

***The Challenges of Christmas:
Waiting on God ~ Luke 2:25-38***

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This Christmas season we are considering some of the great challenges of Christmas. Last week, from the perspective of Mary, we considered the challenge of placing God's plans ahead of our own. Today, we consider a second challenge of Christmas—waiting. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of Christmas is waiting. Children illustrate this so well. The first Christmas, the coming of the Messiah, represents one of the greatest struggles in “waiting” on God recorded in history. The Old Testament prophets spoke of a coming Messiah. Many in Israel thought that this Messiah would come much sooner. As a result of their wait, many began to doubt. Does the end of this year find you waiting on God for something? Let the example of Simeon and Anna encourage you while you wait. Let their testimony serve as an example of what to do while you wait.

Text: ²⁵ There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple complex. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for Him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took Him up in his arms, praised God, and said:

²⁹ Now, Master,

You can dismiss Your slave in peace,
according to Your word.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation.

³¹ You have prepared [it]

in the presence of all peoples—

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and glory to Your people Israel.

³³ His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and told His mother Mary: "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed — ³⁵ and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

³⁶ There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and was a widow for 84 years. She did not leave the temple complex, serving God night and day with fastings and prayers. ³⁸ At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about Him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

What do we do while we wait on God?

Trust in God's Word.

4 Factors Related to Your Trust

1. Obedience: "this man was just (righteous) and devout"

The greatest indicator of our belief in God's Word is not what we say, but what we do. There are lots of people who say that they believe God's Word, but the real test of belief in God's Word is acting on His Word.

2. Expectant faith: "waiting for the Consolation of Israel"

The word used here, translated "waiting," is a word that has the connotation of being in a state of expectancy. It is the same word used by Luke in Luke 12:36 in a parable associated with readiness for the Lord's return. So, the idea of the word is more than just waiting, but rather waiting with a certain expectancy that the thing that you are waiting for is going to occur.

We don't really know how old Simeon was when he saw Jesus, but we have a good idea how old Anna was. According to verse 37, she was easily over 100 years old. Regardless of their age the implication of the text seems to be that both Simeon and Anna had waited a very long time.

A preacher of another generation summarized waiting on God this way:

Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given. - G. Campbell Morgan

3. Leadership of the Holy Spirit: "and the Holy Spirit was upon Him"

One commentator even suggested that the Holy Spirit led Simeon to go to the temple that particular day. Though this is speculation, what is certain is that Luke has already indicated 10 times in his Gospel something about led by the Holy Spirit. Being led by the Holy Spirit is synonymous with trusting in God's Word.

4. Right Understanding: "that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."

A critical point of trusting in God's Word is the correct understanding of God's Word. Certainly, Simeon understood that now that he had seen the Christ, he was ready for death.

Trust in God's Timing.

The trouble with waiting on God is to trust His timing. When we have to wait we battle two extremes. We either want to quit or we want to hurry things along on our own. The Bible is filled with examples of both. Many had given up on waiting for the Messiah. From the lesson of Simeon and Anna, notice these three truths about God's timing.

- God has a purpose in His timing.

Why did Jesus come the day that Jesus came? Why did Simeon, Anna, and others have to wait for the Messiah? Apostle Paul in writing to the Galatians gave this answer, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." (Galatians 4:4) Jesus was born at the right time. We don't know the exact date, but it was the correct date. We don't know the day He is coming again, but it will be the right date. I don't know why you have to wait for your answer, but I know that it will come on the right date. Everything in my life has happened on the right day.

The purpose is given to us in verse 31-32. The people of God had to be prepared for the birth of Jesus.

- God has a plan for you in His timing.

God also has a plan for you in His timing. For Simeon, his death was somehow attached to the coming of Messiah.

- God is at work even while we wait.

Our wait does not mean that God is idle. We must believe that while we wait, God is at work.

Continue in the Discipline of Prayer.

Anna specifically shows us the discipline of prayer.

- God may be building in you greater understanding.
- God may be building in you greater thanksgiving.

Outside of suffering, waiting may be our greatest teacher.

Trust in God's Answer.

Conclusion: Make sure God is not waiting on you.

Charles Simeon was a pastor in the Church of England from 1782 to 1836 at Trinity Church in Cambridge. He was appointed to his church by a bishop against the will of the people. They opposed him not because he was a bad preacher but because he was an evangelical -- he believed the Bible and called for conversion and holiness and world missions.

For 12 years the people refused to let him give the afternoon Sunday sermon. And during that time they boycotted the Sunday morning service and locked their pews so that no one could sit in them. He preached to people in the aisles for 12 years! How did he last?

In this state of things I saw no remedy but faith and patience (Note the linking of faith and patience!). The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was this, "The

servant of the Lord must not strive." (Note: The weapon in the fight for faith and patience was the Word!) It was painful indeed to see the church, with the exception of the aisles, almost forsaken; but I thought that if God would only give a double blessing to the congregation that did attend, there would on the whole be as much good done as if the congregation were doubled and the blessing limited to only half the amount. This comforted me many, many times, when without such a reflection, I should have sunk under my burthen. (Charles Simeon, by H.C.G. Moule, p. 39)

Where did he get the assurance that if he followed the way of patience there would be a blessing on his work that would make up for frustrations of having all the pews locked? He got it, no doubt, from texts like Isaiah 30:18, "Blessed are all those wait for the Lord." The word conquered unbelief and belief conquered impatience.

Fifty four years later he was dying. It was October, 1836. On October 21 those by his bed heard him say these words slowly and with long pauses:

Infinite wisdom has arranged the whole with infinite love; and infinite power enables me--to rest upon that love. I am in a dear Father's hands--all is secure. When I look to Him, I see nothing but faithfulness--and immutability--and truth; and I have the sweetest peace--I cannot have more peace. (Charles Simeon, p. 172) (All taken from sermon on the web by John Piper, Piper's Notes)

May each of us have that sweet peace this Christmas season!