

Luke Chapter 2 v 21 - 38

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Preacher: Graham Hilton

- [0 : 00] Well, isn't that an interesting verse? Safe in the shadow of the Lord, possessed by love divine. Isn't that amazing to think that we are possessed by love divine?
- I want to, this morning, continue with the Christmas story and look at the events that follow on from the birth of Jesus.
- If you've got a new international version, it's that section that's headed, Jesus presented in the temple. And this passage is largely a glorious and happy occasion with the center figure being Simeon, who is mentioned only by Luke in the four Gospels and only here.
- So this is just a quick snapshot of a man. An interesting man and a man whose character I would hope that we would all want to be like.
- And so why is that? Why is that? Well, John Wesley said that my people die well. With reference to Christians, particularly in the context of the Methodist movement that he founded, he said, my people die well, because he was referring to the fact that Christians have a hope looking forward to the blessings that come when we die.
- [1 : 33] As believers, we realize that to be with Christ is indeed better than anything the world can give us. And like it is with the children, our goal is to store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy.
- Simeon has this future hope. And we assume he's old, although we're not told that, but suspect that because he is probably old, his life has been thirsting.
- It's a lifelong thirst after the knowledge of God to know him more and more. Now, as we look at Simeon, we will inevitably see that the story hinges around Mary and Joseph and the infant Jesus.
- And so I've got four headers this morning. Four headers, and they're all to do with blessings. And the first one is blessings that come in the way of doing our duty.
- The other one is the blessings that are ours as we wait. And the third one is that blessings are a spur to worship and praise.
- [2 : 56] And the last one is to consider that blessings are sometimes bittersweet. And we'll see all that in the passage that we read this morning.
- So blessings are found in a way of duty. And the verses particularly, if you want to turn into your Bibles, is the first four verses that we read, verses 21 to 24.
- It says this, On the eighth day when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.
- And when the time for their purification, according to the law of Moses, had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him 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 and two young pigeons.
- Now the concept of duty is somewhat outdated today, isn't it? It's been superseded with a culture that says that we must do everything for ourselves.

- [4 : 16] We must do our own thing, what pleases us. And as long as we don't hurt others, then that's okay. Everything is available to us. Nothing is off limits.
- And so on and so forth. And so we throw off in today's society the shackles of doing our duty and considering the needs of others.
- Now there's a danger as Christians for this philosophy also to creep into our lives. We're affected by the environment in which we live.
- And so as we begin to neglect, so that we may neglect to do good things, to practice our duties. And as Christians, we have duties, don't we?
- We have a duty to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbors, ourselves. And in that shorthand of God's law, we have things that we need to do in order to enable that to happen.
- [5 : 21] For instance, you know, we are really very wisely advised to spend time in God's Word, in devotions.
- And we call those daily devotions, don't we? Time, using time to improve ourselves. We're encouraged that good practice for a Christian is to gather together as we gather together this morning.
- To do that at every opportunity. And if we start neglecting those things, we know that somehow the presence of the Lord just drifts away in our sensitivities towards Him.
- And if we start limiting, as it were, our spiritual duties, we impoverish our own souls. If we move away from doing those things that we know are good for us, reading God's Word, praying, being together, doing good works, then our own souls become impoverished and the souls of others.
- And so the blessings that God would want to point to our lives are limited because of our attitude towards Him. Now, Mary's not like this.
- [6 : 35] Mary is, if we take a look at Mary, she is very, very dutiful. When I say Mary, it's Mary and Joseph, but particularly Mary in the context here.
- In those four verses, we read of things that were being done in accordance to the law. She was very, very diligent in making sure that the custom of the law was fulfilled.
- If you look at verse 22, we read that when the time for her purification according to the law of Moses, she was motivated to go through this ritual of purification because of the law of Moses.
- In verse 24, that the sacrifice had to be done in a certain way with certain creatures according to the law of the law, and so on.
- It's something that's very dominant in the passage that we've just been reading earlier on. And Mary's desires are not mechanical. I'm sure they weren't.
- [7 : 38] They are moved with a heart that desires to bring glory to God and desires to follow God because she loves God. I mean, we get a sense of Mary because in her song, in Mary's song in chapter 1, she says, My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has been mindful of my humble state.
- So Mary is doing things in accordance to the law because she wants to, because she loves to. She knows that by doing things in accordance with the law in the prescribed way, she is in the way of blessing.
- And that's what we're talking about. We're talking about blessings coming through the way of duty. And as parents, they have some very, very specific duties to do.
- She had three things that she had to perform having given birth to Jesus. The first thing was that she was to circumcise Jesus when he was eight days old, which is in following of the law as laid out in Leviticus 12.

And this was important. You might think, well, so what? But it was critical to the plan of salvation that Jesus was circumcised. Not only that it was a mark on him that he was a member of the, he was an Israelite, that he was a Jew, which was important.

[9 : 16] But had he not been circumcised, he would never have been allowed to enter into the temple. He would have been considered as a Gentile. He would never have been allowed to stand up and preach.

His ministry could, was a non-starter, had this service, this ritual not taken place. So when it, on the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise, and then by tradition crept in the, there was a naming of the baby as well.

That was very important. That was very crucial to the plan of salvation. Jesus had to be circumcised because to not be circumcised, he would be excluded from any part in instructing Jews and teaching and preaching.

The other thing that she had to do was to be made ceremonially clean. The second duty, first duty was circumcision, second duty was to be made ceremonially clean.

And for Mary, this had to take place before she was allowed to enter back into the worship with God's people. And she, this involved a waiting for a period of time.

[10 : 30] Because Jesus was a boy, it was required that Mary count off 33 days from the day of circumcision. and then she was to go to the temple to offer a sacrifice.

So that when Jesus is 40 days old, he is brought into the temple. And we know that she is poor and therefore the provision in the law was made that instead of bringing a lamb that she was to bring a pair of doves or pigeons.

And again, these are, these are all significant. I won't go into that, but the two birds was important. One was for a burnt offering and the other one was for a sin offering.

One was compulsory, the other was voluntarily. And all to do with fulfilling of the law. So the question that we have is, are we being blessed in a way of duties?

How do we, do we find pleasure in doing our duties? Now, I suspect probably not. because we're all rebels, aren't we, by heart? You know, we, we, we shirk against duties, you know.

[11 : 42] I mean, how many people coming here or driving around, you know, you don't speed, you know. It irks us to come up against a law. Now, we all try and keep the law, don't we?

But there are times when we think, well, I'm speeding because I'm late, you know. But that's a very trivial way of saying, well, how, how do we live our lives? Do we find pleasure in duty?

Well, probably not. We should see every duty that we have as a means of blessing. And when we don't, we, we, we, we suffer because even when we're doing good, we can get weary of it.

And that's why it says in Hebrews, it says, let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as we say, see the day approaching.

Our duties are important. We have responsibilities. We should fulfill them. And by doing that, as Mary did here, as a parent and as a mother, she was in the way of blessing.

[12 : 47] Which sort of brings us to the second point, really, which was that blessings are found in waiting. Blessings are found in waiting. If you think about Mary, one of her characteristics was that she waited, even when her life took on this rollercoaster turn.

She waited nine months for the birth of Jesus. She waited eight days to go to the temple and have the circumcision for the Lord performed.

She then waits another 33 days because in our Bibles where it just shows it running on, there is a 33-day gap, waiting gap, between verses 21 and 22.

It's on the eighth day she took the Lord to be circumcised, but it's 33 days later is when she, a time for purification according to the law of Moses was to happen, that she waited for those 33 days.

She's probably away from home at that point. You know, just waiting is something which is really, really hard to do, isn't it? We now come to the main character though.

[14 : 01] The main character is also waiting. Let's just read what it says in verse 25. Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout.

He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

So moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law was required.

Simeon is a man who's waiting and he's waiting, it says, for the consolation of Israel which is really a title. It's a title for the Lord Jesus.

He's waiting for the Redeemer that would come. He's waiting for Messiah and he's waiting for Jesus the Savior, the consolation of Israel.

[15 : 01] We know, the little we know about Simeon is he was a serious man. He was serious about his faith. He was righteous and he was devout. He believed the Scriptures.

Why was he waiting for the consolation of Israel? It's because he knew his Scriptures. He had spent his time in his daily devotions. He had spent his time in the Word and he believed the Word and he'd read passages like Isaiah 40 and verse 1 where it says, comfort me, comfort me, my people.

Your trials are over because the Lord is going to send Messiah. He knew that this comfort would come. So the consolation which actually means comfort, the comfort of Israel was the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was expecting the comforter, the Lord Jesus Christ, the consolation to come. And we also read that he'd received a resurrection by the Holy Spirit.

He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he'd seen the Lord's Christ.

[16 : 14] Now, none of us know what's going to happen to us up to our deaths but here's a man who knew that something was going to happen to him before he died.

And what that something was was that he was going to see the Redeemer. He was going to see the consolation of Israel. He was going to see the Lord Christ.

And the Holy Spirit had revealed that to him and raised his expectation. He was an old man probably. But he knew that in the short days that he had that something was going to happen to him.

And we find that he's moved by the Spirit and he goes into the temple courts. He's expecting something to happen. And then the next thing that happens is that Mary and Joseph enter into the temple courts independently, not together.

He goes there, she, they go there bringing the Lord Jesus, the infant child, Jesus with them. And all to do what the custom of the law required. All to do what was needful to be done for her purification and for the movement of the God's grace at work in salvation.

[17 : 31] This was not a coincidence. There were probably 6,000 people, up to 6,000 people in the temple courts. That's how many people it could hold. And so you've got Simeon going in, you've got Mary and Joseph and Jesus, the infant, going in and they, is it where they come together?

And it's not a coincidence because God is at work here. God the Holy Spirit had moved, had moved Simeon to go there to be expectant but also God the Holy Spirit had moved Mary and Joseph to say, well, we must go.

It's the 40th day of the Lord, of Jesus' birth. Jesus is 40 days old. It's 30 to 33 days since he was circumcised. We must go for purification.

And so they go and they meet and there's a destiny being fulfilled and it culminates with great blessings we shall see in just a moment.

And so there is blessing in waiting. They've been waiting, Simeon was waiting, Mary had been waiting and we read that there are others in Jerusalem waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

[18 : 44] People have been waiting. There was an expectation of something happening and here is this crowd of people in this temple court, a massive area, walled on all four sides and something is about to happen.

And this is surely our expectation too that blessings come as we wait. waiting brings an anxiety to us and it gives us a determination. It gives us a sense of need and urgency.

And so we cry to the Lord and we say, Lord, please help me in this situation. And we wait and then God does something in our lives. David says in Psalm 40, I waited patiently for the Lord and he turned to me and he heard my cry.

How many of us here have had that experience of waiting patiently for the Lord, of crying out to him and then knowing him, answering our prayers.

There is blessing in waiting. There's blessing in the way of duty but there's blessing in waiting. blessing. And so the third point is that blessings come, when they come, they come and have a real result in true worship of God.

[20 : 04] blessings result in true worship of God. Let me just read verses 28 to 32 to you. We read that Simeon took him, that's Jesus, in his arms and praised God saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, Israel.

The child's father and mother marvel at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them. This, there is a, this is a doxology.

This is, a doxology means a word of glory. And this is what the Anglicans and Catholics would say is a nunc dimittis.

Dimittis, that's right. It's, it's Latin for you now dismiss, which is the first words. Sovereign now, as you have promised, you now dismiss.

[21 : 14] In Latin, that you now dismiss comes first, so I'm told. And it's the fourth word of glory. Fourth doxology that Luke writes about and speaks of.

the first, well, I won't go to the others, but Mary's song is a doxology. It's a word of glory. And so this word of glory comes out as Simeon takes this infant Jesus and can you imagine it?

I mean, we all love, well, I'm not sure I do, but, you know, you see a baby and it's a new baby and it's so tiny and helpless, isn't it? So, so, so weak.

But here's Simeon and he's not just taking a new life. He's taking the one who is eternal life in his arms. And it's no wonder that, that there is a doxology, that there is a word of glory, that there is this exclamation of praise because he knows through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that this Jesus was to be the savior of the world.

That he's in his arms, he sees God's provision for salvation. He'd read the scriptures, he'd read about the servant that was to come, he'd read about the Messiah that was promised and he was waiting and all of a sudden his waiting is over and he has this babe in his arms, the good news.

[22 : 50] The Old Testament is full of promises by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of the coming of Messiah.

Let me just read one to you. It's Isaiah 49 and verse 6 and it's the second servant song referring specifically to Jesus.

And it says this, and now the Lord says, it is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob. This is God speaking to God as it were.

It's too small a thing for you to be my servant and to restore the tribes of Jacob and to bring back those of Israel I have kept. It's not good enough for my son just to redeem Israel.

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. So the promise of Messiah is not just for Israel, it's for the Gentiles as well.

[23 : 55] And this is what he says, it doesn't show up very well in the NIV, but verse 32 says that there is a light for revelation to the Gentiles.

And he's quoting, Simeon is quoting Isaiah 49. And it's all about the servant, it's all about the Lord Jesus Christ. And he wasn't just going to come and redeem Israel, the tribes of Jacob, he was going to be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of Israel as well.

And so this is what's happening, there is this realization that this baby was the one that was foretold all through scriptures, in particular in this second servant song.

And this verse, this section of scripture is also quoted by Paul as well. So when Paul is on his first missionary journey and is in Pisidian Antioch and he's gone to the synagogue and he's preached Christ and they said, oh, enough of that.

And he leaves the synagogue. We find that he quotes this, he quotes that I will make you a light for the Gentiles so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

[25 : 15] This is quoted by Paul. So this is stupendous because salvation is not just for Jew, it's for Gentile, it's not just for a child of Israel who's been circumcised, it's for everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the marvel of the gospel and this is what Simeon saw. No wonder he rejoiced in God's salvation in this 40 day old baby because he saw more than a baby, he saw the Christ.

No wonder he was ready to depart in peace. Wouldn't you be happy to go if you'd seen the Christ, held him in your arms? You'd say, oh, that's it, I don't want any more of this earth, heaven, that's where I want to be.

No wonder Christians ought to die well because we have a hope that's in heaven, that's where Christ is now. And we'll come to that in a moment.

But the fourth point is that blessings are also bittersweet. Blessings are also bittersweet. It says in verse 33 that the child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

[26 : 33] Then Simeon blessed him and said to Mary his mother, this child is destined to the cause and falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Charles' father and mother marveled at what was happening. This was not something done quietly. This was Simeon with this doxology of praise, loud. You can't imagine him whispering and you can't imagine his mother and dad sort of saying, you know, right.

They would marvel and because of this wonderful fulfillment. But, but the bitter sweetness of the moment is that this child is destined to cause a falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that's spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Here we see the foretelling of the rejection of this babe that's being held in the arms of Simeon in that temple court with all those people around.

This babe was going to be rejected. He was going to be spoken against, more than spoken against, more than just verbal attacks. We know that he would be attacked physically and he would be murdered upon a cross and he would be killed, he would be slain as an atonement for the sin of his people.

[28 : 11] People, Peter says, talks about the stone of rejection, talking about believers being living stones and the church being a spiritual house.

He says this about Christ, this is Peter later on when he's an older man, he says, see, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Now to you who believe this stone is precious, Jesus is precious to us, but to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

This is the babe Jesus that was going to have people speaking against him, who would be a stumbling bot to those who rejected him, who would be the one upon whom the whole world would turn.

And this child was indeed destined to cause the falling, the rising of many in Israel. But the bittersweetness goes on, doesn't it? Because there's pain and suffering coming to Mary too.

[29 : 28] There's pain and suffering of seeing her own son die upon the cross, seeing her beloved son, this perfect child, turned into a perfect man, dying and bearing the sin of his people.

And we know that John picks up that theme of this sword piercing Mary's heart when he says this in John 19, near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby he said to her, woman, here is your son and to the disciple here is your mother.

And from that time on his disciple took her into his home. His mother was seeing her son die upon the cross, bearing the sin, pondering these things.

She ponders these things in her heart. We mentioned that right at the beginning, at the end of the chapter two, she ponders the things in her heart. Mary was a ponderer and she would ponder at the cross and remember this sword, this prophecy, this sword piercing her own soul too.

[30 : 48] But then the wonderful graciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ to make provision for her through the apostle John. Who can understand the pain of Mary's heart as she sees her son die upon the cross?

And who can match the tenderness of a savior that even in his agonies makes provision for his mother?

What an amazing prophecy is here encapsulated in this phrase and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

But let's move on, let's move on from the bittersweetness to the sweetness. And the sweetness is found in this last person, this we can look at this morning, which is Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher.

We read this, there was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of 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.

[31 : 57] She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. And then this is a moment, coming up to them at that very moment, see there's another person come in, you've got Simeon, you've got Mary, you've got Joseph, you've got the baby Jesus, you've got the doxology, the hymn of praise from Simeon, and then there's another doxology, the fifth doxology, the last one that Luke brings.

And coming at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel.

This wonderful doxology, this looking at this child and saying, yes, there's a bit of sweetness in this, there's a bitterness of the cross, there's a sore that pierces Mary's soul, but there's also the redemption of Jerusalem, the salvation of God's people.

Simeon and Anna were richly, richly blessed, were they not, on the temple that day, in the line of duty, in the line of being faithful to what God had instructed them.

They had waited in great expectation to see the Lord's Christ, and they were there on that first advent, that first advent.

[33 : 17] But now as Christians, let's just finish with this, as Christians, we see something that they could never see. We see the second advent far, far clearer than they could ever.

They only had an expectation of one coming of Christ, but we have the expectation of the second coming of Christ. Christ was put to death, he was raised from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he's coming, he is returning.

And as Christians, we ought to have that same expectation as Simeon and Anna, we should be the Simeons and Annas of today, looking forward to the advent, the second advent of Christ.

We look back, we look back at the first advent, and we marvel at what God has done, but we have this increased hope, we can look ahead, not just look back at what God has done, but we can look ahead to what he will yet do, and Christ will come, Christ is coming, that is our hope, the same hope of Simeon and Anna, and all those who are waiting for the redemption of Israel.

I just want to read some verses from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, says this, Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope.

[34 : 49] For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, with a trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore encourage one another with these words. Now I know that that passage in Thessalonians you can say, ah, yeah, but, you know, is he coming for, when's the thousand years going to be, when's the rapture of the church?

[35 : 54] Forget it. This is what's important. We are the Annas and the Simeons of the second advent. We are looking forward to Jesus Christ returning.

We are looking forward for Christ to come down with a loud command, with a shout, and a shout that will silence everything and everyone in this world.

There are seven billion people living on this planet. Every tongue will be silent. Every knee shall bow. Every eye shall see the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what's going to happen. The Lord Jesus Christ will not come as a babe in a temple, in a mingling, thronging, 6,000 mishmash of people.

He will come from heaven itself. Every eye will see him. He will shout. And every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[37 : 04] We live in a terrible world, and we shall always live in a terrible world. We shall always live where there are planes that go missing, where there are tragedies, where there are tsunamis.

We will always live in a world where there is warring and struggling, where there is personal sin and personal death and anguish of heart. We are fallen creatures living in a fallen world, but we're no different to Simeon, and we're no different from Anna.

We are to wait for the coming of the Lord. He is coming, and we are to encourage one another with these words. That is what we live for.

That is what we should live for. We should be putting our treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and spoil.

Our hope and our only hope for the world is to look in face to the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you ready for that? Are you waiting for that? Is that your expectation?

[38 : 07] Shall we just leave it and say that's all very well, but tomorrow I've got to? No. Tomorrow we wait in expectation for the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ and we will see him return one day and we shall be with him and we shall hear that shout.

Let's close with our final hymn which is There is a hope that burns within my heart and the third verse says this There is a hope that stands the test of time that lifts my eyes beyond the beckoning grave to see the matchless beauty of a day divine when I behold his face when suffering cease and sorrows die and every longing satisfied then joy unspeakable will flood my soul for I am truly home.

Let's rise and sing There is a hope. Sovereign Lord as you have promised you now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

We pray our gracious God and loving heavenly father that you will indeed set our hearts on things above that you will set our hearts above with Christ where Christ is seated at the right hand of the glory of majesty in heaven.

We pray that we may have this hope burning within us this hope that this world cannot give nor can it quench. We pray that our hope to see you Lord Jesus face to face may grow and grow and that you will become all in all to us and Lord that we may know what it is to be pleasing to you as we live our daily lives.

[40 : 14] We pray that you take away anxieties and sadness. We pray that you will take away from our lives those negativities which put a fog between ourselves and the glorious hope.

Lord make this hope clear to us we pray and bless us. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God our heavenly Father may the blessing of the Holy Spirit be with us for this day and forevermore.

Amen.