

Luke 2:25-32

by Todd Atkinson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of waiting with eager expectation and faith, as seen in the example of Simeon, who waited for the Messiah and was rewarded with a deep sense of fulfillment and peace.

Duration: 42:18

Scripture: Psalm 24:3, Luke 2:25

Topics: "Advent"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by inviting the audience to a simple evening gathering and potluck, emphasizing the importance of building connections and relationships. The sermon then focuses on the reading from the Gospel of Luke, specifically the story of Simeon. Simeon, a righteous and devout man, had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah before his death. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Simeon goes to the temple and takes the baby Jesus in his arms, praising God for fulfilling the promise. The sermon highlights the importance of waiting patiently for God's promises, recognizing both the big and small signs of His presence, and being part of a community that celebrates and supports one another.

Transcript

Thank you, Lawrence. Good morning, everyone. Really nice to see you, be back from my trip.

Thank you for your prayers for Stephen and I when we were in India and Kenya. They made a big difference. I went, my health was pretty questionable when I began that journey, and it made improvements all through the trip.

And it was astonishing to come off a trip as substantial as that and to be healthier when I came back than when I left. So, thank you very much. Wonderful things happened.

In India, there was a very strong move of God's Spirit and literally hundreds of people a day we saw experiencing the power of God. And so, just deeply fulfilling time there. We went on from there to Kenya, first of all to Nairobi.

There was a group of quite eminent young national leaders who wanted to meet with us, interested in via, and again, just something of real favor was resting on that time. Within 24 hours, those young leaders wanted to move here for training, want to plant via churches in in Kenya. They were just so on board.

It was a really, really splendid time. And again, so thank you that your prayers for helping to make that possible. When we are finished in Nairobi, we went up to the desert region of northern Kenya.

A place called the Turkana Desert, which is one of my favorite places in all the world, where northern Kenya meets Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Working in a United Nations refugee camp that has now swollen to upwards of 350,000 people in that camp. This is probably about my 15th time there.

Each year, I try to take people from Lethbridge, especially from our church, to go visit that refugee camp. Because most of the people that come as refugees from East Africa come through that significant camp at Kakama. And so I want our people to realize what it's like to live in a refugee camp.

And to have a sense of not just sympathy, but respect for people's journeys, both there and when people move here as refugees, to be able to meet people. So all the time I meet people here, and where do you come from? I come from East Africa. Did you come through Kakama? The question is, how do you know Kakama? Oh, I was just there last week.

What would you go to Kakama for? We spent years trying to get out of that place. And I tell them, I went there so I'd appreciate and respect your journey. So that when you come to Canada, there's people here that, in a sense, have made the efforts to understand what you have been through.

And so it was good to be there, but I'm also very attuned when refugees come here that this is God bringing the nations to our doorstep. So I have went, upon my return, my coming home, I have met twice with one of the senior figures in our local immigrant services. And I said, I understand, they know that we've done a lot with Nepali-speaking immigrants.

And we actually have a kind of a favor there because of that. And so I've said, I understand we have immigrants coming from new countries. I just want to say, whatever we can do, we want to be there.

And when I talked about our heart for refugees, he was quite moved and asked me if I would come and speak to the staff. Which would probably be the first time in the history of immigrant services they asked a pastor to come and speak to their staff. So, it was really, I'm really looking forward to that.

So if you ever get a chance to study in the Old Testament how many times God speaks to people about foreigners who come in from other countries and how they should be treated, go make that a study because it'll affect your life forever. It certainly has affected how I see things. Secondly, a little bit of talk about Christmas potluck.

You know, it's been our custom annually that we have had a Christmas dinner together. But like many things, sometimes we visited that and said, is that still hitting the mark? Because sometimes the people that we have most targeted wanted to come haven't come. We're also very well that we have a very, very well connected core.

But if all of our events target the exact same group of people, then, so part of the question is, what do we have to do that people who don't yet feel connected could feel connected to our core and feel like they're part of our core and moving with us? The other thing I have to be honest is that when we run some of these things the last couple years, even the people who have come have just all of a sudden left and left a tiny little handful cleaning up. And so this is meant to be a community event. And when we do those things, it doesn't exactly say community all over it.

It says, here's a little tiny handful of people you're serving us, and then we'll dine and dash. And so we need to do something to kind of change that so that from beginning to end, it is an expression of community. So I actually would, since coming back from my trip, would I'd like to run something.

So we're going to have something on Thursday evening at 6pm on the 17th of December, you'll hear more about this. So it could be a little new because I'm running it. But if you belong to three categories, if you're new here in the last year and don't really feel connected, please come out to that.

Number two, if you're old here and don't really feel connected, because our church has underwent a lot of transition in the last years, and so if that's you, then please come and be there. Third category, if you're like me and want to connect with people that don't feel connected, you actually want to come and be on deck and say, who don't I know here? And how do I help people feel like that they're coming to our church is important to us? And that we want to connect. That we've had this kind of slogan all these years that we want to be a community and not a crowd.

But if we're going to keep that up, it requires a lot of intentionality on our part. And it's well worth it. The reason so many of you feel deeply connected as a core is because we started with that many years ago, and we worked hard toward that.

But we've also got to keep that up with new people who are coming. So we understand that we've transferred a lot of responsibilities in the last couple years over to our home groups who are doing a wonderful, wonderful job. So that's intentional.

So if you're doing something as your community group, and you already have a get-together and meal, then don't feel like you need to replicate. Because the bases for you are probably well covered. You don't have to do both.

But I'm especially targeting people that I don't really know. I look at some of you, worship with you Sunday by Sunday, and our core I know deeply. I've walked with you for years.

But there's all kinds of people. I look out to you, and I don't really know you. And I want to.

And so we're going to set up a very simple evening. Potluck, bring food. So just in case you're thinking someone else will bring food, I don't need to.

Just so you know, I am a man running this, not a woman. That's going to make this different. Because a woman would have lots of contingencies.

She would know who's going to bring what, and she's going to know where we're going to lack, and she's going to know who's going to come with nothing. And so they would have all that figured out. I'm just opening the door, set out a few tables, and I just want to hang out.

And so anyways, if you don't bring food, we're going to be in a whole lot of trouble coming to a potluck. So come, and come be prepared and looking for some heart connection. Meaning come and and and ready to engage, you know, in meaningful conversation.

And if you're a real introvert, come and be prepared to engage in really meaningful awkward silences. And we'll work with that. But regardless of your temperament, come, and and we will have a very simple evening, and a lovely little potluck, and a chance to get, and when you leave you'll think, I, I I know a few

people that I didn't know before, and I gained some connections that I didn't have.

And that will be, make it all worthwhile. I'd like to turn my attention now to the Holy Scripture. Gospel according to Luke, chapter 2, and we're going to take a reading from the 24th verse, 25th verse.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon. He was righteous and devout. And he was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he has seen the Lord's Christ, the Messiah. Moved by the Holy 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, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have repaired in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, This child is destined to cause the rising and the falling of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and a sword, Mary, will pierce your own soul, too. May God bless this public reading of his holy word.

We are here today on the second Sunday of Advent, and Advent, of course, has been thought of as a time of preparation. Because in some ways we identify in this period with those who were prior to Christ, who were waiting for the coming of the Messiah. And just like they lived, as it were, between two times, between times of promise and times of fulfillment.

So the whole of the Old Testament is full of promises that one day a Messiah would come, and these people waited daily for the fulfillment of that promise. But just like they waited between two times, so also we in the New Covenant also find ourselves living between two times, between the first Advent and the second Advent, between the first coming of our Lord and the second coming of our Lord, between partial fulfillment and complete fulfillment of all God's promises, between the now and the not yet. And as a result, we know two things, both a deep thankfulness for what we have received from Him, but at the same time a deep longing for more of Him.

And so we will live in that tension of fulfillment and thankfulness, but also longing. And I want to turn to this man in the New Testament. He's at the kind of tail end of the Old Testament.

He's someone whose entire life had been waiting for the Messiah, and he did that so well that he provides a very fine example for us in our day. The reading begins with these words. Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon.

He was righteous and devout. Righteous. Right with God.

He wasn't just playing at his faith. Where it counts, he was right with God. And he was devout.

He showed deep devotion. He had it where it counts. But interestingly, what his righteousness and devotion looked like.

The next phrase is this, he was waiting. He was righteous and devout. He was waiting.

His righteousness showed up in this way. It made him wait. His devotion caused him to wait.

We don't have that kind of value on waiting. We wouldn't think that that's a sign of righteousness. That it's a sign of deep devotion that someone would wait.

Because we might wait if we have to. We would never think of it as a good thing. We might find it annoying.

Undesirable. Frustrating. Even angering.

Having to wait. But we certainly wouldn't think of it as a sign of deep devotion. And yet, I think it's right.

It really is that. Because sometimes what we most love in life is seen in this. By what we're willing to wait for.

So what you most love in life isn't seen by what you can have most quickly at your fingertips. What you most love in life is not measured by that which is most quickly accessible. Sometimes what you most love in life is seen in this.

By what you're willing to wait for. More than once, I've had a family come to me in the church and maybe their daughter was just getting to dating age and sometimes there's a interesting interested suitor. And sometimes this suitor has been a few years older.

And so anyways, I get asked questions. My advice to the young woman has been the same. If this really is God's choice for you, and if this young man really loves you, then this is what his heart will say to you.

You are worth waiting for. So maybe you're a little on the young side for a relationship of that type. Of that kind of commitment.

But you'll know you're on to something special when someone says, I love you enough to wait for you. I think sometimes Jesus is waiting for us to hear those words. To hear those words from us.

We love you enough that waiting can be pleasurable. Waiting can be an exercise of devotion. It can be a sign of our righteousness by what we're willing to wait for.

I understand that sometimes waiting produces longing. That waiting isn't easy. But the same truth prevails.

What we most long for in life shows what we most love. And so here's Simeon, a righteous man, a devout man, and it says he was waiting. How do you wait? You wait like Simeon? Because his waiting was not a sign of passive resignation.

His waiting was a sign of eager expectation. God had made him promises. And every single day of his life, this man woke up and those promises were as real and fresh to him as if God had made them to him that morning.

Eager expectation. He was an older man who had been waiting for the fulfillment of promises for many years, and yet he still has eager expectation. Sometimes we go, well, I guess I'll wait because I have no choice to.

But really it's resignation. I'll resign to have to wait. There's no sense of eagerness and anticipation in it.

But this man was different. In particular, it says he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He wasn't even waiting for something for himself.

He could tell that his nation was grieving. His nation needed consoling. That they had been waiting for 400 years, the 400 silent years, and that that waiting had taken a toll on their hearts.

And so here's a man who is full of the Holy Spirit. Here is an old prayerful man, and when he is in prayer, he can pick up the heartbeat of his nation. And so he's saying, Lord, I am waiting for the consolation of my nation.

You're gonna come and you're gonna console through the provision of the Messiah. He's waiting for the consolation of Israel. The scripture goes on to say that he had every reason to wait.

This wasn't just wishful thinking. He was waiting because the Holy Spirit had spoke to him and revealed things to him. And especially this, that he would not die until with his own eyes he had seen the Messiah.

And so he's an elderly man, been waiting for probably the majority of his life, and he has been clinging to this promise that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ. And every single day he rolls out of bed, and he asks the Lord a question. Lord, is today the day? Not today, Simeon.

Okay. And this faithful old man rolls out of bed the next day with the exact same question, and the same anticipation, not disappointment, is today the day? It's not today, Simeon, but thanks for asking. Okay.

Day in, day out, month in, month out, year in, year out, with this man decade in and decade out. Every single day he rolls out of bed onto his knees and says, Father, is today the day? He's an old man, but he's got the faith of a child. Is today the day? Is today the day? Simeon, no, but thank you for believing.

Thank you for waiting. Thank you for hoping. Remember, he's praying for the consolation of Israel.

Very few people in the whole nation were waiting with that kind of hope, but Simeon was. Until one day he wakes up, and he rolls out of bed, and he asks that same old question. Father, is today the day? And it's the first day he hears an answer that is different from what he has always heard.

Is today the day, Lord? You told me I wouldn't die before I saw the Lord's Christ. I believe it with all my heart. I've been waiting for decades.

Is today the day? And on this day, heaven says, Simeon, yes, today is the day. Now, do you realize if he hadn't been asking day by day, he would have totally missed that day. If his heart had grown dull, if his expectation had waned, then when it really counts, he would no longer even be asking the question.

But because this man was waiting in hope, he was full of expectation. When he asked, Lord, is today the day? At last the answer come. Today is the day, Simeon.

The Messiah is here. He's down in the temple courts. And the story doesn't tell us what follows exactly between the time he is told that and the time he gets to the temple courts.

But I imagine this old man was just the face of a young boy, and he'd gather up his garments. And probably as fast as his old frame would take him, that man ran through the streets of Jerusalem. Muttering, he's here.

He's here. He's here. He's down here.

He's here. And everybody wondering, where's Simeon going? A couple questions. Number one, what did he expect to see when he got there? Number two, was he disappointed? Because if you take a look at the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah, it's reasonable that Simeon would have expected some very much larger-than-life figure to be waiting for him there.

Someone who's going to vanquish the Romans, someone who is going to make everything right and usher in a wonderful new golden age. Over Christmas or over Advent, when you get a chance, you look back at the Old Testament messianic prophecies. What would you have expected if you were Simeon? It would have been reasonable for him to expect someone gigantic.

And so when he arrives at the temple gates, and he looks around and doesn't see anybody gigantic, Lord, where? Because it seems like temple life is continuing like it always did. It doesn't seem any different today than it did yesterday. So when he says, where? You know what the Holy Spirit points him to? That baby.

The baby, Lord. That baby you mean that looks like every other baby. Great.

I've been waiting all my life, and I have a 20-inch Messiah. I would have been disappointed. I was like, really? That's what I've waited for? Really? That kid is going to change this whole thing.

Because I'm not righteous like him. I don't wait like him. I don't roll out of bed every single day like I ought and say, it's the day of the day, Lord.

And so I, I learn from this old righteous devout man who went over under the Holy Spirit's leading, and he took that small infant in his hands, and he blessed that infant. So here, here's a an icon of of a depiction of Simeon as an old man holding that baby in his hands. And this is what he cries out.

He said, Lord, Sovereign Lord, it's just like you promised. What would we have said? Lord, this is a little disappointing. Simeon didn't say that.

It's just like you promised. You were faithful to all your promises. Now I can depart in peace.

You can take me to heaven because everything you promised me in this life, you have done. I'm ready now to go to heaven. And he blesses that child because he understood things that we don't understand.

Is that when God has promised grand things, they are still going to start in small ways. Then when God wants to change the world, he still starts things and gives them a humble beginning. And if you overlook those small things, they will never grow up to be large things.

And he took that small infant in his hands and thought everything God has ever promised for the salvation of the world is in this small bundle. And he actually had the eyes to see it. And he blessed that small bundle knowing that if I bless it, one day he will grow enough to be a fully grown, blown, world-saving, life-changing, universe-ruling Messiah.

And he could see it in this infant. Beautiful. Oh, I want to be righteous like that man.

Three lessons to draw from Simeon. Number one, What? Do we know how to wait like he did? To show eager expectation, not resignation. That's not biblical waiting.

Oh, we'll just have to see how it pans out. That's not biblical waiting. That's just resignation, not anticipation.

And so for Simeon, we don't know how old he is. We just know he's a very old man who's waited for very long. But by the way he acts, you'd think God made him the promise yesterday.

And I want to be like that too. Number two, he was a man who transitioned well. He'd waited for something for all these years, but he knew when the Holy Spirit was signaling that change was in the air and he was able to go with it.

My imagination allows me to see, if nothing else, that the day that Simeon ran down there, there was probably very likely some other people that saw this little crying infant and said this, would you shut that baby up? We're trying to pray here for the coming of the Messiah. How come it's only Simeon saw it that day? How many people were in the temple courts praying for the fulfillment of God's promises and missed them right under their nose? People who got tired of waiting. Impatient.

Book of Hebrews says faith and patience inherits the promises. I used to think it was just faith that inherits promises. Faith and patience inherits the promises.

And we have to understand we live in a hugely impatient society and it costs us much more dearly than we can imagine. He transitioned well. The wind of change came into his prayer room and said you've been here believing for this, but now you need to move here and expect the fulfillment of that.

And that when you do get there, don't be disappointed, Simeon. Third lesson, he knew how to see the great and the small. Can we do that? I've had things that have even happened in the last month.

I know they are signs. Are they big signs? They are to me. When you've been waiting for 12 years or when you're waiting for 30 years for something, I've been watching for little signs.

And when I see them instead of going, oh, that's kind of disappointing. That's all it is. You will never see your promises fulfilled if you do that.

But if you can say that's a small beginning, that's God acting in our midst, and we can see it and be thankful for it and bless it, then those small blessings will grow up until they're bigger than we could ever imagine. So how do you wait? I don't wait as well as I'd like. Number two, how do you transition? Number three, can you see the big and the small right under your nose? How many people miss the Messiah right under their nose? 2,000 years this child has prophesied, and there he is right under their nose, and there's one man that sees it.

So similarly, things are happening in our midst. I've noticed shifts and changes even actually since our name changed. If I had more time, I would chronicle them for you.

But Todd, those are just small. I know. But I have put myself at the feet of Simeon for the last 25 years.

And I learned something from that old man. How to appreciate the small signs of God's moving. How to bless them when I see them.

How to have eyes to see them when they go undetectable to others. I wish I had the time to unpack the rest of the passage. The rising and this child will cause the rising and the falling of men.

Wow, he was going to upset kingdoms. There would be people in leadership who didn't used to be. And people that used to have places of influence that would lose it.

The hearts, there'd be a sign that would be spoken against. So here he's prophesied this is a gift from heaven and people are going to speak against him. But it will reveal what is in those hearts.

There's so much in that passage. So I always watch what people speak against. Because they think that they are revealing something and they don't realize they are being revealed.

And so beloved, we are too in a time of transition. Let us keep our eyes open. For some very, very blessed signs.

We're going to go to the Lord's table. This is the very nature of the Lord's table. Every time we celebrate the Lord's table, it is a partial fulfillment.

Meaning, every time we celebrate it, it is a looking forward to the great wedding feast of the Lamb. It is a looking backwards to the last supper. And at the exact same time, it is a partial fulfillment and a looking forward to the great feast of the Lamb.

When we will gather around that table. And what we now know in part, we shall then know in full. And so we will gather around his table today.

And we will enjoy as much of his presence as he's willing to give. And we will look forward to that day when we will know it in unlimited ways. Let us go.

Would you bow your heads in a word of prayer with me? All who truly turn to Christ and away from your sins. All who seek to be reconciled with your neighbors and intend to lead the new life following the commandments of God and walking in his holy ways. Draw near now with faith and take this holy sacrament to strengthen, to console and to nourish you.

Let us make our humble confession to our heavenly father. So first a moment of private confession we bring before him our impatience, our despair. Lord, where have we given up on promises? Where is there some part of our heart that is that has just given up? Father, restore to us the heart of Simeon.

Let us live daily in eager anticipation, holding on to the promises like they were just given to us an hour ago. Father, forgive me for my impatience. Forgive me for where I get too easily discouraged when you don't seem to act quickly.

Help me to show my love for you in my waiting and in my longing. Help me transition well, not to feel stuck and backward looking. And please give me eyes to see the promises being fulfilled right under my nose in small ways.

The heart to bless them so that small breakthroughs might mature into big ones. Lord, this is your table. You are our great high priest.

So lead us in this meal. Feed us on your very own presence. You are the bread of life.

Feed us with hope and promise and life and joy. Preside over your table. I ask that all of heaven would come to earth around this meal Scripture says, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? But he who has clean hands and a pure heart.

So let us make our confession to him. Together, merciful Father, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed by what we have left undone. Forgive us where the cares of this world have become our cares, where we have succumbed to the love of things, where we have used our minds and bodies and words in impure ways.

Forgive us where we have given way to discouragement and despair, self-pity, false comforts, harmful addictions, and selfishness. Forgive us where we have neglected your two great commands, where we have not loved you with our whole heart and have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Lord, we're truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, Lord, have mercy on us and forgive us so that we might delight in your will and walk in your ways by the power of your Spirit and to the glory of your name. And so receive the forgiveness of your sin. Hallelujah.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with heartfelt repentance and true faith turn to him, have mercy upon you. Pardon and deliver you from all your sins through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And all God's people said, Amen.

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