

Title: What are you waiting for?  
Text: Luke 2.29-32  
Theme: Simple faith and an amazing salvation  
Occasion: Advent 2013 #4  
Prop Stmt: God reveals his most glorious treasure to those who dare to stake their lives on God's Word.

This week I drove by Ford Field. I told Cathi I felt like I was driving by a crime scene. The Lions' game this past Monday night, was nothing short of painful. Kevin DeYoung said that no professional sports franchise has inflicted more pain upon its fans in the past 20 years than the Lions. And I did what I tell everyone else, not to do. I believed. I thought, this year, they're going to do it. They had a 6-3 record, the Bears and Packers were falling apart, and I thought, they have it this time. And here we are again. I shut the TV off Monday night, more frustrated with myself than even the Lions. Why did I even begin to believe? Why? I seriously do not know of another professional team that has shown more ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It is mystifying. If I could watch the game dispassionately, then maybe it would be different. But that is very difficult for me.

But, let's say that you have a child who wants a Lions jersey. Do you buy it for him/her? Or do you sit your child down and have the talk. You know what I mean? It's the talk that says, "We are Lions' fans, but that means that we are idiots. We are believing in a chance; a pure mathematical possibility that is disconnected from any basis in reality, but we believe in it anyway. But we are not alone. We are in a community of idiots. That is what makes Ford Field feel so much like a crime scene. The place, as it always is, it seems, was sold out. That means that somewhere between 65,000 and 70,000 people felt like they were in the wreck. And it was awful. For every single fan, it was awful. How many times does this have to happen before we say, "enough"? Stadiums are packed with sports fans who believe in their team, in spite of overwhelming evidence that their faith is ill-founded. That is not strange to us. But what is seemingly odd is when a man believes God's promises. Why is that rare? Why is a person of faith unusual when history is full of evidence that God keeps his word?

Our text this morning focuses upon a man. He is presented as being more alone than he is part of a large crowd. His faith is well grounded, but apparently not all that popular. In the midst of unbelief, he is belief. In the midst of darkness, he is a light. There is so much that we do not know about this man. We do not know what family he is from or where he was born. We do not know what occupation he had. We do not know if he is married, widowed or single. We do not know his net worth or educational achievements. We do not know if he fought in a war, or if he had any children. But we know this: God revealed to this man many things that he revealed to thousands of others. But this man believed them. He was apparently one of the few. God reveals his most glorious treasure to a man who dares to stake his life on God's promises.

Read Text:

40 days after the birth of Christ, Joseph and Mary made the trip with him to Jerusalem in order to present their son to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice for purification. This was in fulfillment of the OT law (Lev. 12). They could offer either a lamb or, if they could not afford a lamb, they would offer two turtledoves or two pigeons. The fact that they were prepared to offer the turtledoves or pigeons speaks to their poverty. The trip to Jerusalem from Bethlehem was about 6 miles each way and depending on how long it took to wait in line at the Temple and offer the sacrifice, they could have made the entire trip in one day, though it would have been a long one.

The area of the Temple was massive. It was continually busy. Sacrifices were being offered perpetually. On any given day there would be several thousand people coming and going. During the Holy Days that number would swell to tens of thousands. Therefore, the meeting between Joseph, Mary, Jesus and Simeon was not necessarily noticed by all that many. They would not have been the only couple coming that day to offer a sacrifice for purification. And they would be among hundreds offering a sacrifice that day for various reasons. (By the way, as an aside, traveling with some turtledoves and pigeons for 6 miles would not have been very convenient. So, there were plenty of people in Jerusalem who would sell them to people like Joseph and Mary who traveled there from another place.)

So, out of all of the people who are there, Simeon is directed by God on this day to go to the Temple. Luke places specific emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. He speaks of the Holy Spirit's activity in v.25, 26 and 27. There is absolutely no getting around this. God directed this encounter.

In the 4 Sunday's of Advent, we have been studying the 4 songs of praise recorded by Luke. But, while I have talked to you about what Luke has recorded, I have not spent much time addressing why Luke has written this down. (go back to 1.1-4) Luke is writing this for a man that he calls "Theophilus". Theophilus ("lover of God") is probably not his real name. The phrase "most excellent" may indicate that he occupied a prominent position in the government and/or at the very least in society. Luke wants him (v.4) to "have certainty concerning the things" that Theophilus has been taught. So, Luke has investigated these events, spoken to eye-witnesses and has recorded them. These events are amazing. Each one provides further confirmation not just to Mary and Joseph, but to Theophilus and to people like us who stand in the line of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, Simeon and Anna. God has spoken and we believe Him. We may be few, but we believe. We may be considered naïve, but we believe. But, our belief, ironically, is not contrary to fact and reason. It is, like Simeon, because of fact and reason. For hundreds of years God has spoken to and through the prophets. He did what he said he was going to do. Why would you not believe?

#### I. **Believe what God has already revealed.** (25)

Simeon is described in four ways in v.25. He is 1) righteous, 2) devout, 3) waiting for the consolation of Israel and 4) one that the Holy Spirit was upon. Here is a man, who does not have nearly the amount of material that we have, but what he does have from God, he

believes. He believed what God had already revealed to him in the OT. “Righteous” is a familiar and important theme that Luke points out. Zechariah and Elizabeth were described like this (1.6). Mary was told by Gabriel that she had found favor with God (1.30). And now Simeon is described as being righteous. I do not want to gloss over this. Luke uses this word intentionally. Now, keep in mind that Luke not only wrote this gospel, but he wrote the book of Acts (emphasis on the H.S.). Luke not only gathered information from eyewitnesses, but he was an active participant in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul. He knew the theology of the apostle Paul. He listened to it. He wrote about it. He believed it and he experienced it.

Therefore, we need to ask ourselves, when Luke describes Simeon as being righteous, what does he mean? Does he simply mean that he is a nice, good man who is kind to his neighbors? No (though he is undoubtedly that). This word, righteous, is a theologically loaded word. Luke is saying that Simeon is in a right relationship with God. Simeon has a right standing before God. Simeon was declared righteous by God. And the reason why I am so certain of this is because of the careful attention that Paul gave to this word in Romans 4. People then, as people now tend to be fatally flawed in their thinking on this. The assumption is this: If you are, in comparison to others around you, a good person, then you are righteous. In other words, what you DO determines what you ARE. That is why most religious instruction and cultural conversation focuses upon behavior.

You hear this when in conversations about religions and churches. People tend to focus on the rules, ceremonies, and traditions. A comparative religious course tends to focus on how differing groups differ in their practices. Which is why people often conclude that all religions basically teach the same thing. Be kind, help the poor, don’t be greedy and you will have a better afterlife as a result. When this happens, (and it does over and over and over) people are confusing the fruit with the root.

In Romans 4, the apostle Paul goes all the way back to Abraham. And in one of the most significant, if not THE most clarifying and salient statements about this, Paul quotes the Old Testament and says (v.3) “What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it (his faith) was counted to him as righteousness.’ Then in v.4 Paul gives an example. To the person who works, his wages are not considered to be a gift, but rather they are what he is owed. DO you see his point? Righteousness is NOT something that you are considered because you worked for it. Being righteous is not a status you get because you earned it by doing good. (Look at 4.5) “And to the one who DOES NOT WORK but BELIEVES in him who justifies the ungodly, HIS FAITH IS COUNTED AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

So, why was Abraham counted (declared by God) as being righteous? Because (v.3) he believed God Word! What Paul wrote about Abraham is what Luke is saying about Simeon. Simeon did not know about the cross, the resurrection, ascension, church and return of Christ. But what he did know, he believed. And because he believed, he was declared righteous by God. So, how was Abraham justified? By faith alone in what God had revealed. How was Simeon justified? By faith alone in what God had revealed. How are we justified? By faith alone in what God has revealed. By the time Simeon came has

revealed to us, a whole lot more than he did to Simeon. In other words, we have even more reason to believe! So, here are a couple of points I want to remind you of:

**A. You already have all that you need to trust God for today.**

Like Simeon, there is so much that you do not know. But, what God has revealed to you is enough for you to trust him today. You and I do not need to know every single detail about why certain things happen or how they will unfold before we decide whether or not we are going to trust God. God has revealed himself to you. He is God, you are not. He is good. He is Sovereign. He is carrying out his plan, right on schedule. His ways are best. So, trust him and get on board and quit whining.

Rome had invaded and controlled Israel. Herod was an insecure, maniacal tyrant who squatted like a human toad on the throne of Israel. There were so many things upside down and inside out in Israel. Things were a mess. Simeon had no idea how it was going to turn out. He did not need to know. But he knew enough to trust. So do you.

**B. You already have all that you need to obey God for today.**

Simeon's faith drove his actions. He was devout. He not only believed God, but he kept on believing God. He would not quit believing God. I cannot speculate about all of the disappointments and challenges in Simeon's life because the text does not speak to that. But he was a human, who lived like you in a sin-cursed world. His life was affected by the sins of those around him and by his own sin. He most certainly had "issues" because he was a human. But, those were not things that defined him. His righteous standing before God was lived out in faithfulness. And Simeon's faith drove something else: his affections. He waited for the consolation of Israel! Do you know what that means? We sing about it every year.

Come, Thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's Strength and Consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

The consolation of Israel was their hope of deliverance from their enemies and their vindication. Israel's history is pre-dominantly marked by suffering, persecution, warfare and hatred. God promised to deliver Israel from that. Simeon believed it. He waited for it. He set his heart on it. He longed for it and looked for it. He lived in anticipation of it. So, what are you waiting for? Seriously. Everyone lives in anticipation of something. What is your something? What drives you? What do you long to see or experience that would free you to die in peace? Is what drives you any different than what drives unbelievers?

This is what I love about Simeon. He not only looks for Jesus, this guy looks like Jesus. You know what I mean? Simeon has an eye for what is really big. He has an eye for what really matters. He is not distracted with the small stuff that tends to define us. This guy is looking at the big picture and he is dreaming big. He believes that God is going to act upon His Word so Simeon looks for it. And look at what happens...

## II. **God will give you eyes to see to even more.** (26-28)

When you believe what God has revealed, he will give you the eyes to see more. If you reject what he has revealed, then you won't. In Matthew 13, Jesus did something that was a major shock to his listeners. He began to use parables in his teaching. When his disciples asked him why, Jesus said, (13.12) "For to the one who has, more will be given and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

His point is very clear. If you only hear God's word with your ears but you do not combine your hearing with believing, then God will remove from you even the capacity to be able to believe. However, if when you hear God's word, you embrace it, then God will increase your capacity to receive and understand more of his Word. We see this played out in a very explicit manner with Simeon. He believed what God revealed to him, so God revealed even more. God told him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. And then, either at the same time or perhaps on that particular day the Spirit of God revealed to him that he was going to meet the Messiah in the Temple! And he did! And when Simeon saw Christ, "he took him up in his arms and blessed God."

### A. **He saw that the Consolation of Israel was the also the Light of the Gentiles.** (29-32)

I love this! Simeon had a big view! He saw that God's means of rescuing Israel was also the same means to provide light to the Gentiles. Simeon understood what most of the disciples seemed to miss. He already saw what many in the early church struggled with. He even saw what some people do not see today. He saw that...

### B. **The salvation of the Gentiles only added to the glory of Israel.** (32b)

Animosity against the Jews continues to be the source of so much conflict! Simeon saw what so many have missed! It is not an either/or. The salvation of the Gentiles comes through the glory of Israel! Therefore, the salvation of the Gentiles (which comes from the Messiah) brings glory to Israel. When mercy is abundant and grace is free, there is no competition for the favor of God. There is always room for more at the cross.

### C. **This salvation would come at great personal cost.** (33-35)

Simeon saw more than a nation, he saw the world. He saw people from every tribe, language and nation being drawn to the New Jerusalem to worship God. He saw the glory of God reflected in the peoples of the world and he loved it! But, he also knew that this

salvation would not come without a fight. This salvation would expose the hearts of many, and that would mean war! Jesus, rightfully understood has always been controversial. He is controversial because he tells the truth. He tells the truth about our sin and if we are proud and bitter we resent it. We want to excuse it. We want to justify it. We want to fight back. We want to blame him, but how do you blame Jesus? You cannot find any fault with him, so you make up something and crucify him so that you do not have to face the ugly truth about your own sin. Simeon knew this! He knew that Christ was going to be a threat to the mighty and that they would fall. He knew that Christ would be a joy to the humble and that they would rise. And he knew that this would mean such conflict that Mary would not be deeply affected by it as well, which she was. She watched her own Son, wrongfully accused, wrongfully tried, wrongfully convicted, wrongfully rejected by her own people, and then crucified. Think of it! She was a Jew who was part of the people who rejected her own Son. What terrible conflict and anguish she felt. But, that is how far some people will go to defend their sin. They will kill Christ rather than admit that he is right.

This is the story of the gospels. There were many who loved what Jesus gave them, but only a few who loved Jesus. To most, he was a threat because he would not share the throne. He was a threat because he revealed the truth. He was a threat because you could dig and dig and dig, but you could not find any fault. But, Simeon was not threatened by Jesus, he embraced him.

### **III. When you see Jesus, you are ready to die.**

Simeon's song or prayer is one sentence. He is ready to die in peace. He is like the watchman on the tower who can rest because the deliverer has come. He is like the runner who can stop because he delivered the message. He is satisfied. God had fulfilled his word to Simeon. He told Simeon that Simeon would live long enough to see God fulfill his promise to send the Messiah. Of all the times to live, Simeon lived when Jesus was born and what is more, he was one of the few who knew it! He knew it because God revealed it to him. God revealed it to him because he believed that God kept his promises. And then he says, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace." What a gift from God! Simeon was able to die at rest because he knew that the One he trusted was indeed true, active and now, here.

There is no shortage of evidence for faith. How can someone live in the land of Israel and reject the Scriptures? The entire story is over-powering in data. I believe that one of the most powerful logical arguments for the authenticity of the Bible is Israel. How else can you explain it? This little country, roughly the size of New Jersey, our 5<sup>th</sup> smallest state only has a population that is double that of Metro Detroit. And yet, this country is repeatedly a focal point of the world.

For Simeon, the fulfillment of God's promises was not a matter of if, but a matter of when. He knew that God would keep his Word, he just didn't know when. So, he waited. He waited in faith for God to do what God had promised. What are you waiting for?