

Encountering the Prince of Peace

Luke 1:22-38

When we hear sermons on the first coming of Christ, most of us are familiar with the lives of Mary and Joseph—we know about the shepherds abiding in the field and the wise men. But there are two elderly saints, who though they are not as well known, were uniquely blessed as a result of the first advent.

The names of these two elderly saints are Simeon and Anna. These two individuals shared some similar God honoring qualities that we will look at this morning. Additionally, the great blessing of their lives was that they shared a similar experience. They both recognized that the child Mary was holding in her arms when she walked into the temple was the promised messiah.

Concerning their divine encounter, John Piper asked this probing question: “Of all the Jews that might have been chosen to recognize the child-messiah and take him into their arms and speak of His coming, why these? I think Luke wants us to ask that question because he takes the time to tell us some of the qualities of these two people.”

Now, although no one will ever encounter the child-messiah again, we can know the crucified, risen prince of peace in a way that, like Simeon and Anna, we find what our souls have been longing for all our lives.

Main idea: God’s peace comes to us when the Prince of Peace is held up before our eyes by the Spirit and in response He’s given His rightful place on the throne of our hearts.

This morning I want us to examine the qualities these two elderly saints possessed that no doubt contributed to their peace-producing and soul satisfying encounter with the Christ-Child.

1. Devotion to God

The first quality about Simeon and Anna that I want us to see is their devotion to God. But before we look at Simeon and Anna, notice also that it was the devotion of Mary and Joseph that brought Jesus to the temple where Simeon and Anna encountered Him. Luke writes:

“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. 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 Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”)²⁴ 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

You know, both Mary and Joseph had already seen and heard some amazing things from angels and shepherds, and experienced a miraculous birth. But even after all the incredible things they experienced, they remained humble, faithful, and devoted to God. They didn't take the amazing blessings bestowed upon them for granted. They didn't let it get to their heads.

Rather, they continued to do what God commanded them to do in the law of Moses. And they went to the temple to do what the law prescribed knowing others would wrongly judge them. They knew that others would think that Mary had committed a sexually immoral act and would not believe that she conceived a child by the power of the Spirit. Nevertheless, they didn't allow what others wrongly perceived to keep them from obeying God's word.

Listen to what doctor Luke also said in his second book about the early church: *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”* Acts 2:41-42

Beloved, what ought to mark our lives as the people of God, a people who have encountered the amazing grace of Jesus, is devotion to God—devotion to God's word, devotion to God's ordinances, devotion to God's church, and devotion to prayer. As I've said many times, a

devotion to Christ is a devotion to Christians. We are saved by grace. But grace should never be a license to sin or to have a take it or leave it attitude towards the church.

Like a biblical marriage, the church is a covenant community of believers who are devoted to God and to each other and who together fulfill the mission of the church, namely, to make disciples of all nations. And according to the gospel of John, one of the key ways that the world comes to know that we are followers of Christ is through our devotion to one another.

As the apostle John recorded, Jesus said to His disciples: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*
John 13:34-35

The devotion that we are to have for the church, for one another, is not legalistic. That is, it's not motivated by the law of Moses, but by the law of Christ. It's motivated not by law, but by love. And when our devotion to God and His people is rooted in the love of Christ, we don't give up on each other when we don't meet each other's expectations. Rather, we are patient with one another. We don't gossip about one another. If someone offends us, we talk to them not about them. We lovingly confront those in unrepentant sin not to crush them but to restore them.

Too often professing Christians miss encountering the restoring power and presence of God because we give up on each other too easily. We make church into a place that is supposed to meet our self-centered expectations, rather than a place where we sacrificially build each other up in love to the glory of Christ.

The church must be a covenant community where the world sees a love that doesn't run out on each other because Christ's love doesn't run out on us. Yes, there are times when a church or its leaders depart so far from the faith, that we need to separate. But generally speaking God does His best work in our lives when the challenges of

maintaining healthy relationships challenge us to lean hard on Jesus and hence become more like Him.

Now after coming into the temple to offer their sacrifices for purification in keeping with the law, we read beginning in 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, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”* Luke 2:25

Notice that it is said of Simeon that he was a righteous and devout man. Additionally, Luke records that He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and that the Holy Spirit was upon Him.

What’s more, Anna had a similar testimony. We not only learn that she was devout, we’re also given a description of how she demonstrated her devotion to God. Beginning in verse 36 we read: *“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, ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ 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.”* (Luke 2:36-38).

Simeon and Anna were godly people who were wholly given to God. Anna for example was married for only seven years. And after her husband died, although she could have, she never married again. But instead, she served God for decades in the temple with fasting and prayer night and day.

Moreover, not only was she still serving God in the temple in her eighties, she spoke to others about Jesus. This whole-hearted commitment of Simeon and Anna no doubt contributed to their blessed encounter with the incarnate Son of God.

Let me ask you, what are you wholly given and devoted to? Whatever it is that you really live for is what you truly worship. And what you’re most devoted to will shape your life. Are you attempting to do with

your life what Jesus said is impossible to do? The gospel of Matthew records:

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Matthew 6:24

When our loyalties are divided there will be conflicts in our lives between desiring the things of God and desiring the things of this world. The book of James also speaks about the fallout of having this kind of divided mind. He wrote, *“For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”* James 1:7-8

Does devotion to God mean that like Anna you need to spend every waking moment in church serving God in some way? Devotion to God is more about your heart than about what you do. Devotion to God doesn't mean that God wants us all to quit our jobs to be missionaries in the jungles of Ecuador. Devotion to God is about what has your heart today. And whatever it is that has your heart is what you truly worship.

Concerning the sacrificial giving of the churches of Macedonia, the apostle Paul wrote: *“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”* 2 Corinthians 8:3-5

Why were the churches of Macedonia so sacrificially generous with their resources? Because in view of the grace of Christ, who though He was rich became poor so that we through His poverty might become rich, they gave themselves first to the Lord. And because the Lord had their heart, everything they had they held with loose hands.

Remember what Corey Ten Boom said: “I have learned to hold all things loosely, so God will not have to pry them out of my hands.”

“Those who truly worship the Lord, don’t just lift their hands. True worshippers have loose hands.” Tim Delaney

That is, everything they have, their money, their career, their time, their very lives are at God’s disposal. Worship is not being moved by the music on Sunday mornings. Worship is having loose hands that are ready to cheerfully give to God whatever He asks.

Does God have your heart? If he does, then there will be nothing in this world that you would be unwilling to let go in order to please God and serve His cause. And Christians whose hearts are wholly devoted to God—who are wholly available to Him, encounter His power and presence in extraordinary ways.

2. Desire for God

Now the second quality that both Simeon and Anna possessed, which no doubt contributed to their encounter with the Christ child, was desire for God. They both lived their lives with a deep longing in their hearts to see the promise coming of the messiah, the consolation and redeemer of Israel.

Again, we read in verse 25, that in addition to being righteous and devout, Simeon was *waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him*. Notice a similar emphasis concerning Anna in verse 38 where we read that she spoke of Jesus “to all who were *waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*”

“I assume,” one commentator noted, “that Anna herself was among those who were ‘waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.’ And I assume that the reason she spoke to those in particular who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem was that they were open to her testimony about the Christ. So it seems to me that Luke wants to emphasize by this repetition in verses 25 and 38 that what made Simeon and Anna especially fit to recognize and receive the Christ was their longing for God to break into history again to console and redeem his people by sending the Christ” (John Piper).

Concerning this longing for Christ by those who know Him, the author Hebrews confirms, *“So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”* Hebrews 9:28

The New Testament makes clear that one of the great evidences that one truly knows Jesus as Savior and Lord is that like Simeon and Anna, there will be a longing in your heart for the return of Christ.

When Jesus came the first time there were those who rejoiced at His appearing and there were those who rejected Him. When He comes again there will be those who will welcome His appearing with great joy and others who after a period of great tribulation will dread His appearing. What number will you be among?

Now there's another application that can be made here about encountering Jesus' presence and power in our lives today. Three times Luke emphasizes in our text that the Holy Spirit was at work in Simeon who was a devout and righteous man before the Lord.

It was said of Simeon in verse 25 that the Holy Spirit was upon Him. In verse 26 we read that the Holy Spirit revealed that he would not see death until he had seen the promised messiah. And in verse 27 it was by the Holy Spirit that He came into the temple at the precise time Jesus was brought in and he knew at that very moment that the ordinary looking babe was the promised Messiah.

Today, if you're saved, the Holy Spirit lives in you. Do you know that during the earthly ministry of Jesus He said that it would be spiritually more beneficial for us to receive the promise of the Spirit in us than it would be to have His physical presence alongside of us? During His earthly ministry, the physical presence of Jesus could only be at one place at a time. But through the Spirit, we can know His abiding presence at work in us continually. John 14:12-17

For this reason, believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, which means to live in continuous dependence on the influence and control of the Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit to fill us with power so

that we might fulfill the work God is calling us to do. We need, like Simeon and Anna, to be led by the Spirit through doors that provide opportunities for us to share Jesus with others in the power of the Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit to bring us into such an intimate relationship with Jesus that, like Anna, we have the boldness and urgency to share Jesus with those in desperate need of redemption.

When we make time to commune with God in worship based, scripture fed, and Spirit led prayer, the Spirit will hold up Christ's glory before the eyes of our hearts which will shape our deepest longings and desires. The more we know Him the more we will long to know Him and make Him known.

We must immerse ourselves in the word so that we come to know the God of the word. It's been said, the less you read the word, the less you will desire to read it. Conversely, the more you read the word, the more you will desire to read it. So long as we are satisfied with the status quo, we cannot expect to enter into a deeper experience of the power and presence of Jesus in our lives.

3. Dependence upon God

Lastly, Simeon and Anna depended upon God. When Simeon took Jesus into his arms recognizing that He was the promised messiah, he began to praise the Lord! Beginning in verse 28 we read, *“he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”* (Luke 1:28-32).

Simeon praised God for who Jesus is and for what He was born to do. He praised God that Jesus was both the glory (hope) of Israel and the light of the gentiles. What a marvelous thing to say in the Jewish temple.

Jesus came into the world to be the saving light of all people sitting in darkness. He took on flesh to live a righteous life so that in the end He could plead guilty for us all.

Notice also that in verses 34-35, Simeon prophesied to Mary that although Jesus came to be a deliverer for all people, there would be those who would not see and depend on Him as a deliverer, but would in fact oppose Him. While blessing them, Simeon prophesied:

"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 2:34-35

The light of Jesus is truly a sign that reveals the evil in our hearts which often opposes the light. The light of His glory not only saves us, it judges us. To be saved we must bow before Christ as savior and judge. Many want Jesus as savior but they don't want Him to be Lord and Judge. Therefore they oppose and reject Him.

Kent Hughes put it this way: "When people truly encounter Christ... Human goodness is seen as filthy rags. Unable or unwilling to handle the truth, we naturally oppose Christ's work. But when we fall before him in humiliation, we receive grace and new life. Jesus always knocks us down so he can pick us up." Hughes

When Christ's light shines on people lives, some will reject Him and some will receive Him as Lord and Savior. In light of this, Simeon said to Mary in verse 35, *"(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)"*

Here Simeon was prophesying of the anguish that Mary would experience as she witnessed the son of God, born of her womb, being crucified on a cross by and for sinful people. Again, this would be the case because many rejected His sin exposing light.

Where do you fall in relation to all of Simeon's prophesies that have been fulfilled just as he told them? Are you among the number that

reject Him or are you of the number that have recognized and received Jesus as savior and Lord of life?

What has your response to the light of Jesus revealed about your heart towards Him? There's no neutral ground, you're either for Him or against Him. You've either held Him up as lord of your life, or you've rejected Him because you want to be lord of your own life. True peace comes only to those who have given the Prince of Peace His rightful place on the throne of their hearts.

Like Simeon, have you held up Jesus in your hands metaphorically and placed your faith in Him as your redeemer and King and received the peace that only He can give? Again, "True peace comes only when we, like Simeon, understand that salvation is Jesus Christ plus nothing—and rest our souls in him alone." Hughes

But in addition to resting our souls in Christ alone for salvation, to know His securing peace in our every day lives we must live a life of radical dependence. Let me reiterate, the other quality that really stands out about Anna and no doubt was a quality that Simeon possessed, was radical dependence on God demonstrated by her radical prayer life. In verse 37 we read this about Anna, who was a widow in her eighties, "*She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.*"

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. People who know much peace spend much time seeking the one who is our peace.

There is no doubt the qualities that Simeon and Anna possessed—their devotion to God, their desire and longing to see Jesus, and their dependence on God demonstrated by persistent prayer got the attention of the Lord. Consequently, He blessed them with the greatest gift of all, a soul thrilling encounter with Jesus.

Although no one will ever encounter the child-messiah again, we can know the crucified, risen Savior in a way that, like Simeon and Anna, we discover what our souls have been longing for all our lives. We can

know the presence of Jesus in a way that brings peace to our hearts despite the storms that may be raging around us. We can encounter His Holy presence and know it is well with our souls.

Seeing Him as He longs for us to see Him gives us both a real sense of the gravity of sin, and a deep gratitude for His saving grace which in turn produces in us an urgency to share with others the redemption that is found in Christ alone.

Conclusion

Do you desire to know the presence, power, and peace of Jesus in your life? Receive the Prince of Peace as Savior and Lord. If you have, examine the level of your devotion to God. Does God really have your heart or is there something that God is asking you for but you won't surrender it, something that you've allowed to compete for the deepest affections of your heart?

Remember, we can't be committed to God without being committed to each other. Are you content with just visiting the church or do you desire to be a committed servant of God's people? Have you obeyed the Lord in baptism?

If we are truly devoted to God and desiring for Him to do in us what only He can do, then we must be a praying people, and a praying church. Let's give ourselves to our 21 days of prayer and fasting. Let's pray now. Let ask for what our souls are longing for, namely for the Prince of Peace to rule in our hearts. Let's pray what devoted disciples pray, "Lead me Lord, I will follow."

Give Jesus, who gave His all for you, His rightful place on the throne of your heart. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.