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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, “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 turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 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 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 marvelled 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. 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 eighty-four. 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.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

(Luke 2:21–39)

Introduction

As we approach the text before us, Jesus Christ, Messiah, had been born. The long-awaited promised good news had been announced (1:26–38), affirmed (1:39–56), and arrived (2:1–20).

An angel of the Lord informed the shepherds of Messiah's birth, and so they left their lambs, to find *the* Lamb. They travelled to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Israel's great shepherd-king: David. There they met the *true* Shepherd-King: Jesus, who is Christ the Lord (Micah 5:1–2). The shepherds departed and declared the good news. The world's first human evangelists were, in the literal sense of the word, pastors.

It was now eight days later, and Jesus underwent the covenantal custom of circumcision (v. 21; cf. Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:1–3). For the first time, Jesus bled for his people. This would be the first of many sufferings that he would undergo for the sinners he came to ransom.

Thirty-two days later, they would return to the temple when and where their faith would be strengthened by two older saints: Simeon and Anna. These faithful believers had, for a long time, anticipated the arrival of God's promised Messiah. They now experienced what they had been so longingly expecting. Therefore, they celebrated. But this led them to anticipate again. For with the arrival of Messiah, greater things were still to come, not only in the city of Jerusalem, but throughout the nation of Israel and in all the nations.

Their celebration of fulfilment, coupled with their anticipation of future fulfilment, illustrates the biblical truth referred by theologians as "already / not yet." This is where you and I live—or where we should be.

Like Israel of old, before we came to Christ, God graciously brought us to a point of disillusionment, defeat and, for some, despair, due to our guilt for our sins against holy God.

God then consoled us with "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). We repented of our sins, and believed on Jesus who lived, died, and rose again for us. Celebration was our response. What we longed for was now our experience: We were reconciled to God. But this was only the beginning, for we began to anticipate further blessings—like growth in holiness, a growing devotion to God, and collateral blessings along the way. After all, as the hymn says, Jesus came "to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found." Sometimes those blessings have come sooner,

sometimes much later, and some of these blessings have yet to come. But since they are God's promises, we must continue to faithfully anticipate them. This is the theme of our passage and of this study.

This passage will help us to wait for God's full and final salvation. It will help us to persevere through times of hopelessness. May God equip us by scripture's encouragement, and by the Spirit's empowerment, to faithfully anticipate the fullest extent of his good news.

Simeon's Trust

In the account before us, Jesus was brought to the temple for the first time, and the first character he encountered was old Simeon (vv. 21–35).

Devotion

Luke highlights Joseph and Mary's devotion: "And 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" (v. 21).

The scene before us wonderfully depicts the truth of Galatians 4:4–5: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." As Sproul comments, "From the very beginning of his life, he was dedicated in every detail to the commandments of God." His earthly parents were good examples. They were faithful to God's covenant. They were devoted to God. They would raise their Son to be as well. What a blessing to be raised in a home with covenantally faithful parents!

We see the faithfulness of Joseph and Mary as Luke five times mentions their obedience to God's "Law" (vv. 22, 23, 24, 27, 39). Verse 21, however, is the first example of their faithfulness to the law of God—the old covenant law concerning circumcision. Eight days after his birth, they obediently cut a covenant with God, depicted by circumcision (see Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:1–3).

Jesus underwent circumcision because he was Jewish. He was a son of Abraham. This was his first identification with sinners. Amazing love, amazing humility. Paul wrote, "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11) That deserves a lot of meditation, appreciation, and celebration.

Theologians speak of Jesus' "active" and "passive" obedience. The former refers to his 33 years of active faithful living according to God's revealed will. The latter refers to his

“passive” death and burial (though there was nothing really passive about it). Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Jesus “passively” obeyed the law of God as an infant. That is, his parents fulfilled what was required of them for him, their son. This was essential, for we need a sinless Saviour. Since sin is defined as “transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV), thankfully, for both his and our sake, Jesus kept the law – every iota and dot (Matthew 5:18).

Naming Without Claiming

It was at this time for Joseph to give him the pre-assigned name Jesus. Whatever their spiritual insight at the time, this name would become the name above all names (Acts 4:12). Ryle observed that Jesus was King, Prophet, Priest, and Judge and yet, “it is as deliverer and Redeemer that he desires principally to be known.” He then challenges, “Is he our Jesus, our Saviour? This is the question on which our salvation depends.”

Naming is an act of dominion, as illustrated when God commanded Adam to name the animals and appointed him as the one who would subdue and have dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1:26–28).

It is both common and significant that parents name their children. It is an act of “rulership.” So, it is interesting that neither Joseph nor Mary had a say in the name of their firstborn son. It had already been determined. The angel had made it clear what he would be called Jesus (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31).

There is a good lesson for us here: When God puts Christ into our life, he rules. Mary’s response – “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” – is the motto of the Christian. “Jesus is Lord” means precisely that. Joseph modelled this well. May we all do likewise.

Dedication

Some 32 days (cf. Leviticus 12:4ff) passed between v. 21 and v. 22:

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, “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 turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

(Luke 2:22–24)

After the allotted time, Mary came to the temple for her ceremonial purification. She presented her firstborn son to the Lord (amazing!) and she and Joseph offered the prescribed ceremonial sacrifice.

The law of Moses stipulated that the firstborn son belonged in a unique way to the Lord (Exodus 13:1–12,15). This was related to the historical Exodus in which the firstborn sons were appointed to death. Yet God accepted a sacrificial lamb in the son's place.

Normally a lamb was offered along with a pigeon or turtledove. But God made provision for the poor: He would accept a second pigeon or turtledove in place of a lamb. We are reminded again of the poverty into which Jesus was born. If you are poor, take comfort. So was Jesus. Neither dignity nor nobility requires wealth.

Again, this sacrifice pointed to the death penalty upon humanity because of sin. Yet more so, it pointed to God's grace in accepting a sacrifice as a substitute. The sacrifice is looked upon as the guilty one: The guilt of the sacrificer is transferred to the sacrifice. The one making the sacrifice is set free from guilt.

We need to remember that God gave his law in order to point us to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39). Therefore, God's law concerning the sacrificing of one's firstborn son to the Lord was ultimately a picture of what God the Father himself would do. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is that sacrifice so all the chosen sons of God may go free. We are saved by Christ's death on the cross. But this required his fulfilling the righteous demands of the law (Romans 8:1-4). Bishop Hall long ago wrote, "He that was above the law, would come under the law, to free us from the law."

Ransom Price

Though not mentioned here, Joseph would have also paid the required ransom price of five shekels required by law (Numbers 18:15–16). All of this begs the question, why would the sinless Son of God need to have this done for him? Because he came to be the ransom for repentant, believing sinners.

Confirmation

The sacrifice having been offered, we now encounter Ananias:

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 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.”

(Luke 2:25–32)

While this truly royal family was faithfully following God’s protocols, something extraordinary took place—something brought about, we are told, by the third member of the Godhead: the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is everywhere in the Christmas narrative. Apart from him, we would never make the connection that the baby is Christ the Lord. The Holy Spirit loves to draw attention to our Saviour. He does so here in what must have been both an encouraging and yet confounding experience for Joseph and Mary.

“The Holy Spirit was upon” a man by the name of Simeon as “he came ... into the temple.” There is no indication that Simeon was a priest or that he was fulfilling any special function in the temple. Rather, the tenor of the passage indicates that Simeon was simply a faithful Jewish man—one of the faithful remnant during these days of increasing apostasy. Luke describes him as “righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.”

Apparently, like Anna (vv. 36–38), he spent as much time as he could in the temple. Why would that be? Because the Old Testament prophets foretold of a time when God would send Messiah to his temple. That is, the glory would be restored as God returned to dwell with his people (see Haggai; Isaiah 40–66; Malachi 3–4; etc.).

Let’s examine the description of this godly man.

The word “righteous” speaks to his character: like Joseph, Simeon was a “just man” (Matthew 1:19). We are told also that Simeon was “devout.” This is a precious word that indicates a man who was careful and cautious about how he lived (see Acts 2:5; 8:2). Though the word “pious” often carries a pejorative slight, nevertheless, it is a good synonym. Simeon was careful not to deviate from God’s word. Like the author of Psalm 119, Simeon sought to keep the law of the Lord with his whole heart (vv. 1–2, 10).

Finally, we are told that he was characterised by patience. We are told that he was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.”

Looking for Jesus

“Waiting” translates a word that means to endure—not in a grin-and-bear-it kind of endurance, but rather a confident, expectant, hopeful waiting. The word is found several times in the New Testament in the context of an eagerness that empowers one to endure.

For example, in Mark 15:43 it is used in the context of Joseph of Arimathea who “was also himself looking for the kingdom of God.” In Acts 24:15 Paul uses this word when he speaks of waiting/hoping for the resurrection of the dead. Paul uses the term when writing to Titus about “waiting for our blessed hope” of Christ’s return to earth (Titus 2:13). The writer to the Hebrews uses the word when describing those who endured trials. They “joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property” because of confidence in a better future (10:34). Finally, Jude uses the term when he speaks about the believer “waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ” at our full and final salvation from sin and from a sin-cursed world (Jude 21).

In each of these, the waiting is due to a hope about the future. Simeon was a man who righteously, devotedly, and confidently waited on the Lord. Luke tells us that he was waiting particularly for “the consolation of Israel.” The word “consolation” refers to that which affords comfort or refreshment and, for this reason, the rabbis called the Messiah the Consoler or the Comforter.

Simeon, like any faithful Israelite, expected God’s promised Messiah. But in his case, he expected him to come in his lifetime, for Luke tells us that “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” Simeon believed God’s word. And on this day, his faith would be rewarded. He would meet Jesus.

Imagine with me. Perhaps for many, many years—daily—Simeon entered the temple looking for Jesus. Perhaps he would ask, “Is he here yet? God promised me, you know.” “Yes, Simeon”, the other worshippers would say. “We know. How could we possibly forget. You constantly remind us! But, with all due respect, is it possible you either misheard or misunderstood? After all, you have been anticipating this for a long, long time.”

Perhaps, with a sigh, Simeon would respond, “I know. But as I often remind you, great is God’s faithfulness. He always keeps his word. In fact, it is his character that consoles me that he will send the Consoler.”

On that day, as on so many previous days, Simeon entered the temple “in the Spirit.” But on this day, the Holy Spirit “consoled” him by pointing him to the Consoler. We should pray for something similar.

O that, when we gather with the temple of God, we too would be “in the Spirit”! Apart from him, we will never experience true worship of God’s Son. The Holy Spirit loves to point God’s people to Jesus. Further, like Simeon, we should come to worship confident in what God has revealed—confident in God’s unchanging word. We have an even more sure word than Simeon (1 Peter 1:19–21). Like Simeon, let us gather to worship expectantly.

Clinging to the Promise

I don’t know about you, but I was always uncomfortable with a stranger picking up my children. I wonder about the initial response of Joseph and Mary when this stranger picked up their six-week old Son. I wonder how it took place.

Perhaps Simeon was praying in the temple when he noticed the presence of this family. (Note that their obedience provided the setting for a faithful believer to be encouraged. Don’t underestimate the impact of simple obedience: gathering with believers, persevering in hardship, serving the body, praying with others, deeds of kindness, bestowing forgiveness, etc.) It seems that the Spirit immediately confirmed to him that their baby was his Saviour! He rushed over to them and, from Mary, “took him up in his arms and blessed God.”

The old man blessed God with thankful words: “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.” Simeon’s waiting was rewarded. His years of patient, devout, and righteous living had come to fruition. Though he was a sinner, like us, years of claiming God’s promise were now realised in literally clinging to that promise. He had now literally seen God’s salvation.

Simeon exemplified the patient endurance of the faithful disciple who waits in accordance with God’s word. Submission over the long haul is the mark of the disciple of Jesus Christ (John 8:31). Someone has described biblical discipleship as “long obedience in the same direction.” Simeon was Exhibit A.

World Outreach Celebration

I recently looked into the faces of two nine-week-old baby girls, passionately asking the Lord to give them a godly forever family and to save them. I imagined them one day walking the aisle, each marrying a Christian man and raising a godly family. I long for that. But I have no guarantee of that. However, when Simeon saw Jesus, when he held him in his arms, he knew the outcome of this six-week old baby: the salvation of Jews and Gentiles.

Simeon had some inkling—because of God’s revelation to him—that this child would grow up be salvation to a nation and to nations. He was celebrating God’s promise to save the nations. This was the first world outreach celebration!

Simeon was both celebrating the already and anticipating the not yet. He was both revelling in the glorious now and revealing the glorious future. And he could do this because of Jesus. He could do this because of the gospel. Christian, this is where you and I live.

We live in the already of justification while anticipating the not yet of glorification. We live in the already of reconciliation anticipating the not yet of universal restoration (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). We live in the already of seated in heavenly places anticipating the not yet of resurrection (Colossians 3:1-3). We live in the already of the new heavens and new earth while anticipating their fulfilment. We live in the already of “it is finished” anticipating the not yet of every tribe, tongue, kindred, and nation around the throne. As Ryle comments,

God has a believing people even in the worst of places and in the darkest of times.... Therefore, we should be a more hopeful people. Let us believe that grace can live and flourish, even in the most unfavourable circumstances. there are more Simeons in the world than we suppose.

We live in the already of “God is for you” anticipating the not yet of every tear and sorrow wiped away. We live in the already of loving God and “called according to his purpose” while anticipating the realisation that, to such, “all things work together for good.” We live in the already of casting all our care upon him anticipating God’s gracious intervention. Remember, the experience of consolation requires a time of sorrow. Christian, as you suffer, look to Christ for deliverance. Non-Christian may your guilt-induced sorrow be the foretaste of the consolation of conversion to Christ.

Christian, bless God for his faithfulness in the present, while remaining aware of his promise to bless us yet with more. Let’s learn from Simeon.

Consternation

The good news was accompanied by some sad news:

And his father and his mother marvelled 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.”

(Luke 2:33-35)

After this encounter with Simeon, is it any wonder that Jesus' "father and mother marvelled at what was said about him"? Having heard many prophecies about their Son, nothing had been so clear. Simeon provided further revelation, which no doubt increased their consternation: Their Son was going to be at the centre of much conflict – conflict that would attend their own heart and home.

Perhaps startled, they took Jesus back from Simeon, holding him tightly. He noticed, and then calmly, confidently, and compassionately "blessed them." Perhaps this was in the form of a prayer. He explained to them, in case they were not yet aware, that their child was special – divinely special.

Simeon knew, by divine revelation, that this child would grow to become a thorn in the side of many – those who refused to bow to him. He knew that this child would break his mother's heart, not by any sin, but rather by his mission: to give his life as a ransom for many. This will result in both blessings and burdens.

He told Mary that her child was "appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel." Like the revelation of God in the Old Testament, Jesus would be either a stone of blessing or a stumbling-stone of judgement. As the New Testament reveals, Jesus is the cornerstone (Luke 20:17; 1 Peter 2:6–7; see Psalm 118:22).

Jesus, the one who would save his people from their sins, would be a stumblingblock to some and a Saviour to others. He would save those who would submit to him and he would damn those who would refuse to submit. Depending on how one responds to Jesus, they will either fall under his condemnation as their Judge or rise to newness of life under his saving power. In other words, when it comes to Jesus Christ, there can be no neutrality: You are either for him or against him. Those who humble will bow and be raised to newness of life, while the prideful will continue to stand before their eternal fall.

So, what is your response to Jesus?

As Simeon declared, Jesus would bring salvation for all peoples. But because of mankind's sinfulness, this would not come without conflict. This is indicated by the phrase "for a sign that is opposed ... so that thoughts from many hearts will be revealed." This baby was God's revelation to the world (Hebrews 1:1–2). And, in turn, he would reveal the world (vv. 32, 35). Amid the joy of the already (Jesus' birth), Joseph and Mary needed to prepare for the not yet (but immanent) spiritual conflict. For when confronted with Jesus, a person's true character is revealed. And humanity loves darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

All of vv. 29–32 would come to pass. We must confidently anticipate this. Yet it would not come to pass easily. It would not come to pass without a fight. This fight was not a political, socio-economic, or military fight. No, this would be a spiritual fight. Two spiritual kingdoms would be in conflict. One's response to Jesus would reveal the spiritual condition of their heart; it would reveal to which kingdom they belong. Ultimately, as Simeon indicated, our hearts will be revealed by the cross of Jesus. As Morris puts it, "When men see Christ suffer, their reaction shows on which side they stand." This is what Simeon meant when he said to Mary, "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." When the Roman soldier took his spear and thrust it into Jesus' side as he hung on the cross, Mary felt it deep in her soul. What mother would not?

With these words, Simeon was prepared to die. We don't know how long he lived after this experience, but we know that, because he saw Jesus, he was prepared for death. No one is ready to die until they "see" Jesus. Have you?

Startled but Strengthened

As startling as this encounter may have been for Joseph and Mary, certainly it was also a strength to them. As Elizabeth's encounter strengthened Mary's faith, this encounter with faithful Simeon would have had a similar effect. O how we need one another!

When times are dark, we need the light of truth shared by a sister or brother in Christ. May BBC be filled with the likes of Simeon; those who have a track record of faithful anticipation in the promises of God. We need the likes of Simeon, who endured by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the only way that the Christian can eagerly wait in the midst of what, on the surface, is less than promising.

Anna's Testimony

Verses 36–38 introduce us to a second witness of Jesus' Messiahship:

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 eighty-four. 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.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

(Luke 2:36–39)

Scripture calls for the testimony of two to corroborate a testimony. With Anna, we are assured that Messiah had come to his temple (see Malachi 3:1).

This is her only mention in the New Testament, but what an honourable mention! Luke informs us that, at one time, she had been married, but that, after seven years of marriage, she had been widowed. She was now 84 years old and, we can assume, widowed for a very, very long time.

Anna is described as a “prophetess.” Since the prophets had been silent for some four hundred years, this is a remarkable statement. God was using her to encourage the faithful remnant who were “waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” This is similar language and identical in meaning to “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” Anna was patiently waiting, confident in God’s promise to send Messiah to redeem Jerusalem from its sin.

Unlike the ransom price paid by Joseph upon Jesus’ presentation, Jesus would one day pay the ultimate ransom price for his people – for the new Jerusalem, the church, the Israel of God. The ransom price would not be silver or gold but his own blood, shed on the cross to satisfy God’s just wrath deserved by sinners like you and me (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Life in the Father’s House

Anna’s devotion is summarised in the words, “She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.” Anna was the kind of person Paul would write about in 1 Timothy 5:5: “She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day ” This was Anna. And her devotion was rewarded.

The Right Place, the Right Time

It seems that Anna came into the temple at about the time that Simeon (whom doubtless she knew) was confirming that Jesus was Messiah. She too had been faithfully anticipating the fulfilment of God’s promised Messiah. Her faith, like that of Simeon, was rewarded with fulfilment. She waited a long time, faithfully persevering amid much spiritual and political darkness. And the light was now beginning to shine.

I doubt that Anna understood the full ramifications of what was occurring. I am not sure how much she understood about the new Jerusalem compared to geo-political Jerusalem. But I am sure she realised that it would still be some time before God’s promises would fully come to pass. After all, Messiah was only a baby!

Again, this points us to the principle of the already, not yet. This experience in the temple was a foretaste of what was still to come. But it was enough. This encouragement of God’s

faithfulness in the present equipped and empowered her to believe God for the future. Can you relate? Let's note some important applications.

Persevering faith is just that: It is the ability to keep believing because of God's faithfulness thus far.

It is for this reason that knowing Scripture is so important. It is for this that reason fellowship ("testifying") is so important. As one commentator notes, Anna, "spent her life in God's house with God's people. God gave us his church to our mother in the faith. We rob ourselves of a priceless treasure when we neglect to be one with his worshipping people" (Barclay). We rob ourselves of growing in our faith.

It is for this reason rehearsing the gospel is so important (Romans 8:32). It is for this reason we need faithful biblical theology. History is heading somewhere, but it is occurring in stages. Whatever stage we are in now, a more glorious future awaits us.

But I want to make another important observation (and challenge). Simeon and Anna were old saints—old and faithful. They were exemplary in this. Every Christian should grow old like this.

It is exciting to see younger people follow the Lord. But sadly, many do not persevere. When the tough times come, when romance kicks in, when careers soar, when the allure of the world becomes strong, many lose their zeal and their commitment, and some fall away completely. I've observed this at BBC for over twenty-five years. Yet what a joy to observe those who continue faithfully to follow Christ, year after year, decade after decade. What a joy to watch such saints continue to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

I met with a couple of such saints just recently. Both in their 70s, they continue to serve, continue to sacrifice, continue to learn, continue to trust God and to grow. They continue to anticipate better things because they continue to believe the gospel.

I am saddened when men and women in their forties say that they are stepping aside from ministries to make room for younger people, for several reasons. First, if you are in your forties, you are a younger person! Second, stop creating a generation gap. Third, you are never too old to serve. In fact, the older you are, the more equipped you should be to serve even more effectively. Finally, read this text until it sinks in: Older saints who serve put themselves in a better position to encounter Jesus. Let's be done with the retirement mentality.

Anticipation is Making Me Wait

So sang Carly Simon; so lived Simeon and Anna. What should we be anticipating? That is, what are the practical take-aways for us?

First, Anna serves as a great example for every Christian: She responded with thanksgiving to God and with testifying for God; particularly to God's faithful remnant. This is how everyone redeemed by the Saviour is to respond.

Second, we have more reason to faithfully persevere. So let's do it! If Anna testified of what would yet be, how much more should we be testifying of what came to be! J. C. Ryle wrote long ago, "If [Simeon and Anna], with so few helps and so many discouragements, lived such a life of faith, how much more ought we with a finished Bible and a full gospel. Let us strive, like them, to walk by faith and look forward."

Our Response

In our brief series, we have been confronted with the holy, faithful, merciful, and gracious character of God. We have also seen the condition of man: sinful and in need of a Saviour. And, of course, we have focused intently on this Saviour: Christ the Lord. Because he had God's favour, and because he lived a life meriting God's favour (v. 39), we can experience his saving favour. It all depends on our response.

Gabriel, Mary, Elizabeth, an unnamed angel of the Lord, a heavenly host, shepherds, Simeon, and Anna all testified that Jesus is God's appointed Redeemer and Saviour. Ultimately, Jesus' life and death and resurrection proved this. Will you confess your sinfulness, trusting him to forgive you? Will you trust him to reconcile you to holy God? That is, will you trust him to bring peace between you and God?

The good news is that, though we are sinners, the anticipated Saviour has come. There is nothing more to do than to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved.

If we respond to this good news, we will truly have a gospel-centred Christmas, for our good, to the glory of God in the highest.

AMEN