

**Luke 2:25-38 New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss[a] your servant in peace.

<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

<sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. <sup>38</sup> Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

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*Precious Saviour we pray that as we study your Word this morning that you will open our eyes to behold the wonders of Your Word.*

In 2007 a film came out called 'The Bucket List'. This film is an American comedy-drama film starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. The main plot follows two terminally ill men on a road trip with a wish list of things to do before they "kicked the bucket".

Yearning for some experience or someone that will make life fulfilling for you before time runs out is nothing new. You sometimes hear people say that if only some specific thing happened then they could 'die happy'. I suppose it's a good question to ask ourselves, that if this was our last day on Earth, would we be satisfied with our life. Was there something that we had wanted to achieve that was not done?

Simeon had one special item in his bucket list it was to see God's promise of a Messiah fulfilled before he died.

The promise of the Messiah goes back as far as the Garden of Eden when God spoke to serpent declaring that the 'seed of the woman' i.e. Eve, would bruise Satan's head. These words in Genesis are sometimes called the 'first gospel' because they promise the coming one whom we know to be the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.

In the centuries that followed the Jewish people were conquered and dominated by one empire after another, usually because they had turned away from God. And as the years passed they began to lose hope in the promised Messiah proclaimed by the prophets. Their hopes faded and soon there were only a few who remembered what they hoped for and dreamed about. This faithful remnant refused to give up hope and continued to watch faithfully and pray, waiting for the long-promised redemption.

In this group was Simeon. Simeon was not a priest, or anyone of status, but he was a servant of God living in anticipation of God's redemption of Israel. We are told that he was a devout and righteous man and his life satisfaction was linked with the promise he had received from the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah before he died. He was apparently in the twilight of his life and he had this one item, this promise, in his bucket list. Given that the Holy Spirit had given him this promise It seems reasonable that Simeon would have shared it with others of the godly remnant at the temple. People like Anna, who walked up 'in that instant' and joined the celebration.

This encounter with Simeon and with Anna should not be seen as coincidental. It was not something that happened by chance. Had those in Jerusalem heard of the encounter the shepherds had with the new-born Christ? Possibly, but even though Bethlehem was only about 9km from Jerusalem communication in those days was not like today. And if they had heard the message of the shepherds would they have believed them? Society and rabbinic Jews despised shepherding and looked at shepherds with disdain. To many they were considered outcasts because shepherds were uneducated, especially in Mosaic Law and were considered a lower class of Israelite. They were ceremonially unclean. It is said that people would not buy anything from a shepherd because it was possibly stolen.

It would have been over a month in time since the shepherds had gone to see the baby Jesus. We can know this because in those times the purification ceremony of the firstborn male was not performed until the child was 40 days old. This was when Mary was declared to be ceremonially clean again.

Why 40 days? In those days children were not delivered in the sterile environment we know today they were usually delivered at home where the conditions were less than sanitary. The floors were probably dirt and farm animals commonly shared the space. When we were in Nazareth in August we went into a recreated village as it would have been in the time of Jesus. It was very Spartan, cramped and nothing like the glory that Jesus would have experienced in heaven. This village was recreated only using the tools that were available in



those times but also only using the same building methods. What really struck me when I saw this room is that Jesus gave up all the unimaginable glories of heaven to come and live in a house like this. Why? Because He loves us.

The water used to cleanse a baby would be regarded today as polluted and the cloths used to wrap the child would have been washed with the same water. It has been estimated that the infant mortality rate in those days could have been as high as 90%. Therefore, if a child had survived the first 30-40 days it was surmised that there was a good chance they would grow into adulthood. Therefore, the presentation of the firstborn male child was delayed for this period of time.

Simeon and Anna had both been led by the Holy Spirit to be there that day and at that time. With God there are no 'accidental' encounters. So what was God's purpose for Simeon and Anna to be there that day? Certainly it was to fulfil the promise to Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died, but importantly it was an encounter intended to encourage these humble parents in their mission in raising this special child, to encourage them and prepare them for what lay ahead. One can only imagine the impact that the responses from

Simeon and Anna had on Mary and Joseph. Also can you imagine how Simeon would have felt when he held his Messiah in his arms to bless Him? To bless the One who would eventually bless him! This encouragement was reinforced when several months later the Magi came to worship the Babe of Bethlehem in the house where they were now living.

Simeon's message to Mary and Joseph would have appalled any other Jew who may have witnessed this encounter. To have it proclaimed out loud that the Messiah would bring revelation to the gentiles was against all their deeply held beliefs. Many Jews believed that the gentiles were created to 'feed the flames of hell'. A common prayer of many Jewish men was to thank God that they were not born as a 'dog' a 'woman' or a 'gentile'! To include the gentiles in the promise of God for salvation was almost regarded as blasphemy.

Dr Richard Emmons, the professor emeritus in the School of Divinity at Cairn University in Pennsylvania has commented that whilst Mary and Joseph would have been thrilled that Simeon recognised Jesus as the Messiah they would have been challenged by the prophecy that things would not be easy for them. Jesus would divide the nation. Many would fall as a result of rejecting Him. His ministry would reveal the true nature of people's hearts and Mary would suffer as she watched her son crucified. Mary was reminded that fulfilling God's plan in this world often brings suffering. Mary would experience suffering like a sword piercing her soul as she watched her son suffer (it appears that Joseph must have died before Jesus was crucified). The image used by Luke is that of a large broad sword striking Mary. She would suffer much pain in watching Jesus being rejected and tortured.

God then lead Anna to bring encouragement to Mary and Joseph. Mary was probably distressed at Simeon's prophecy so this dear Jewish saint, who was probably about 84 years old, encouraged them and rejoiced with them. Anna was one of these people who focussed on the positives, seeking to glorify God through her ministry. She was a prophetess who had been prepared by the Spirit through many years of focussing on the Kingdom of God rather than on her own personal circumstances, or in spite of her personal circumstances. She was perfectly suited to give encouragement to Mary and Joseph for the difficult times that lay ahead.

God used two senior saints to affirm and encourage these younger people at the start of their spiritual journey. God has a purpose for everyone regardless of age.

But, God has a special role for older more mature people. People with many years of life experience who have done the hard yards in the past, people with a real ministry as encouragers. Chuck Swindoll has commented that one of the reasons they were called 'Elders' in the church was because of their age, life experience and spiritual maturity. I know that I can all look back to occasions when an encouraging word from an older person in the church was a great blessing and encouragement to me.

We all have 'bucket lists' of some sort. Ours is to see our grandchildren grow in their Christian faith and also that those of our family and friends who are not saved would come to salvation. These are things that we desire to see before God calls us home. However, if we have a bucket list we cannot just sit back and hope for them to happen. We must be actively involved in the process. If we have a desire to see a family member or friend come to salvation we must be prepared to talk with them about God's love for them. We can be active by bringing these desires to the Lord daily in prayer and in seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit who goes before us leading and guiding us as to the things we should do and say. Achieving the desire, achieving the item in our bucket list takes action, it takes involvement.

Simeon led by the Spirit came to the Temple that day and Anna, we are told, never left the temple having chosen to invest her life in fasting and prayers as she sought to glorify God. When she had her encounter with the baby Jesus, we are told that she then proclaimed the good news to all who would listen to her. The joy and praise among the faithful must have been amazing as the word spread through the temple that day. Could you have kept such good news to yourself? I have often wondered what the Rabbis and Priests in the Temple thought when they were informed of the event, for it must have come to their attention. Their encounter that day with Jesus was life changing for Simeon and Anna.

Wasn't that true for us when we came to faith through Christ? When people encounter Jesus it is truly a life changing experience. O the joy that Simeon had when he held his

Messiah in his hands. But what a greater joy it is for us the Jesus holds us in His everlasting arms.

Simeon and Anna were never mentioned again in the scriptures. Simeon's bucket list was complete and he was at peace with the approaching end of his days, the peace that came from the faithful promises of God to him.

I believe that God has a 'bucket list' item for each of us. Something or someone He has placed on our hearts. A family member or friend, someone His Holy Spirit is urging us to talk too about their need to find peace with God through Jesus Christ. God's great gift of salvation is there for all who accept it. I have heard people say that they show the world they are Christians by the way they live, and that's great. They say that they witness by being friendly, and that's great too. But salvation only comes from hearing the gospel proclaimed. No-one has ever been smiled into the Kingdom.

For those who have never accepted Jesus Christ as their personal saviour maybe they have in their bucket list the need to have that emptiness in their hearts that only God can fill to be filled with His love.

Jesus came as a baby, but He came for a purpose. When we consider the birth and the child in the manger we must look past it to the cross and the empty tomb. Our hope is tied up in the birth of Jesus, the Son of God who was both fully human and fully divine and in the cross and in the resurrection. Jesus had to be born fully human for if we are to become like Him, He had to first become like us.

The first time He came it was as a little baby in a manger, but the next time He comes it will be as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. If He was to come today would you be ready to receive Him.

God bless you and may 2019 be a year of great joy for us all as we abide in His grace and love.