

**“...And So We Wait...” (Luke 2:25-38)**

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**Brier Creek / Chapel Hill / Blue Ridge (Saturday only)**

Happy Thanksgiving weekend, Summit Church! My name is Danny Franks, and I'm one of the pastors here at the Summit. Let me acknowledge the obvious from the beginning: no, Pastor J.D. is not preaching this weekend, and yes, in true Thanksgiving fashion, you are getting leftovers. Consider me the Cool Whip container of green bean casserole at the back of your fridge.

Thanksgiving week is interesting, isn't it? Only in America have we figured out how to be grateful for stretchy pants on Thursday, punch people in the throat for a flat screen TV on Friday, and flip our entire house to decorate for Christmas on Saturday. And that's the weird part about Thanksgiving week: we tend to hit the reset button really quickly once Thursday is over with, don't we? It's like we have to get to the end of being grateful before we can officially signal the beginning of consumerism Super Bowl. After Thanksgiving the tree can go up and the presents can be wrapped and the lights can be strung and you can replace all your pumpkin spice stuff with peppermint mocha stuff. Because once Thanksgiving ends, the only thing that stands between us and Christmas is just...the waiting.

Let's talk about waiting for Christmas. Quick straw poll: show of hands, how many you can't stand to wait on Christmas? How many of you as kids felt like it took forever? How many of you secretly unwrapped and rewrapped your presents?

We're bad at waiting as kids. And I think in some ways, that's a foreshadowing to how bad we tend to be at waiting as adults. Because if we're honest today, that's where some of us

are. But we're not necessarily waiting on Christmas. We're not waiting with gleeful anticipation of what we hope we'll get under the tree. No, for some of us, we know that there is a darker side to Christmas. For some, it's the hardest time of year. Maybe for you it's just this year, maybe it's for so many years you can't count and you can't remember a time when "waiting" had a positive payoff.

Maybe you're here today and you're waiting on a diagnosis. Just...*waiting*. You're waiting on *that* phone call. Just...*waiting*. You're waiting on healing. Waiting on a relationship to start or on one to stop. Waiting on her to walk back through the door. Waiting on a colorful baby bed in a long-completed nursery to be filled. Just...*waiting*. Waiting on the addiction to be broken or the pain to heal or the other shoe to drop. Waiting on God to actually show up in your life and bring you the joy and fulfillment that you were promised by calling Jesus your Savior. Or maybe you can't even pinpoint what you're waiting on, you just know you haven't found it yet. You just have this deep, numbing, hard-to-put-your-finger-on-it angst.

Waiting can be hard, because in waiting, what we want to happen just hasn't happened yet. And waiting can *especially* be hard at Christmas, when we're surrounded by people singing *Joy to the World* and wearing festive sweaters and acting like they don't have a care in the universe.

In Luke chapter two, there's a Christmas story for those who wait. It's not the Luke 2 Christmas story most of us are familiar with. Can I submit to you that maybe today, this is your Christmas story? This is the joy for your world?

Let me set the scene for what we are about to read. This story takes place exactly 40 days after Jesus was born in that Bethlehem manger. If we're assuming Jesus was born on December 25, this is February 3. He's five and a half weeks

old. He's holding his head up, he's beginning to smile, and he's getting between four and six hours of sleep a night, and the Babywise schedule is kicking in, so Mary and Joseph are feeling a little more human than they've felt in a while.

And because Mary and Joseph are good Jewish parents and Jesus is a good Jewish baby, they are following good Jewish laws like good Jews do. The law said that boy babies had to be circumcised at 8 days old. They'd done that. And then the law said that 33 days later, the mother of a boy baby had to present herself at the temple in order to complete her purification process. If mom and dad were financially well off, they'd present a lamb to the priest for sacrifice. But if they were dirt poor - and Mary and Joseph definitely were - they would present two turtledoves or two pigeons for sacrifice. Let's get into it in Luke 2:22:

**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."** and a partridge in a pear tree.

This is a little foreign to us, but this was just a part of life for Mary and Joseph. They grew up in a culture of circumcision on the eighth day and purification rites on the 40th day. Jesus was probably one of a half-dozen babies that showed up at the temple that week. There was nothing special about what we see here.

Except.

Except there was someone *waiting* for them to arrive. There was someone *watching* for Jesus. There was someone for whom this was no ordinary baby and this was no ordinary trip to the temple and this was far far away from an ordinary day. But what I want you to hear is that these were completely ordinary people who were doing the waiting. They were largely obscure and unknown. They were like us, and that should give us hope.

First, there was **Simeon**. We don't know a lot about Simeon, and this is the one and only time he shows up in all of scripture. But here's what we do know (v. 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. 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."**

Now, the Bible doesn't say that Simeon is old, but I think it's safe to assume he probably is. Can you imagine what this moment looked like? The Bible says he came in the Spirit into the temple. He was home minding his own business and the Holy Spirit gut-punched him and said "*Get up.*" And he went to the temple and out of all the families and all the babies, the Spirit whispered into his ear, "*There he is.*" And can you

imagine what that scene looked like? This old man first of all had to convince two brand-new and probably overprotective parents to let him unbuckle Jesus out of his car seat and pick him up. They didn't know if he was a crackpot or a kidnapper, and even more frightening, they didn't even know if he'd washed his hands. But somehow he got Jesus in his arms, and tears formed in the corners of his eyes, and they tracked down the creases in his leathery skin, and they splashed into his beard. And with his head pointed towards heaven and his eyes squinted shut, he said **"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation."** Why? Because Simeon had spent a lifetime *waiting* on someone. Like most Jews of his day, he was waiting on a political solution to a national problem. In his mind, the Messiah in his arms was going to be that political fix.

We'll come back to Simeon in a minute. There was another one waiting. Her name was **Anna**. We meet her if we skip down to verse 36:

***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.***

Just like Simeon, we don't know a lot about Anna, and like Simeon this is the only story she's featured in. The Bible says she was advanced in years, which is a first century diplomatic way of saying, "She's old as dirt." She was married for seven years and then widowed, and at some point she goes to the temple and never leaves. She likely had an apartment somewhere in the complex and she spent every waking moment worshiping and fasting and praying. And what was she worshiping and fasting and praying for? Why was she

doing that? Because she too was waiting. She was waiting on the Messiah to come. Waiting on Israel to be redeemed. She was waiting on the day when this couple would bring this baby into this temple and with her own eyes she could see what God had promised and all of her hardship and all of her trials had been worth it. Think about her life. She was married for *seven years* and then widowed for almost *seven decades*. No fifteen year old girl dreams of her life and says, "That's what I want. I'm signing up for that!" This woman who had likely never held a baby of her own was now looking into the eyes of the baby who was the savior of the world.

Simeon and Anna waited. No, they weren't waiting on a phone call or a health fix or a relational breakthrough. They were waiting on what God had promised to Israel for generations and generations. They knew the stories. They had heard the prophecies. And they knew that one day a redeemer would come. We're told that Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit he wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah. We don't know if Anna had that same promise, so we can assume that for all she knew, she could have risked her entire life waiting and never actually see the Messiah with her own eyes. But through faith, she waited. Through faith, Simeon waited. And through faith today, I think *their* story tells us how we can wait better in *our* stories.

There are **Four ways Simeon and Anna teach us how to wait:**

### **1. We wait actively**

In our society, *waiting* gets a bad rap, because *waiting* seems so passive, doesn't it? We don't really *do* anything while we wait. We're *waiting on the acceptance letter* so we compulsively check the mailbox. We're *waiting on the diagnosis* so we just sit and stare at the phone and kill

ourselves with worry. We're *waiting on the promotion* so we put everything else on hold until we get the answer from our boss. We associate *waiting* with helplessness, and helplessness is a bad thing.

But the Bible doesn't teach passivity in waiting. One of my favorite passages in all of scripture is Psalm 37, where David says this:

**Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. (Psalm 37:3-5, NASB)**

Here's what I love about this passage: it teaches us that we can wait **actively**. Look at the words David uses: **trust, cultivate, delight, commit, trust**. Who is the object of our trust? [the Lord] What is our role? [we trust actively and we wait actively]. While we are trusting in the Lord, we are doing good. While we are dwelling in the land, we are cultivating faithfulness. If we are waiting on the Lord to act, he's asking us to actively wait.

It's important to note that Simeon and Anna weren't being sedate senior citizens, sharing outdated memes on Facebook and playing shuffleboard down at the Moose Lodge. They hadn't spent a lifetime twiddling their thumbs and half-heartedly hoping that the Messiah would show up. No, they were praying for, fasting over, and anticipating Jesus. They woke, scarfed down their tapioca pudding and got to work. They were eagerly searching and patiently waiting. They were working while they were waiting. They were waiting by working. They were actively waiting on God but also actively resting in the fact that God would work.

Can I ask again, how good are you at waiting? I'll speak for myself. This time of year a lot of churches observe Advent. Now I grew up in a Baptist church that didn't observe Advent as an annual practice. That was something the Presbyterians did, but the Presbyterians also kept their wine bottles on the kitchen counter where everybody could see 'em, so we didn't trust them. But a few years ago as a grown up Baptist kid, I decided Advent was something our family should try. And by the way, if you're not familiar, the word *Advent* comes from a Latin word that means *coming*. As in, future tense, show-up-sometime-a-while-from-now *coming*. As in, *for now, we wait*.

And so we tried to follow the Advent plan as a family, as a pastor's family, as a pastor-at-the-Summit-Church's-family...and it failed spectacularly. My older kids were bored because I was trying to make the devotions interesting for our youngest kid, and my youngest kid didn't find anything interesting except making inappropriate comments and doing flips throughout the devotional, and so finally I just got ticked off and got it over with it so I could put her to bed and get back to watching Netflix. It was a 25 day Advent plan teaching us how to wait, and I couldn't even get through day 1.

I don't wait well. And maybe you don't either. And in most sermons that you'll hear a few weeks prior to Christmas, this is the point where you expect me to say something like this: *carve out some time to get some hot chocolate and sit in front of the fireplace and meditate on your nativity scene and ponder the real reason for the season. Put away all electronic devices and gift wrapping and holiday parties and instead of incessantly doing, just try being. Be in the presence of Jesus and reflect on what this Christmas means.*

Listen, there's nothing wrong with that. And yes, we could all use some downtime around Christmas to reflect on the incarnation. But this is not something we limit to December. Waiting actively is a year-round discipline.

Sometimes waiting actively means we kill activity, but sometimes waiting actively means we discipline ourselves to see what is important. Here's an important question: **How do your daily habits prove or disprove your dependence on Jesus?** If you aren't actively seeking him January through November, don't expect him to show up under your Christmas tree in December while you're staring at the fireplace.

If you are in the middle of a painful waiting period, how are you proving or disproving your dependence on Jesus? Are you running to him or from him? Are you boldly coming before his throne of grace or are you shrinking back in fear of punishment? Waiting actively doesn't mean we are helpless...it means we are focusing our attention on the one who can actually help us! Are you actively looking for how God's promises apply to your situation?

## **2. We wait openly**

I think it's entirely possible that we expect God to be completely predictable. I think it's possible that when God moves, we can miss it.

Here's something that I found fascinating during my study of this passage, and full disclosure: I don't have an answer. I just want to make you wonder about it, too. From the Old Testament prophecies, we know that Israel expected Jesus to come as a baby. Genesis 12 said that the Messiah would be born from Abraham's lineage. 2 Samuel said that he would be a descendant of David. Isaiah 7 said he'd be born of a virgin, Isaiah 9 promises *unto us a child is born and unto us a son is*

*given*. Micah 5 says that he'll be born in Bethlehem. But what we don't know is who the nation of Israel expected to meet when the Messiah first came on the scene. Did they actually expect *8 pounds 6 ounces newborn infant Jesus, don't even know a word yet*, or did they expect that the first time they saw the Messiah he'd be a full grown adult? I don't think we have a clear answer to that in scripture, and I certainly don't know what Simeon or Anna expected at the temple that day.

Okay, let's say they did expect 8 pounds 6 ounces newborn infant Jesus. Did they expect the redeemer of all of Israel to be the son of peasants who couldn't even afford a proper sacrifice? Even if he's a baby king, he's still a king, right? So shouldn't he be rolling up to the temple in an Infiniti QX60 with an on-board infotainment system, outstanding fuel economy, a new, more powerful standard V6 engine, and an optional hands-free liftgate? Shouldn't they have pulled him out of his Joovy car seat and put him in his Uppababy stroller while Mary carried all of his baby gear in her Petunia Picklebottom diaper bag? Isn't that how we'd expect an infant king to arrive?

That's not what Simeon saw. He saw two kids who still smelled like a stable. Jesus' swaddling clothes may have still had traces of hay and donkey hair. Joseph and Mary were scrounging change just to come up with the fee for the poor people's version of a sacrifice. And sure, Jesus was probably a cute baby, but he wasn't an *especially* cute baby. Isaiah 53 said there was no special beauty or form that would make us notice him.

In other words, I wonder if what Simeon and Anna were waiting for is what Simeon and Anna were given.

Let's unpack this a little further. Look at what Simeon says in v 30:

**“...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.”**

It's really easy for us to miss what just happened here. Some of this makes sense to us: **my eyes have seen your salvation**. I think we can agree that Jesus is salvation. Salvation wasn't just an act that he performed on the cross, *salvation was Jesus. Salvation was embodied in a person.* Then we see that Jesus was given **for glory to your people Israel**. That makes sense. If Israel is God's chosen people, then the coming of Jesus means the glory of Israel. The redeemer has come to liberate the Jewish nation.

But here's the problem with Simeon's declaration. He says that Jesus will be **a light for revelation to the Gentiles**. Again, it's easy to gloss over this. The Gentiles were not friends of the Jews. For generations as far back as they could remember, the Jews had been under the thumb of Gentiles, and they had been waiting on the Messiah to free them from the Gentiles.

So when Simeon says that Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles, I have to assume it caught other people's attention. After all, if we hate the Gentiles, why do we want the Gentiles to have the light of revelation? Don't we want them to suffer the same way we have?

But it gets even worse. Simeon looks straight at Mary: this brand new mama who still has the promises of Gabriel and the songs of the angelic choir and the questions of shepherds ringing in her ears - and he adds to the uncertainty of what Jesus represents. V. 34

**“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.”**

Simeon says that Jesus is appointed **for the fall and rising of many in Israel**. Simply put, some of the Jews will embrace Jesus and some will reject him. Just because Jesus is a redeemer doesn't mean that he is a uniter. He said about himself “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” In other words, the Messiah that the Jews are expecting is not the Messiah that all Jews will accept when he finally arrives.

Listen, you need to hear this: this story of the first Christmas isn't a story of unbridled happiness and a cute little baby and a Thomas Kinkadee stable that smells like a cranberry peppermint Yankee Candle. The story of the first Christmas is the story of God bringing hope into a very dark and messed up world. Jesus didn't come in a form that many people expected. His redemption wasn't going to look as neat and clean as a lot of people thought. He was going to divide Israel down the middle and then graft in Israel's sworn enemies.

So let me ask you: **What if God answers your prayers in a way that is different than you thought? Do you want the answer to prayer, or do you want the One you're praying to?**

Again, I think it's possible that when God moves, we can miss it. There were dozens - maybe hundreds - of people at the temple that day. There were people there who were also waiting on the Messiah. But Simeon and Anna were the only two who actually saw him. Why? Because they refused for their God to be safe. There was room in their depiction of the Messiah for God to completely surprise them. And **if there's not room in our lives for God to surprise us, maybe it's**

**not God that we're worshipping**, but some projection of God that we've created in our own minds.

If you are in the middle of waiting today, maybe you think that God has totally abandoned you, and that's *why* you don't have answers. That's *why* you're suffering. That's *why* you are in pain. Scripture tells us that the Messiah is already here, and that means God has not - *cannot* abandon you. He is in the middle of your waiting. Psalm 73:28: "as for me, the nearness of God is my good, I have made the Lord God my refuge." Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 145:18: "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth."

Jesus is in the middle of your waiting. Let's not make the mistake of only seeing him in the ways that we can expect or predict.

### **3. We wait generously**

I said a moment ago that while there were a lot of people at the Temple, only Simeon and Anna actually saw Jesus for who he was. And that's true. At least at first, it's true. Because I don't think we give Anna the credit she deserves in this story. We know Anna was "advanced in years." We know she was widowed. We know she was a prophetess and that she lived at the temple and that she'd worshipped and fasted and prayed for decades. But Anna was also outrageously generous with the message of the Messiah.

What we have to remember is that Jesus' moment of redemption was still to come. The cross was still 33 years away. And just as Anna had lived her 84 years in faith in what she had not seen, *she still was operating on faith*. She didn't exactly know *how* God was going to redeem Israel through this

baby. She didn't know about the cross. She didn't know about the empty tomb. But she trusted that the Messiah had come. She believed that the Savior of Israel was in her midst.

And so what was the reaction of one who had spent her life waiting? How did Anna handle this new revelation? We see it in v. 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.***

Anna wasn't content to sit on the information she had. She got feisty. She had a *well glory* moment. She spoke about Jesus to all who were waiting for Jerusalem's redemption. She was shuffling her 84 year old self all over the temple complex, pointing people back to the baby over by the turtledove kiosk, yelling, "*He's here! That's him! That's exactly who you've been waiting for! He's right there! Do you see him? Israel's hope has come!*"

Once Anna saw Jesus, the thing she was compelled to do was to speak about Jesus. So let me ask, are you a pre-Jesus Anna or a post-Jesus Anna?

Here's why this is important: there is somebody else in your orbit who is also waiting. They're also in pain. They're also in the middle of a lot of uncertainty. They're looking for hope and they don't know how to find it. They're searching for peace and it seems just out of their grasp. They're standing in the shadow of the temple and they haven't yet seen Jesus. And maybe...just maybe...it's *your* wonder and amazement at the Savior that will be the tipping point to end their waiting and suffering.

As we say here a lot, people who have been given much can't help but give much. People who have received grace can't help but give grace. And people who have really seen Jesus can't help but to talk about him. Somebody around you needs the hope of the gospel. Someone at your workplace needs to know your source of hope. Someone in your family needs to know that the Messiah has come. When Jesus comes, the message is no longer *You need to wait*. The message is *You are sent*.

### **Who needs you to *live* the gospel so they can see the gospel?**

Over the next few weeks you are going to have multiple opportunities to share the message of Jesus. You have chances to tell friends and neighbors and co-workers and family members that Jesus isn't just some cuddly Christmas story, he brings real hope for real problems in today's real world. Do you see yourself as Anna? Can you say that you are living a "sent" life? Are you shuffling as fast as you can around the temple to grab people by the collar and say "There he is! He's here!"

### **4. We wait personally**

If this is to you just another sermon that's sandwiched between Thanksgiving and Christmas...if you've been humoring me and listening just because you're in town visiting relatives and didn't have anything better to do...if maybe you're the one who has been standing in the presence of Jesus but you've never actually seen Jesus...then this last point is the most vital one for you today. This is the entire reason you're here. One of the names given to Jesus is *Immanuel*. That means "God with us." It's not "God with them" or "God with the religious zealots" or "God with my churchgoing grandma" or "God with me when I finally get around to it someday." No, Jesus is *God with us*. He

came for us. He lived for us. He bled for us. He died for us. The incarnation means that Jesus took on flesh and came to live among us so that we could be saved. And that's not just a message for other people in this room. That's a message for you.

Let's go back to Simeon for a moment. Old, haggard Simeon. Wrinkly, bearded Simeon. Simeon with huge calloused hands holding onto a tiny baby, with his tears splashing onto baby Jesus' face. Look at what he says:

**Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.**

Translated? Simeon says, "I can die a happy man now." He could go in peace, because he had received what God had promised. He met Jesus. He knew the Messiah. His faith had become sight.

May I ask you: what is your "depart in peace" moment? What is the thing that you are waiting for? What is it that you are looking to to fulfill your deepest desires? To get rid of the pain? To give you hope?

If it's anything other than Jesus, then I'd humbly suggest that you'll never find peace. In our culture there are a lot of things that people are living for, but at the end of the day what we think will be our "depart in peace" moment doesn't actually end in peace. Every time we think we've found it, we realize it just points to another need later on. If you're looking for a replacement for God, an idea of God, a projection of God, a small dose of God, *you can't actually get God*. If you like the idea of Jesus but don't actually have any desire to submit your life to him, you may not actually know who he is. The people of Israel were coming to the temple that day to atone for their

sins and make sacrifices, and *the once-and-for-all sacrificial lamb came rolling up in a stroller*. Mary and Joseph were offering their two turtledoves to the priest, who would slaughter the birds, sprinkle their blood on the altar, and roll their sins forward for another year.

But that sacrificial system was incomplete. It was a foreshadowing of the entire reason that Jesus came. Because three decades later it would be Jesus who was slaughtered. It would be his blood that was spilled. But rather than rolling our sins forward, he would take them onto himself. He would embody all of our sin and our shame. He would become the thief, the liar, the abuser, the adulterer, the rejected, the outcast. He would take every part of us and give us every part of himself. He would give himself as the savior of the world, he would provide salvation as a free gift for any who wanted to receive it, he would make it possible for us to find peace with God and peace with each other and even peace on earth. And...he's a gift that none of us have to wait on. He is available to us right here, right now.

See, when we know Jesus personally, that gives us the strength to wait through whatever circumstance we're in. When we know Jesus, we have our "depart in peace" moment. But for you I'd ask, is that true for you? **What is your "depart in peace" moment? Is it Jesus? Is he enough for you?**

When we look at the story of Simeon and Anna, we get the sense that the one thing that Simeon needed in his life was to *see* Jesus. The one thing that Anna was compelled to do is to *speak about* Jesus. And really, is there anything outside of those two things that we really need?

He's in the waiting. He's here with you in your trial. He's come to be God with us so that you can have joy in your world and

peace on earth. Do you see him? Can you see him? Do you know him? He's here. He's here.

Let's pray.