

Jan 8th 2012 "Worth Waiting For" Luke 2:22-35—Simeon

The story of Simeon that we read today stands in Luke's Gospel as a reality check as far as the birth of Jesus is concerned. Up to this point Luke has written about the angelic announcements of the coming Saviour and Lord and it's all been so exciting and joyous. The baby Jesus has been born, the shepherds have visited him, the family have settled into more permanent lodgings in Bethlehem and, 40 days after his birth the small family has arrived at the Temple in Jerusalem ready to present their son to the Lord.

It is then that they meet Simeon and it is his God given task to complete the message that the angels had begun. So he starts with a song of praise (2:29-32)

***²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.***

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel."

This is heartwarming stuff and we are told that Joseph and Mary marvel at what is said about Jesus. It confirms the angels message about Him as the promised delivered for Jews and Gentiles and as the one who will bring glory to His Jewish heritage. But Simeon has more to add, and it's then that the mood changes—

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

For the first time God reveals the suffering and division that is to come. That not all people will benefit from the coming of Jesus for some will reject Him. Will turn against Him. And will treat Him in such a way that the suffering for Mary will be like a dagger plunged into her heart. The blessed end result of the Christmas story will be the rising to a place of glorious deliverance for many—not for all by any means—but for many. Yet between Christmas and that triumphant conclusion lays Easter. Something that Luke did not omit and that we must never forget in our presentation of the Christmas story.

But another thing that we cannot fail to see in this account is the example of spiritual perseverance that Simeon gives us.

He is described as a righteous or good, Godly man who was also devout, so it comes as no shock for us to find him in the Temple. But Simeon is also intensely involved in his Faith. He feels deeply about the things of God and he has this great desire to see his Nation living under God's Kingship.

He knew from his study of the Scriptures that God had promised salvation for His people through the coming of a Messiah, and he was far from alone in knowing that. There were many in Jerusalem who knew all about the coming one, chosen by God.

But whereas many of them just had head knowledge of the facts Simeon had heart knowledge too. He yearned in his heart for salvation to come, and for that salvation he had prayed persistently for many years, for now it seems that he is old.

But because his heart was soft towards God and because he craved so much the touch of God on His nation, God the Holy Spirit had come close to him and lovingly shown him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. God's chosen Messiah.

We are not told how many years before this incident that this had happened, but there is the sense that Simeon had been waiting a long time for that fulfillment. But never once does it seem that he stopped praying for, or looking for God's promised intervention, because he knew that it was Well Worth Waiting For.

v25 says that he 'was waiting for the consolation of Israel' where consolation means a comforting for the Nation as her Messiah comes. But it's the Greek word for waiting that contains the most meaning because it means to wait for expectantly. It was well worth waiting for because he knew in his heart that it would happen. He knew that he would see the Messiah before he died. And he was so in tune with God the Holy Spirit that when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the Temple he was there to recognize and declare this baby, who was less than two months old, as the promised Messiah.

Now that is spiritual perseverance with all the blessings that go with it and it is as possible for every believer now as it was for Simeon then. Even more

so; for if we are in Christ then within us God the Holy Spirit dwells. He doesn't just come upon us as he did upon Simeon but He lives within us. So we too can know God's heart as Simeon knew it, and yearn for God's intervention in our homes, community, families, Nation. But too often we don't, because so much of our knowledge of what God wants to do stays in our head, and doesn't reside in our hearts.

If it did we would be like Simeon craving for God to do something big, and praying for Him to do it before we died. We would be committed to praying and pleading with Him every day until we too felt the Holy Spirit saying, yes, it will happen; and you will witness it.

Some years ago the phrase "Bucket List", relating to physical things a person wanted to see or do before they died, was coined. When we were on holiday in Singapore some time ago we were at the zoo and Judy was asked by an elderly man to take a picture of him as he rode an elephant, because that was something on his 'bucket list'.

Simeon had a spiritual bucket list and it was a yearning to see God's intervention before he died. A prayer that he was believing in God to answer. And in that he stood apart from the crowd and God blessed him accordingly.

What about you? Are you courageous enough in Christ to have a spiritual bucket list? To be seriously and zealously trusting God for something that will be well worth waiting for?

The Apostle Paul did. Speaking to the Christians in Rome he writes in Romans 15:20

²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

And then a little later he writes in v28

²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.

Paul's desire was to preach the Gospel in places where it had not been preached before. That was on his list of things he wanted to see God do through Him before he died. My list—your list—will of course be very

different to Paul's, or Simeon's, or each others. Each of us should have things which are personal to us that we want to achieve for God or to see God achieve before He takes us home or returns in glory.

It may be to see a family member or family friend come to know the Lord. To go on a mission trip or to become a street chaplain. To do a course at a Bible College or to reach out in some way to the suffering, abused, oppressed in our society.

If we are willing to accept it God will lay something on our heart or bring to the fore a desire that has already been there for some time. That's the way I believe that God worked with Simeon. And as Simeon persevered in prayer so God fueled the desire in his heart, and God the Holy Spirit gave him the deep assurance that it would happen so that Simeon would not despair and give up. And God will do the same with us—that's the exciting thing about it.

Then, in God's timing, the moment came when what Simeon desired happened. He was old—approaching the end of his life, but God had something that only he could do. And it was at that point that he willingly did it. He made himself available

And in the end that's all God wants from each of His children. To want to be used by Him while we have breath with a willingness that whatever our age or situation, to always be available. At the beginning of 2012 will you join me in making that commitment anew to our Lord—to our Redeemer.