

My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation
Luke 2:21-38
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Read Luke 2:21-38 - *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Introduction: Bucket Lists

Have you made a bucket list yet? You know, the list of things that you want to see or experience before you “kick the bucket” and die? I know you probably thought I’d be talking about new years resolutions, but I like to throw you some curveballs. Maybe you haven’t given it a lot of thought yet, or maybe you have a very specific list of things that you know you really want to do in life. I always wonder about bucket lists because there’s generally an unstated expectation that you’re going to live a really long life, and we all know that’s no guarantee. But it never hurts to make a list, since you’re more likely to accomplish goals that you write down than ones you never name. As with pretty much everything these days, there’s an app for that, Bucket List Maker. Or you can go to bucketlist.org to get and share ideas. Or you can find all kinds of lists online to help you develop your bucket list:

- 84 travel adventures (such as backpacking through Europe)
- 55 new skills to learn (like learning how to play poker or using chopsticks)
- 37 Life Milestones (like earning degrees and landing a dream job)
- 70 outdoor activities (like bungee jumping)
- 35 Charity ideas (like holding a charity fundraiser)
- 40 entertainment and sports activities (like seeing an Olympic event live)
- 50 personal goals (like reading a book a week for a year)
- 35 food & drink ideas (like entering a food eating contest),

Of course, if you have the time to do even a fraction of the things on those lists, you probably have a lot fewer responsibilities, a lot more freedom, and more disposable income than most of us!

I don’t have a bucket list, per se, as much as a general list of things that I hope to experience. Things like seeing my kids get married, meeting and playing with all my grandkids, and a small list of places in the world that I would like to visit. Being a senior pastor was on my bucket list list, but it got checked off thanks to you all. Living in Delaware – I didn’t know it was on the list, but let’s pretend it was and we accomplished that this year too. But I haven’t sketched a whole lot of things out that I need to do to make my life feel complete because I’ve already been so blessed. And if the Lord sees fit to take me to heaven before I accomplish a bunch more things, it’s not going to matter whether I visited Ireland or went to the Super Bowl or learned how to use chopsticks. It’s going to matter a lot more how I treated others, how I lived out my faith, how I influenced the next generation to follow the Lord, those kinds of things. To paraphrase Jesus: “What good is it for a man to check off everything on his wish list and lose his soul?” I’m sure we’ll revisit some of these ideas when we study the book of Ecclesiastes.

But in today’s passage, we’re going to meet two people, very advanced in years, who had bucket lists of sorts. But their lists were very short: only one thing on them. And that thing was seeing the Messiah in person. But before we meet those two people, first we see Jesus’ family attending to some things that were required of them as faithful Jews.

I. Jesus' Life Begun in Ritual Obedience (vv. 21-24)

²¹ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 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 ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Despite knowing exactly what they would be naming Him, Joseph and Mary waited until Jesus was circumcised at eight days to officially give Him the name; which is also how John's parents had approached things. I talked in the Dec. 20th sermon about the Hebrew people observing the rite of circumcision for thousands of years because Genesis 17 was God's clear instructions to circumcise their sons at eight days old to include them in the covenant community. It was particularly important for Jesus to be included in the covenant community because He had to be part of God's chosen people. It's linked to the fact that Jesus gets baptized, not because He has sins of His own to symbolically have washed clean, but as an identification with His people whose sins He will bear. Jesus submitted to the rituals that God had laid out for His people, at once showing His obedience but also transcending them, since He was perfect and the fulfillment of the whole law.

So the circumcision happened when Jesus was eight days old, then verses 22-24 describe two rituals that took place when He was forty days old. According to Leviticus 12:1-4, Jewish women had to be pronounced "ceremonially clean" forty days after giving birth to a son, so this was a purification for Mary. This was what the two pigeons were for. But also on the fortieth day, if a son was the first child of the household, he was dedicated to the Lord at the temple.¹ In Exodus 13 God had told Israel to consecrate the firstborn of the womb to Him.

Everything in this account reminds us not only of Joseph and Mary's obedience to Jewish law, but also of their humble status. In other words, they were dirt poor. Leviticus 12 said that if someone could not afford a lamb for the purification offering, they could offer two pigeons or two turtledoves instead. They clearly could not afford a lamb, so they went with the birds. This is a reminder to us that the old ideas that poverty was a sin or that being poor was always God's curse on a person are not true. Proverbs 28:6 – *"Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways."* Furthermore, God was using the *"weak things in the world to shame the strong,"* as 1 Corinthians 1:27 says.

Luke introduces us next to those two people that I mentioned who were waiting to see the Messiah. The first was an older man close to dying,

II. Simeon's Life Ended in Peace (vv. 25-35)

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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is

¹ Cory Brock's sermon "The Consolation of Simeon" from December 13, 2020, found at fpcjackson.org.

appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ *(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

Old Simeon, gray-haired and bowed down with the burden of many years. He was ready to die, he knew that he was right with God and that his people had been promised deliverance. But Simeon had one thing left on his bucket list, in fact he had been promised by God that he would be kept alive until he experienced one thing: seeing the Christ, the promised Messiah, the One who would be bringing salvation and glory to God's people. He did not want to die until he got to see this great gift that God was bestowing on the world. Somewhat like Moses, who got to see the promised land but didn't get to experience it, Simeon would not be alive for anything that Jesus did or accomplished in His ministry, but just knowing that God had come through was enough for him.

So one day Simeon was alerted by the Holy Spirit that this was the day. A young couple would be bringing their baby to be purified in the temple, offering a sacrifice according to the Law of Moses. Simeon got into the temple before this couple, and when they brought in the baby Jesus, Simeon approached and asked to hold the baby. Most of us as parents would have been like, "Settle down there, buddy, you're a little too excited. Careful with the baby! And now he's going to sing. Uh OK." But Joseph and Mary rolled with it, let him hold the baby and pronounce his prophecy.

Simeon's words are often called the *Nunc dimittis*, which is Latin for "now depart" or "now dismiss." And what does Simeon's song say? That he is ready to "depart in peace," ready to die. His peace comes from the assurance that all is well with the house of the Lord. It's one thing to know from studying Scripture and having made up one's mind that God would be sending His Deliverer, it's another thing altogether to hold Him in your arms and have the proof of God's love and perfect provision looking up at you. And Simeon is essentially the representative, the spokesmen for all of the believers of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant. They all looked forward in faith to God's Messiah appearing. And Simeon is going to die soon. Just as the Old Covenant will pass away. Just as the Temple in Jerusalem would be torn down, and the sacrificial system would be outdated now that the Anointed One, the Savior, was here.²

Jesus would make all things new, and carry God's salvation forward, establishing the church to become the new Israel. Because, Simeon said in verse 32, Jesus was "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles*" as well as the glory of the Jews. He had come for all people. God had revealed Himself throughout history to the Jews, but not much to the Gentiles, anyone who was not a Jew. Sure, there were glimpses of people from outside Israel who were brought into Israel, but for the most part, God had chosen one group of people. But Jesus' life will change that – He will be a revealing of God to the rest of humanity, while still being the glory of Israel.

Did you notice that Simeon had a very direct message to Mary? Verses 34-35 are addressed to her, saying that Jesus would bring about people's rise and fall in Israel and their hearts would be laid bare. But he also gave a prophecy about her: "*a sword will pierce through your own soul also.*" That's not a literal explanation of how she would die. But something about Jesus would bring great pain to her. It's obviously not spelled out or elaborated here, but she would be devastated by Jesus' death. What an interesting observation that while Jesus brings peace to our hearts, He also brings inner turmoil. Jesus Himself would say later in the Gospel of Luke (12:51): "*Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.*" But He also said that He came to

² This section adapted from Herman Hoeksema, *The Mystery of Bethlehem* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing, 1986), pp. 159-167.

bring peace. It's both-and, depending on the situation, but mostly He brought peace through conflict. He afflicted the comfortable and comforted the afflicted.

Now that we've met Simeon, the other person that would see Jesus before her death was named Anna.

III. Anna's Life Ended with Thankfulness (vv. 36-38)

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, ³⁷ 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. 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.

Wow, this woman, Anna, had essentially gone the route of a nun after she was widowed seven years into her marriage. If she was 84, then this was probably over fifty years of living alone without remarrying. Some scholars believe that rather than the way the ESV reads that she was a widow "until she was eighty-four" that the Greek more likely indicates that she was a widow for 84 years, which would have put her at over 100 years old.³ Either way she's old and she's been alone but devoted to God for a LONG time. This may seem like a wasted life to many: she gave up on family and life and just hung out in the temple worshiping and fasting. What about being God's light to the world? We all have to answer for how we live our lives, but I suspect that the Lord had called her to that, and had great blessings in store for Anna as she prayed and served Him. Most of us fall way too far on the other side, only giving the Lord a few moments of thought or a quick prayer before meals each day, and maybe a bit more on Sundays. Very rarely do we set aside extended time for Him for spiritual contemplation. Would any of us consider spending a week out of our three or four weeks of vacation taking a spiritual sabbatical of study and prayer? She spent all of her time in service and worship. And after getting a glimpse of Jesus, Anna was so excited and so thankful that she couldn't contain the news, she told everyone she knew that she had met the Messiah.

Conclusion

There was a church that made the news a couple of years ago because they were trying to revitalize and grow the church, mostly by getting younger and cooler. So they asked all of the old people to stop coming. That's not exactly true, the pastor Dan Wetterstrom of Grove United Methodist Church in Cottage Grove, Minnesota said. He claimed that people were encouraged to find another church if they didn't like the direction the church was taking or the new church planter they had brought in.⁴ But the story struck a chord because that seems to be the unspoken message to a lot of older folks in churches throughout America: we want to grow, be cooler, be more attractive, so younger people are who we want, not you. How sad that mindsets is. The church should value all ages and value the gifts that every age brings. This passage should remind us that the elder, mature saints in Christ in our churches have a lot of wisdom that they can teach the younger, and the younger folks can bless the older.

Our culture has been worshipping youth more and more, and ignoring and disdaining the elderly. It started in the 60s with phrases like "Don't trust anyone over the age of 30." I just saw a trailer for a documentary about Billie Eilish, who is 17 years old and already unbelievably famous and

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 1* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 96.

⁴ From the article "Did A Minnesota Church Actually Ask Elderly Members to Leave?" by Relevant Magazine's January 20, 2020 edition, found at <https://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/did-a-minnesota-church-actually-ask-elderly-members-to-leave>

successful – 137 million social media followers, 15 billion streams on streaming services, 19 hit songs. Nothing against her, she’s very talented, but the younger performers are, the more likely our culture celebrates them, worships them. I’m sure you’ve heard the phrase “OK, Boomer” as a way for a younger person to just shut up an older person who they don’t want to listen to. I’m sure older people can be obnoxious and don’t always say the wisest or most edifying things, but when we have a mindset of “OK, old person, you have nothing to teach me, you’re irrelevant,” we miss out on one of God’s greatest blessings in our lives. I’m embarrassed by the way I treated one of the old pastors in a church that I was part of in my 20s; I was so obnoxious and dismissive because he was too old and out of touch, I was young and wise. When the reality was that I was clueless and he had decades of ministry experience that I could have learned from.

And conversely, if you’re the older person, don’t assume that you have little or nothing to still give to God. Retirement from jobs should not mean retiring from doing acts of ministry and helping people; in fact, it’s possible to devote even more of your time, as your health allows it. The older we get, the more we realize that we’re “not as smart as a 5th grader” in trivial facts, but we have learned some hard lessons that the next generations can benefit from. My parents are at a church near their retirement community in the Villages, FL, and it’s mostly older, retired couples. And my dad has consistently brought up the idea of reaching out to young families and making the church multi-generational over the past few years, but he is often met by a mindset of “we like church the way we have it and bringing in young people will change our church too much.”

This is a great place to remind us what Titus 2:2-5 encourages of our elderly in the faith (turn there): *“Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women, likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”* What a blessing to know older people who exhibit these kinds of traits, who love and minister with the time and energy that they have, helping to shepherd and mentor the next generation.

I hope that when I’m 80 or 100 years old that I get as excited about knowing Jesus as Simeon and Anna did. I won’t see Jesus face-to-face until I die, but I have the full revelation of who He is in the Scriptures. Simeon and Anna only knew the old covenant and saw the very beginnings of the new covenant. They knew that His name was Jesus, which means “Jehovah is salvation,” but they didn’t get to live long enough to see what that would mean. I get to read and experience all of it. I can know that Jesus’ perfect life of obedience led to Him being arrested, convicted in a Roman courtroom, handed a death sentence, and hung on the cross to die. And it’s not just an intellectual knowledge, but a personal knowledge that His death on the cross was in my place, to die for my sins, to make me holy and righteous in God’s sight. That is how “Jehovah’s salvation” was accomplished in Jesus’ life. Yes, Mary would experience a sword piercing her soul, but Jesus took the sword on our behalf. He was cut off from the land of the living, taking on the punishment that our sins deserve.

You must make sure that, like Simeon, you are holding onto the Christ child before you die. You will not be privileged as he was to hold Jesus in the flesh, but you are invited to hold him in your heart. To put your faith and trust in His deliverance and salvation. Your life could be over at any time, so be sure you have embraced Jesus as your Lord and Savior, placing your faith in His death to save you from your sins. Because when we know that we have Jesus, we can echo Simeon and say that your servant now has peace. Amen.

Benediction

Revelation 1:5b-6 – *“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*