge, knowing that his plans for his people and his creation are good, and seeing that in Jesus, the Messiah, he has accomplished what he said he would.

And our lives are in his hands. Simeon could say that. Have you found that peaceful rest? Can you say with Simeon, now because Jesus has come, now I can die in peace.

Tim Keller in his book, Every Good Endeavor, tells a story about John Coltrane, the jazz saxophonist, and his most celebrated album, A Love Supreme, which he dedicated to God as an offering of praise.

[16 : 14] He explained that it was the result of a spiritual awakening he had experienced by God's grace, through which he had come to acknowledge God's omnipotence and our dependence on him, the God who is gracious and merciful.

There was only one live recorded performance of this piece. And at the end of that performance, Coltrane stepped down from the stage and he said, Nunc dimittis.

That is the Latin for the first two words of Simeon's song. Now I can go. Keller writes, Coltrane claimed to have had an experience of God's love that liberated him from the tyranny of work.

From the pursuit of perfectionism and self-justification, he had been given God's power. He had felt God's pleasure. He had experienced God's grace.

He had responded in praise. And now he could rest. That's what Simeon found in the Christ child. Rest.

[17 : 21] But now look at Anna in verse 36 to 38. Notice in verse 38 in particular how the news of the child Jesus affected her.

Anna didn't say, Now I can die in peace. Now my work is done. Notice how she reacted. She began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

It's as if the coming of Christ gave her a new lease on life at the age of 84. It awakened and enlivened her. She began praising God and proclaiming the good news to everyone around her.

And the verb tenses indicate this wasn't just a one-time thing. It became, it was a continuous, ongoing, habitual action. Giving thanks to God and speaking of Jesus to all those who would listen to her.

For Simeon, the coming of Christ made him ready to die in peace. For Anna, the coming of Christ gave her energy to live with hope and joy and praise. Simeon got rest.

[18 : 32] Anna got energy. Some of us, like Simeon, might be ready to die in peace. But we need strength, like Anna, to live with praise.

Maybe like Anna, you are getting older day by day. Perhaps your body is gradually slowing down.

Your memory is beginning to fade, at least at some points. Perhaps your eyes are growing dim. Your hearing isn't what it used to be. You feel not quite as sharp as you once were.

And perhaps you're tempted to sit back and become just a passive observer of life going on around you.

Because you're facing difficult physical and mental limitations that you haven't had to deal with previously. Maybe those of us who are younger or middle-aged haven't honored you in the way we should.

[19 : 34] Perhaps you feel disregarded or unnoticed or unwanted. But let me encourage you. The Holy Spirit knows no age limit.

In chapter 1, the Holy Spirit was at work in John the Baptist when he was still in his mother's womb. And here, the Holy Spirit was active in Simeon and Anna nearing the end of their lives. Let me encourage you not to be idle and inactive.

and silent. Be creative within the limitations that you have. You might need to find new ways of doing things. You might need to ask for help. That can actually be a way of serving someone else by allowing them to serve you.

It is actually a way that you can bless others. But let your life be characterized like Anna's was. By giving thanks to God continually.

By speaking of the Lord Jesus to all who will listen. Or perhaps like Anna, you're on your own. Anna was married for seven years and then she was a widow for the rest of her life.

[20 : 48] She lived in a culture that even more than ours revolved around marriage and family and children. She lived in a society where widows were particularly vulnerable, both economically and otherwise.

But for whatever reason, Anna had taken a harder and potentially more lonely road. Anna knew what it was like to spend every holiday without a spouse and without children.

She knew what it was like to go to bed alone every night. She knew what it was like to have lost someone so very dear to her. Maybe you're wrestling with one or more of those things.

Loss, loneliness, longing. But in all that, Anna devoted herself to God. It says she did not depart from the temple. Now that doesn't literally mean that she pitched a tent and laid her sleeping bag in the temple and camped out there every night.

There wasn't space for her to do that. That wouldn't have been feasible. But it means she did not isolate herself from the people of God. She actively engaged herself in the community of faith.

[22 : 07] So let me encourage you to do that. And it also says she devoted her energies to worshiping, fasting and praying night and day. If you have neither spouse nor children, that is actually one of the great spiritual privileges.

you have, you can spend uninterrupted time in prayer with no one to bother you and no one who could rightly interrupt you and claim your time.

Well, perhaps someone would interrupt you, but with less interruption. the road of sin or widowhood over the long term, the road of loss and loneliness and longing that comes in various shapes and forms is not an easy road to walk and often not a path that any of us would choose if it were just up to us.

But the Bible says that the Holy Spirit of God can energize us to walk on that path and that the Lord Jesus Christ himself accompanies us for he walked that path, the path of loss and loneliness and longing when he was on earth.

His life began in a manger and his life would end on a cross. He was rejected so that we could enjoy God's acceptance.

[23 : 34] He was made poor so that we could become eternally rich. He was forsaken so that we might be forgiven. He died so that we might live.

He gave so that we might receive a gift that would never pass away. And seeing the Christ child, Anna found energy through which she could live.

Simeon found peace in which he could die. And isn't that all we really need? When it comes down to it. Isn't that what we hope and long for in this holiday season?

What we try to grasp onto in the form of beautiful music and satisfying food and thoughtful presence and the comforts of a home?

Of course, it never lasts forever. Perhaps deep down, we're always left wanting more. we're trying to soothe and silence the aching longing deep within our soul.

[24 : 45] This Christmas, look to Jesus Christ. Find in him the peace in which you can die and the energy through which you can really live.

Maybe you've never done that before. Maybe this is all new to you. You can begin today by simply receiving him.

Perhaps you still have questions. Seek him. Seek until you find. Maybe you have trusted in Christ.

Look to him again today with renewed faith and hope. Ask him to fill you in a fresh way with his Holy Spirit who gives us his peace and his power within our souls.

Many years ago, someone wrote a very succinct but profound description of what it looks like to do this. To find the peace to die and the energy to live in Christ.

[26 : 02] And it made its way into a document called the Heidelberg Catechism which has been used by Christians for hundreds of years and this is how it goes. It puts it this way. It says, what is your only comfort in life and in death?

In other words, what is it that gives you energy to live and peace in which to die? And the answer is as follows. That I am not my own. But I belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood. He has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven.

In fact, all things must work together for my salvation because I belong to him. Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Christmas is finally here. What have you been waiting for? find it in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 29] Let us pray. Father, we pray that by your grace today we would find what Simeon and Anna found in Jesus whose birth we celebrate on this day.

The peace in which we can die and the energy through which we can really live. Grant us that by the power of your Holy Spirit.

perhaps for the first time, perhaps in a fresh way today and send us out with joy and praise for what you have done.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.