

Waiting Well

How God Prepares a Heart for Christ

Luke 2:22–38

Read Text

The Ache Beneath the Noise

We live in a noisy world. There is always something playing.

Always something buzzing. Always something demanding our attention.

And yet— beneath all that noise— many people carry a quiet restlessness.

We've learned how to distract ourselves. Social media, streaming, music, algorithms, and more help to keep our attention diverted. Despite all of that extra activity providing distraction, we haven't learned how to satisfy our souls. Advent and Christmas and a new year is God's gift to people like us.

It slows us down. It forces us to refocus on things that are more important, more meaningful. And, graciously, it can teach us how to wait.

Because waiting is not wasted time. Waiting is *forming* time. And Luke shows us that through two people most of us would overlook.

SIMEON AND ANNA — TWO PEOPLE WHO WAITED WELL

Luke tells us that when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple, two elderly saints are already there. We read in Luke that the holy family is at the temple to take care of three separate Judaism-based ceremonies. Mary and Joseph are making a cleansing sacrifice that was expected for women forty days after giving birth (Lev. 12:2-4,6 – Joseph required cleansing as well as he probably assisted in Mary's birthing process). They are also consecrating their firstborn to God (Ex. 13:2, 12, 16; 34:19; Num. 18:15-16) and observing the dedication of the firstborn to the Lord's service (1 Sam 1-2). We read that they offer a burnt sacrifice of turtledoves, meaning Joseph and Mary gave what was established as the sacrifice of poor people. But this visit won't just take care of their religious duties.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus meet two elderly saints at the temple: an old man named Simeon and an old woman named Anna.

They are not priests. They are not rulers. They do not hold power. But they see what others miss. Luke tells us *why*.

Simeon is described as righteous and devout. And then Luke adds this phrase: “He was looking for the consolation of Israel.”

We don’t know Simeon’s profession. Just that he is righteous and devout. This places Simeon in the same company as Job from the OT and many prophets, described with the same words. Simeon represents the testimony of a mature believer who has walked with God. There is wisdom here and we see that wisdom born out by the fact that Simeon is looking for the hope of a nation. He is waiting for the one who is the fulfillment of God’s promised consolation of Israel.

Anna appears only briefly— but Luke tells us she did not leave the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer. And then Luke tells us that Anna spoke of the child to all who were *looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*.

Luke repeats the idea for a reason. These were people shaped by longing. Not bitterness. Not cynicism. Not nostalgia.

They were *expectant*.

WHY THEY RECOGNIZED JESUS

Here’s the question Luke wants us to ask:

Why Simeon? Why Anna? Why were they the ones who recognized Jesus as Messiah?

Why them— and not the religious elite? Not the scholars? Not the powerful? The answer is not intelligence. It’s not morality. It’s not status.

They recognized Jesus because they were looking for God to act.

People who expect nothing from God rarely recognize Him when He shows up. Simeon and Anna were not waiting *passively*. They were waiting *prayerfully*. They were waiting *hopefully*. Their longing made them attentive.

Not too long ago, when we were dealing with a difficult pregnancy and a birth that led into a stint in the NICU, I remember sitting next to my daughter's bedside sitting and praying. Most of those prayers composed of listening. I remember praying all the words I could come up with in the first ten minutes and then depended on the Holy Spirit to communicate the rest while I sat there. I heard the compression and humming and occasional beeping of machines. But in this time of uncertainty, I found myself listening differently to God. More open. More attentive.

Do you find that to be true for you? Do you listen more carefully, more consistently, when you are in those seasons of some sort of deep need? What does it take for you to listen differently to the Spirit of God? That listening, the sensitivity to the Spirit that you can have in those moments, that is how God prepares a heart.

Luke lets us know a powerful truth here in this text:

God prepares a heart to receive Christ by awakening a longing for consolation and redemption that nothing else can satisfy.

This is not accidental. It is not cruel. It is merciful. God uses these seasons to prepare a heart for the presence of Christ. The star of the old sitcom *Malcolm in the Middle*, Frankie Muniz, said he was driving across the country, and nothing was going right. It was catastrophe after catastrophe, constant setbacks. Finally on one dark and desolate stretch of highway, he could only get praise music on his radio, so he listened to that and right in the middle of that mess, the Spirit of God prepared his heart to receive Christ through the songs he was listening to. Muniz said he was awakened to spirituality, to realizing his sin and his need for Christ. God prepared his heart to receive Christ by awakening a longing for consolation and redemption that no other source, no other thing, nothing else in the universe can satisfy.

God prepares or prepared hearts for Christ in three ways.

FIRST — AT CHRIST'S FIRST COMING

Simeon and Anna were longing— and therefore ready.

They didn't recognize Jesus because of appearances. He looked like any other infant. They recognized Him because God had trained their hearts to wait for salvation. Longing created room.

SECOND — AT CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Scripture says the same thing about Jesus' return. Hebrews tells us He will appear again *for those who are eagerly waiting for Him*. Paul says the crown is given to those who *love His appearing*. That hope keeps faith alive within our hearts.

THIRD — AT CONVERSION

This is where it becomes or became personal. So many people do not come to Christ because life is going smoothly. They come when something breaks. When success disappoints. When control slips away. When distractions stop working. When something scares them in a way they could not prepare. That moment is often the beginning of grace.

My father-in-law is constantly arguing with his GPS. They get lost — displaced — often. It is always the faulty GPS. When my mom used to drive us places when we were kids, she would turn the map so we were always driving “up.” There is a spiritual awakening that happens that is sort of like that. We realize that how we have been navigating our lives is broken. The thing we were following isn't working. God is preparing our hearts for Jesus.

A LIFE SHAPED BY LONGING — MARTIN LUTHER

Martin Luther tried everything. Religious discipline. Confession. Good works. Moral striving. And it left him terrified of God. But Luther kept longing.

He said: “Night and day I pondered...” Until he realized that righteousness is not something we earn— it is something we receive. Longing led him to grace.

WHAT WE ARE REALLY LONGING FOR

Luke tells us exactly what Simeon and Anna were waiting for.

Consolation. Redemption.

JESUS IS THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL

Simeon knows that before he dies, God will show him the consolation of Israel. Meaning that God would show Simeon the one who would take away the sense of loss and trouble and provide peace and rest. He would be their consolation, their comfort. Like the generations before him, Simeon waits for the One who would comfort and console his people.

Simeon's words come from Isaiah 40: "Comfort, comfort my people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for" ([Isaiah 40:1-2](#))."

This is not shallow comfort. This is comfort for the guilty. The weary. The ashamed. Jesus brings:

- forgiveness for the past
- tenderness instead of judgment
- peace where there was fear

Simeon waits for the one that he knows will fulfill the covenants of both Abraham and David. Simeon would see the One who could save Israel. And the One who could save every person. Simeon makes it clear— This consolation is not just for Israel. It is: "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." That means **us**. Jesus is OUR consolation – he is OUR comfort.

Someone is here this morning and their heart has been stirred. They have come to that point where they realize that their GPS is broken. They've been reading the map for their lives all wrong and they've only experienced trouble, pain, confusion. They feel awful. They feel lost. They feel afraid. The Spirit is pointing your heart toward Jesus. He promises direction, forgiveness, grace and peace. This is who Simeon waited to meet. Maybe you should end your waiting today. Meet Jesus. The redemption of Jerus.

Anna waits for redemption. A LONG wait. A really, really, long wait. And at that very moment when Simeon cradles baby Jesus and blesses the family, she knows who it is. And she knows what that means. In that moment.

Redemption is power. It means liberation. Victory. Deliverance from what still threatens us.

Jesus does not merely soothe wounds. He breaks chains. Sin. Fear. Death. He heals the past and secures the future. But only if you receive him as Lord and Savior in the present.

Redemption can be experienced in a moment of realization. A moment of recognition. A moment of discovery. Anna knows in the moment. Do you remember your moment of understanding – that moment when you realized who Jesus was and what redemption meant?

Redemption means you've been bought, purchased. Your future changes. Your eternity changes. Your everything changes. And from that moment, you can walk away from it covered in the peace of Christ.

Simeon holds the child and says: "Now... I can depart in peace."

Why? Because salvation had arrived. The past was forgiven. The future was secure.

If you feel restless this after this season and as this new year opens — unsatisfied— quietly aching— Do not rush to silence it. That longing may be God's mercy. Preparing you to see Christ clearly.

Jesus is the consolation of your past.

Jesus is the redemption of your future.

Receive Him. In this moment. Right now.

GUIDED PRAYER / RESPONSE MOMENT

Let's take a moment to be still before God.

You don't need to fix anything right now. You don't need to impress God.

Just bring your heart as it is.

Prayer

Lord God,

You see what we carry.

You see our longings—
even the ones we don't know how to name.

Where we are weary,
bring consolation.

Where we are bound,
bring redemption.

Where we have tried to satisfy our souls
with lesser things,
gently turn our hearts back to You.

Jesus,
You are the gift we've been waiting for.

The forgiveness we need.
The freedom we cannot create.
The peace that endures.

This Advent season,
teach us to wait well—
and to receive You fully.

We place our hope in You.

Amen.