

ADVENT: WEEK THREE

day 19

Joy Is Our Strength

Luke 2:25-31, 36-38



These are the only moments we get to see from the lives of Simeon and Anna, but they both reveal to us the truth that JOY is our strength. Before we examine this story, let's take a look at Nehemiah chapter 8. God's people hear the Book of the Law of God for the first time in a long time, and "the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. And Nehemiah continued, 'Go and celebrate...This is a sacred day before the Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!'" I had heard that verse for many years before I started to take it seriously. If His JOY is my strength, it must be important for me to have it. But how do I get and maintain this source of strength? Both the lives of Simeon and Anna demonstrate how to cultivate this life-strengthening joy. Simeon lived in close contact with God and the Holy Spirit. Had he not responded to Holy Spirit guiding him to the temple that day, he would have missed the fulfillment of the promise that Holy Spirit had given to him. Rather than growing frustrated or impatient in the waiting, we see a man moved by great love and joy to praise his heavenly Father. Russ Ramsey writes, "Simeon was a case study in the benefits of careful examination and devotion to the Word of God...He knew how to want what God had promised. He knew how to delight in God's goodness. And he knew how to wait." I love that phrase, "he knew how to want what God had promised." We can all live with greater joy because of the promise of heaven alone. Knowing that eternal existence in the presence of God awaits each one of us who has said YES to Christ's salvation should fill us with deep longing for more of God now, in the waiting. Anna had been serving God night and day for 84 years through prayer and fasting. We learn that she is of the tribe of Asher. Asher was one of Leah's sons; upon his birth, she says, "What joy is mine!" Her son's name means "happy." This is the line of Anna, the woman who bursts into a great chorus of praise as she recognizes her Messiah! God had been planning this story from the beginning, including Anna's specific role. Rather than becoming bitter over her status as a widow or feeling angry with God for not leading His people into redemption sooner, she throws herself into the things of God.

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She stands out in her purity, her persistence, and her prayerfulness. And she looks for others who share her longing in order to give them hope in the waiting—the Messiah has arrived! Like the shepherds, Anna continues to share the experiences that changed her life with others in the hopes of spreading the lifestyle of joy to everyone else living in desperate need of a source of true fulfillment for their longings. Both Simeon and Anna recognized the symbiotic relationship between joy and the practices of prayer and praise. When we choose joy, we find it easier to communicate with the Father through prayer and praise. When we choose to pray and praise, we find our joy tanks filled again and again as we focus our minds on the only one who can satisfy our longings. Simeon and Anna realized that the joy of God’s people is not determined by their struggles but by their future destiny. The joy they each developed strengthened them as they waited expectantly for the Lord to fulfill His promises to them. Pay close attention to that word DEVELOPED. It did not happen by wishful thinking or perfect circumstances. They had to work for it by creating habits of continually turning to the Lord, regardless of how they felt or what they experienced. Turning to the Lord in every season of life is key in living joy-filled lives.

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prayer:



Father, thank You for the amazing examples of faithfulness found in Your servants Simeon and Anna. This Christmas, help us to grow in our faithfulness to give time to be in Your presence and in Your Word. Help us to be purposeful and joyful in our worship, especially in the hardest seasons of life. We want to wait for Your return with joyful expectation; we want You to return to a faithful, vibrant Bride full of love for You!

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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