

The End of Waiting

Text:

Isaiah 66:1-2

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Luke 2:21-40

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before
the face of all people;

A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother,

Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked (waited) for redemption in Jerusalem.

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Introduction:

We have been thinking about waiting during advent. Now it is almost Christmas; the time when waiting ends. We have seen that as Christians we must wait on the Lord. We must wait on the Lord because he is righteous and he will keep his promises. We must wait on the Lord because salvation comes only from him. We are a waiting people, but not an idle people. We have a calling and a mission for the time of our waiting. We are to seek the good of the city. We are to pass the time of our exile in the fear of the Lord. We are to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. On this Christmas Sunday what I want us to meditate upon is that waiting does end. I want us to see how it ended when Christ was born in order to be encouraged; to not lose courage as we wait.

We have read the later part of the story of the arrival of Jesus into the world from Luke's Gospel. We are more familiar with the first part. The decree of Caesar Augustus, the journey to Bethlehem, the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lain in a manger, angels appearing to shepherds, and shepherds coming to find the babe lying in a manger. Luke tells the story quickly and simply. He organizes it into three scenes each introduced by the word "accomplished".

In verse 6 upon the arrival of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, the city of David, we are told: "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered." The second scene, the circumcision and naming of the child is very brief, contained in one verse, verse 21, again introduced with the accomplishment or fulfillment of time: "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb." The third and final scene, the visit of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to the Temple, is likewise introduced with the same formula: "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord" (Luke 2:22).

This word "accomplished" or "fulfilled" reflects what the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 4:4, 5: "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Mary's pregnancy was not the only thing that had come to term when she and Joseph reached Bethlehem. God's long promised plan of salvation was also about to be accomplished, and it was to begin with the birth of Mary's Son, who was also God's Son, the promised Savior, who would be named "Jesus" because he would save his us from our sins. So Luke repeats this word "accomplished" three times as he introduces the three scenes which occur in three separate places on three different days. He does this to call our attention to the fact that the long wait is over. As Zacharias has already sung at the circumcision and naming of his Son John:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his

servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (Luke 1:68-75).

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus have come to the Temple to perform a double duty. First, according to the law Mary must offer a sacrifice of purification. According to Leviticus 12, this was to be done forty days after the birth of a son. The mother was to offer a yearling lamb as a sacrifice, but an exception was made for those too poor to afford a lamb. They could substitute two doves or two pigeons. So Mary comes with the offering of the poor in order to fulfill the demands of the law. Secondly, the law required that the first born son be presented or given to God. However, the tribe of Levi had taken on full responsibility for the Temple service, so each firstborn son from other tribes was to be redeemed by the payment of five shekels. It was not necessary to go to the Temple to do this. The price of redemption could be paid to any priest. In the case of Jesus, however, it appears that the price of redemption is not paid, but rather like the young Samuel in the Old Testament, he is presented to the Lord to serve him.

Notice the one who receives and blesses him. It is not the High Priest, the highest official of Judaism. It is not even a priest, but an old man named Simeon. This Simeon has no official position but he represents something very dear to God. He is among those who were “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” He fits the description of the person described in the passage we read from Isaiah 66:1-2:

“Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”

By the time Jesus came to the Temple as a babe, Herod the Great had built for the Jews a magnificent house of worship, but God does not “dwell in temples made by man”. He dwells, rather, with those who wait for him, for those who are humble and contrite in spirit and tremble at his word. So when the Lord’s Messiah arrives for the first time in Jerusalem’s Temple, he passes unnoticed and unrecognized by those who were taken by the importance of the place and by their own importance, but he is recognized and acknowledged by Simeon who is described as “just and devout waiting for the consolation of Israel, and indwelled by the Holy Spirit.” This careful and humble man could see with eyes opened by the Holy Spirit what the rest could not see, and when he sees it, he burst into song, singing:

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”

Simeon is not alone in recognizing the Lord’s Messiah. He is joined by the eighty four year old prophetess, Anna, who also has eyes to see the accomplishment of God’s time and recognize the Lord’s Messiah. She, in turn, “gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked (waited) for redemption in Jerusalem”.

So to those who had hearts prepared for his coming, those who had eyes to see, the wait had ended.

Allow me a couple of observations in conclusion. First, Christ comes to those who are ready to receive him. He does not force his way in; he does not overwhelm us, but where there are those who are humble and contrite in spirit and tremble at God’s word, Christ will find them. He will reward their wait. As Phillips Brooks says in the 3rd stanza of “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

“How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given,”

“So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven”

“No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin”

“Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.”

Finally, I would say that the end of the wait is always the same; it is the coming of Christ. All of God’s promises are fulfilled in him. Whether it be in his coming to earth at Christmas recognized by Simeon and Anna, or his coming at the end of time, or his coming to us individually to call us to be his follower and take up residence with us, it is always the same; when he comes the time is fulfilled, the wait is over, songs of joy begin.