

Until the Promise Comes

Luke 2:21-40

Introduction

Two weekends ago my wife Karen and I were in O'Fallon MO – just west of St. Louis. We went there to celebrate Christmas with our daughter Alyssa and her family. They all come to our house for Christmas every-other-year, and we go there in the off years.

Three of our six grandchildren live in that household; Callum is 5; Chandler is 3; Wesleigh is 1. All three kids knew we were coming on Saturday. The older two were really excited about it – probably because they knew we were bringing presents!

- Our daughter told us that every day that week, Chandler would ask her mom “Is today Saturday? How long until Saturday?”
- And because it wasn't Saturday yet, Chandler and her siblings had to find something else to do. Something to occupy their time until Papa and Grandma came.

We all know what it is like to count down the days as you wait for that big event to happen.

- Ask a bride how many days until the wedding.
- Ask a pregnant how long until her due date.
- Ask a teacher how many more years until he can retire.

Like the countdown clock in Times Square ticking away the seconds until the ball drops on New Years Eve, we have this internal excitement that builds as we wait for the “big event” to happen.

- But until it happens, we must occupy our time doing something else.

And the question becomes: What do you do between now and then? That is, how do you occupy your time as you wait for that thing that you know is coming but just isn't here quite yet?

In the Gospel reading for today, we are introduced to two godly people: Anna and Simeon. These two saints lived in the expectation that they would one day see the fulfillment of the most important promise God had ever made. The promise was the miracle of Christmas – that God would send the Messiah to redeem His people from their sins.

Simeon had been specifically promised that he would still be alive when that promise was fulfilled – and that he would actually be able to witness it firsthand.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. (Luke 2:26)

So what did Simeon and Anna do until their promise came? There are at least three things:

#1: They Waited Patiently (vv. 25, 29-32)

Isn't it annoying how often the Bible reminds of the importance of patience?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience ... (Galatians 5:22)

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; (Psalm 37:7)

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)

Patience is one of those words that causes my eyes to roll. We know it is important, but ... ick!

One of the commentators I read as I prepared for this message said this:

Patience is the most accurate measurement of the depth of our faith.

He was talking about how well we wait for the promises of God to be fulfilled in our lives. How does that make you feel? If we really believe that God will do what He has promised to do, we know it is not a matter of "if" but merely a matter of "when." The patient person knows for sure that God will do what He has promised to do.

Before my dad went into the ministry, he worked for the City of St. Mary's, OH in the power plant – the facility where they burned coal to produce electricity. My dad could tell from the color and quantity of the smoke coming out of the smoke stack if there was trouble at the plant. Several times I remember we would be out somewhere and would need to drop him off at work so he could work on getting things fixed.

If my commentator source is correct, our lack of patience may well be the wrong color of smoke coming out of our lives.

Both Simeon and Anna demonstrated a depth of patience that I envy. Years in the making – 38 years for Anna, we're told. During that time one of the things they did was to wait patiently.

#2: They Walked Faithfully (vv. 27, 37)

When Jesus arrived at the Temple, both Simeon and Anna were doing exactly what they were supposed to be doing – the very thing God wanted them to be doing.

We aren't told how long Simeon had been working in the Temple, but Anna, it appears, had been there for a very long time. Both lived out the faith in the presence of God and His people. I love how the text describes their decisions to spend:

Simeon went to the Temple courts because he was “moved by the Spirit” to do so (Luke 2:27). Anna “never left the Temple” (Luke 2:37). She spent her days worshipping, fasting and praying.

The work they were about while they waited for the promise to be fulfilled was the work of faith. It was God's work. They continued to live out their faith even though the waiting was long.

When there is a long time between “now and then” it is tempting to grow discouraged in matters of our faith. That is a very natural, very human temptation. There is a lot of energy when the promise first comes! It is easy to trust then. Imagine the people in Isaiah's day when he – the prophet – first announced:

The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

That was some 600 years before the birth of Christ. The energy level no doubt lessened in those 600 years. Did God mean it? Why hasn't He done it? What is taking so long?

That was Abraham's problem, too. God promised more offspring than there were stars

(The Lord) took (Abram) outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (Genesis 15:5)

But it took a while for that promise to be fulfilled. And Abraham's biological clock was ticking.

But Simeon and Anna didn't fall victim to the temptation. They continued to do God's work day after day. Their faith was as real and vital as it was the day the promise was made. Time didn't alter that.

#3: They Worshipped Continually

Every day those who went into the temple courts would see Anna and Simeon. It was part of the worship experience, you might say.

This week I had the opportunity to eat lunch in a small-town diner. I think I was the only person there who wasn't a regular. The waitresses not only knew the names of the people who walked in, but also knew what they wanted to eat and drink. I was there on “meatloaf Wednesday,” and more than once the waitress said, “Coffee and meatloaf today?”

It would have been like that for Simeon and Anna. They were fixtures. You would have noticed if they had been missing. Because they never were missing. They were always there.

Most of us don't have the luxury of spending all day every day at the temple. A few of us have jobs that make that possible, but even then we don't spend all day here... so it is harder to replicate what Simeon and Anna modeled. Unless ... we remember that worship is not confined to a particular location. Worship is not restricted to a specific building at a specific address.

This building is where we worship "corporately" – as part of the Christian community. Worship in community is very important, because it is here our faith is strengthened and shared about fellow believers. But worship doesn't end when the service is over. Worship continues as you leave this place.

Your worship should continue in your practice of daily quiet times, daily devotions, times of prayer and adoration. Worship that is restricted to an hour on Sunday is anemic and weak. Worship that is vital happens every day in your homes and places of work. Don't miss that!

APPLICATION

In our own walks of faith, there are a myriad of things out there in our futures.

- Promises that we are clinging to
- Prayers we desperately want to see answered
- Hopes – not wishful thinking – but God inspired hopes that will one day happen but just haven't happened yet.

How we live between now and then is important. Very important.

We cannot live lives of misery and despair, of gloom and doom. Such living doesn't reflect well on our faith, or on our God. We don't live in the fairy land of make believe. We live in the realm of faith.

Our God keeps His promises. One of the verses I cling to these days is 1 Thessalonians 5:24:

The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

Indeed He is, and indeed He will.