

HAVING SEEN GOD'S SALVATION
LUKE 2:21-38

At least for some things, I am not the most patient person in the world. I have been known to get a little hangry while waiting for dinner to cook. I don't like waiting for traffic lights or for accidents to clear. I don't like waiting in checkout lines at any store. Waiting just feels like a waste of time — I have things to do, and the delays are preventing me from finishing my tasks. So I “stew.” What do you do while waiting?

- When you are waiting nine months for the baby to arrive?
- When your boss told you that you will have a performance review next week?
- When the tax return is two months late in being returned?
- When Amazon says the package you need tomorrow is going to be delayed three days?
- When your parent (or child or friend) hasn't returned a phone call in three months?
- When you have finished your Christmas shopping list and Christmas is still three months away?
- When you know God will restore all things and Christ hasn't returned and difficult times have come (2 Tim. 3:1ff) and they seem to be getting worse?

It's hard to wait. It's hard to be patient — both for inconsequential things and essential things.

The story of Jesus' arrival reminds us of God's nature, His provision, and of our responsibilities as we wait for His promises to be fulfilled. After Jesus is born, Luke tells several short stories — the naming of Jesus, the sacrifice of Joseph and Mary, and the songs of joy from Simeon and Anna. All those stories reflect what those who waited for Jesus were doing — they were faithful.

Their faithfulness informs us for how we are also called to wait for the completion of our salvation — and the fulfillment of all God's other promises. What do we learn from the faithful waiting of those who anticipated His first arrival? Through multiple examples we are told —

BECAUSE YOU HAVE SEEN GOD'S SALVATION, BE FAITHFUL.

No, we haven't seen the end of our salvation, but in Scripture we have seen the provision of the Savior, His sufficient life of obedience, and His death and resurrection to provide our salvation; and we have seen His faithfulness in so many promises in the Scriptures. And we have seen a multitude of faithful believers who have preceded us, including the first people to observe the Savior. From these examples, we learn of at least **three manifestations of faithfulness** while we wait...

1. **Having Seen God's Salvation, Be Faithfully OBEDIENT (vv. 21-24)**
2. **Having Seen God's Salvation, Be Faithfully HOPEFUL (vv. 25-35)**
3. **Having Seen God's Salvation, Be Faithfully GRATEFUL (vv. 36-38)**

1. Having Seen God's Salvation, Be Faithfully **OBEDIENT** (vv. 21-24)

- Jesus, the , Son of Man, the Messiah, King and Savior has been born, but the responses to His coming are what dominate vv. 21-38. And it starts with the young parental couple, Joseph and Mary.
- Just **eight days** after His birth, they **circumcise** and **name Him** (v. 21; the situation is the same as with John the Baptist, 1:59ff, though certainly with a much smaller number of onlookers).
 - ✓ Likely done at home by Joseph, circumcision began as a sign of identification with the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:10); it identified one as an Israelite — certainly fitting of the Savior of Israel.
 - ✓ What is emphasized in this verse though, is the obedience of Joseph and Mary — they obeyed the Law by having Him circumcised and they obeyed God's direct revelation by naming Him **Jesus** (Mt. 1:21). His name reflects His work — YHWH saves. There is salvation through Jesus.
- Verses 22-24 indicate two further events: the dedication of Jesus and the purification of Mary — and obedience is again the emphasis of the verses.
 - ✓ After a woman gave birth to a baby, the Law decreed that she had to offer a sacrifice for her ritual cleansing — 40 days after the birth of a boy and 80 days after the birth of a girl (Lev. 12:1-8).
 - ✓ So **still in Bethlehem** six weeks after the birth, they took Jesus about **five miles to Jerusalem** for **their purification** (only Mary needed purification; the plural is probably a reference to his dedication, v. 23). They offered **two turtledoves** — the sacrifice of a poor person.
 - ✓ While in Jerusalem, He was also dedicated (v. 23) — the exodus from Egypt established that the firstborn of every Israelite belonged to the Lord (Ex. 13:2, 12-15).
 - The redemption price was five shekels (Num. 18:16); the Levites served in place of firstborn males.
 - Every firstborn child was **Holy to the Lord**, but just how much Jesus belongs to the Lord and just how holy He is won't really be understood until they go back to the Temple years later (vv. 42ff).
- Lesson: Joseph and Mary are being obedient and fulfilling the requirements of the Law. "The piety of Jesus' parents is the point. They obeyed the Law." [Bock]
 - ✓ When Gabriel revealed the virgin birth of Jesus to Mary, she submitted to the plan (1:38).
 - ✓ When Gabriel revealed the virgin birth of Jesus to Joseph, he submitted to the plan (Mt. 1:24-25).
 - ✓ And now again, we see their complete and willing obedience.
 - ✓ There were unique pressures on their lives (and there would be more, v. 35); but they demonstrated their faithfulness to the Lord by their complete obedience to Him.
 - ✓ In this section, Luke emphasizes the Law, mentioning it five times (vv. 2:22-24, 27, 39).
 - ✓ And every mention is in the context of their obedience. In this section we only see obedience.
 - ✓ When you are waiting on God, an appropriate question to ask is, "what has God positioned me to do and what has He called and commanded me to do?" Then obey. Faithfulness is exemplified in obed.

2. Having Seen God's Salvation, Be Faithfully **HOPEFUL** (vv. 25-35)

- Simeon's **CHARACTER** — everything we know about Simeon is in these verses...

- ✓ He was **righteous** — an OT believer by faith in God (Hab. 2:4), as were Zacharias and Elizabeth (1:6). He had a righteousness that was imputed to him by faith.
- ✓ He was **devout** — not only righteous by position, but righteous by action, demonstrating the reality of his faith in God.
- ✓ He lived under the special empowerment of the **Holy Spirit** (v. 25b) —
 - We know that in the Old Testament not every believer in God was indwelt by the Holy Spirit — that was a gift that came from Christ in the inauguration of the New Covenant. But we do know that the Holy Spirit operated in the Old Testament in and through people for particular tasks and seasons of time. And that was Simeon's experience.
 - Note also the three-fold reference to the Holy Spirit in vv. 25-27. It indicates the real piety of Simeon in a time of spiritual deadness.
- ✓ **Verse 27** especially reveals that he is being controlled and directed by the Spirit of God, the same way every believer now is guided and directed (Eph. 5:18; which will be a theme of this book).
- ✓ What is important about Simeon's character is that it informed and cultivated his desire...

- Simeon's **DESIRE** (v. 25b)

- ✓ He was looking (*constantly*) for the Messiah — to look for **consolation of Israel** means to *constantly* look for Israel's comfort and peace — what (Who) will relieve the distress and suffering of Israel?
- ✓ His lament echoes the cry of **Isaiah 40:1**.
- ✓ He is looking for the Messianic King of Israel (Dt. 18:15), just as Anna and others were (**v. 38**).
- ✓ This was also the desire of Zacharias (**1:79**) — release from the darkness of sin.
- ✓ This is the common refrain of Scripture and life — we want resolution to suffering, injustice, and pain (cf. **Hab. 1:2-4**, 1:17; **3:2**).
- ✓ Note this about Simeon:
 - He had a righteous desire and he had not received it. There was nothing wrong with his motives — and still God delayed in fulfilling his desires (much like **Heb. 11:39-40**, where God was doing something better).
 - And he continued in faithfulness to the Lord. In his particular situation that meant *he kept looking for the coming of the Messiah*. He didn't quit being hopeful/confident in God.
 - The temptation when we must wait is to quit. Even though it may appear God has delayed, trust and keep acting on that trust by remaining faithful to do what God has called you to do and remaining faithful in hope. In His right time He will provide the fulfillment of His promises...

- God's **PROMISE** (v. 26)

- ✓ God made a specific and unique promise of comfort to Simeon — **he would not see death before...**
 - We don't know when or how, but at some point God **revealed to him...** God made a direct and personal revelation to Simeon (it was for him individually, not a general promise to all).
 - The promise was that he wouldn't die until he had seen **the Lord's Christ** (God's anointed, Dt. 18:15); Luke uses a similar phrase "Christ of God" (9:20; 23:35).
 - The promise was not that Simeon would see the completion of the Messiah's work, but that Simeon would see the Messiah. And he did. How gratified must he have been?!?!
 - Simeon was confidently looking for and anticipating the Messiah. And God said, "I will show you a part of the plan" (which is what He often does with us as well when He saves & sanctifies).
- ✓ God also promises to comfort all His people (Is. 49:8-13; 52:9; 54:11; 57:18; 61:1-2; 66:10-13. Also Jer. 31:13; Ezk. 14:22-23; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 2 Pt. 3:10-13).

- Is. 51:3 Indeed, the Lord will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places. And her wilderness He will make like Eden, And her desert like the garden of the Lord; Joy and gladness will be found in her, Thanksgiving and sound of a melody.
- Is. 51:12 "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies And of the son of man who is made like grass..."
- Is. 66:13 "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."
- Zech. 1:17 Again, proclaim, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.'"

- ✓ Living in this world means we have not yet experienced the fulness of His comfort.
- ✓ But lack of comfort so far does not mean it will not come. It will. He has promised.

- Simeon's **DECLARATION** (vv. 27-35)

- ✓ The provision of salvation (vv. 27-32)
 - Joseph and Mary were in the Temple for Jesus dedication, and then Simeon, led by **the Spirit...** **came in** saw Him. Then Simeon **took Him into his arms, and blessed God...** Simeon saw the fulfillment of God's promise and honored God. (To **bless God** is to thank God as the source of blessing, declaring His excellence and affirming His gracious nature and acts.)
 - His statement is often referred to as the *Nunc Dimittis*, taken from the Latin, "now releasing..." This is the climax of Simeon's life. He knows that nothing on earth can supersede this experience. So he can "die **in peace**." That's remarkable. On what basis could Simeon say that?
 - When Simeon saw Jesus, he saw more than a baby. I have seen and held and prayed over many babies in my life. I've smiled at them, talked with them, laughed with them, gotten on the floor to play with them, and told their parents how beautiful or cute or sweet they were.

- But I've never said anything to them or about them like Simeon said about Jesus — ***my eyes have seen Your salvation***. We think about children as a gift from God, as a delight and joy, as work, and as challenges. But it's doubtful any of us have looked at a baby and said, "My salvation!"
 - ... When Simeon looked at Jesus, he saw one who was fit to save. To see Christ is to see salvation (3:6; 1 Jn. 1:1-3). He saw something like the writer to the Hebrews said of Jesus: "...He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him" (Heb. 7:25).
 - ... The world says, "He is a worthy teacher." Simeon says (and we say), "He is a worthy Savior."
 - ... What he says is similar to what will be said about Jesus by the 24 elders in Heaven: "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).
- This salvation in Christ was ***prepared*** by God ***in the presence of all peoples***.
 - ... Salvation is not man-made. It's God-made. It's "Made in Heaven." Peter (1 Pt. 1:3-5) will say that in God's mercy He causes us to be born again — our salvation is God's idea, not our idea. He loved and drew us while we hated and resisted Him. He reserves and preserves this salvation in Heaven. And He *will* reveal the fulness of this salvation at the end of time.
 - ... And this salvation that is available to ***all peoples*** — not just individuals, but people groups. In v. 10 this same phrase meant "all Israelites," but now it means "all the world, including Gentiles" (v. 31). It is a universal salvation — available to every person everywhere.
 - ... This is God's great salvation; it is not hidden and obscured from man. It was a gift of God's eternal plan and a universal offer to all mankind.
 - ... The salvation of Christ is also unique because it is a ***light of revelation to the Gentiles*** (v. 31). Remember the setting of these words to recognize the importance and power of them. It was in the Temple in Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary had come to give an offering commanded by the Mosaic Law. Joseph and Mary and Jesus and Simeon and the priests were all Jews, living in Israel. Simeon's declaration reminds them that the Old Testament repeatedly said that the Jews were to be a light to the Gentiles (Gen. 12:3; Ps. 98:2; Is. 49:6).

- Ps. 98:2 The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.
- Is. 49:6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

- ... But Jewish tradition created a barrier and wall between the Jews and Gentiles. The Jews hated the Gentiles. And now Simeon reminds them of provision of salvation for world.
- ... Christ came to earth to His chosen people Israel (Jn. 1:11). But He also came to redeem people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Jesus came as the Savior of the world (Jn. 1:29 — the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world).

- ... It is Christ who came to remove the blindness of even the Gentiles who were living in darkness so they might see the light of His glory and enjoy Him forever (Acts 13:47).
- ... Since God has prepared this salvation and made all mankind responsible to believe it, then we (like Simeon) must also be bold to proclaim and declare it. God hasn't hidden it from the world, and we don't want to hide it from the world either. This is our role (Mt. 5:13-16).
- And Christ's salvation also is ***the glory of Your people Israel*** (v. 32b). For something or someone to be glorious means the reality of their condition and situation is revealed. For Simeon to say that Christ's salvation is for the glory of Israel is to say that the fulness of what Israel is to God is going to be revealed in her final salvation (Zech. 10:6-10; Rom. 11:28-29).
- ... Nothing else reveals the unique nature of Israel's relationship to God and His character like the salvation that comes from Christ. If you want to see the glory of Israel, look to Christ and what He did to save God's covenanted people/nation.
- ... No one else could provide salvation for Israel, the Gentiles, and all people. This was a salvation particular to God and from God. God prepared and designed it. Then God prepared and implemented the plan. He brought salvation to fruition in the Advent and cross of Christ. He accomplished everything He planned and promised. And throughout all his life, Simeon remained faithfully hopeful/confident in that salvation from God.

✓ The suffering of salvation (vv. 33-35)

- Salvation is coming, but it would also come with grief and sorrow. So Simeon turns to Mary —
- There would be grief for the nation — ***the fall and rise of many in Israel***.
 - ... I.e., Christ will become a stumbling-block to some (***fall***, Rom. 9:33; 1 Pt. 2:16f).
 - ... And Christ would be a blessing to others (Rom. 6:4, 9; Eph. 2:6).
 - ... Cf. Is. 8:14-15; 28:16. Christ makes one either trip and fall or He becomes a sure foundation. E.g., Judas despairs, Peter repents. "Jesus is the magnet of the ages. He draws some, he repels others." [Robertson] There is no neutrality with Christ. He always divides (19:47-48).
 - ... He will be One who is ***opposed*** by many — an opposition which arose quickly (4:28-29). While Jesus was opposed then (and still is today), He was not defeated or overwhelmed then, and He is not defeated today. Opposition is not defeat for Christ or His people.
- There would also be personal implications for Mary — ***a sword would pierce even your own soul*** — there would be suffering and grief from Christ's death — even through differing agendas of Christ and Mary (vv. 48-50; Jn. 2:3ff). There will be hard circumstances for Mary.
- Yet Simeon remains faithfully hopeful. He has given his life in service of YHWH; he was confident before the revelation of God to him and he remained faithful afterward.
- He is our model — He only saw the beginning of salvation, while looking backward, we see He has finished our salvation. Simeon was confident. So also our faithfulness to the Lord is confidence that He will finish what He has started. No one can stop Him.

3. Having Seen God's Salvation, Be Faithfully GRATEFUL (vv. 36-38)

- Like Simeon, we know nothing about Anna other than what is in these verses:
 - ✓ She was one of a few women identified in Scripture as **prophetesses** (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah).
 - ✓ She was from the tribe of **Asher** (8th son of Jacob, born to Zilpah, Leah's maid). It was one of the least significant tribes. Yet it was one of the 10 northern tribes (so for her to be from that tribe means that it wasn't "lost" in Assyria). It also identifies her as a genuine Israelite.
 - ✓ Like Simeon, she was old — **advanced in years**. Verse 37 can be interpreted as either 84-years-old, or a widow for 84 years (so perhaps about 106, if married at 15).
 - ✓ The emphasis on her age is a reminder of her faithfulness; she has been serving in the temple for a great many years, without having received her desire for the coming of the Messiah.
- **At that very moment** (v. 38) is a reminder (like v. 27) that God is sovereignly orchestrating events.
 - ✓ There may have been a conversation between Simeon and Anna, or perhaps she overheard his song and comments to Mary; regardless, she understands the significance of Jesus and praises God.
 - ✓ She was **giving thanks to God and continued to speak...** (praised and evangelized).
 - Simeon was looking for the Messiah (comfort of Israel, v. 25); with a parallel term, Luke says she was telling those who were **looking for the redemption of Israel** that He had arrived.
 - Perhaps a group of them regularly met in the temple to pray for the coming of the Messiah.
 - Regardless, she is overjoyed with gratitude and keeps telling others the good news.
 - Luke uses her story to affirm to us that while there were personal hardships in her own life and silence all her life about the coming of the Messiah, she remained faithful.
 - And when the Messiah was revealed, her heart was prepared to praise. Immediately...repeatedly, she was grateful and evangelistic.
 - When we suffer and wait, it's easy to become cynical, sarcastic, despondent. Not Anna. We do well to follow her lead by being faithful to feed our souls in the silent days with gratitude. He is good.

CONCLUSION: Mary and Joseph, Simeon, and Anna had different roles in God's purposes, but they all had seasons of waiting. And what they did when their waiting was over reflected what they did while they waited. Their obedient and joyful responses at the revelation of Christ revealed what they had been doing all the prior months and years.

We also have various reasons to wait — and these stories teach us what to do while we wait: **Be faithful to what God has called you** to fulfill.

- ✓ **Be obedient to His revealed will.** What do you need to do to obey Him in your various roles? Have you let pressures of the day and discouragement lead you to become lackadaisical in obeying? What do you need to do so that you will hear “well done, good and faithful servant?”
- ✓ **Be hopeful** (confident, not despairing) that God will accomplish His promises. It's easy to despair about the evil in these days. It might be new to us, but it's not new — there was enough unfaithfulness in His day that Jesus asked if there would be faith when He returned (**18:8**). Yes, there is much opposition against the Lord. But the opposition is helpful in this way:
 - It clarifies who is a follower of Christ and who is not — and gives us an opportunity to be seen by the world as different so that we can give a reason for our hopefulness (1 Pt. 3:15).
 - It clarifies who needs evangelism — and gives us an opportunity to speak boldly.
- ✓ **Be thankful** (and evangelistic) for God's provisions. When He appears silent and inactive, He is not oblivious or unaware. He knows and is acting (even if we can't see it yet). Get your heart ready to praise Him with gratitude (which you can only do by practicing now).

BENEDICTION: **1 Thess. 5:23-24**