

Simeon's Long Wait 2017

Luke 2:21-50, December 17th, 2017

Show Video (*Apollo 8, 1968, 2nd manned space mission... traveled to moon, orbited and return. On that flight was James Loveland who commanded the 1970 Apollo 13 mission that was nearly destroyed by an oxygen tank explosion.*)

It was 45 years ago, in December of 1972, **when the Apollo 17 was launched**, delivering the last manned mission to the moon.

- Four days after take-off, **Eugene Cernan** and **Harrison Schmitt** stepped out of the Lunar Lander,
- which would make its' home on the moon for 3 days and 2 nights...
- with a full 22 hours spent walking (and playing on) the surface of the moon **[see pic]**.

That's about 20 hours longer than Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin spent outside "the Eagle" on their 1969 lunar mission.

- It was on route to the moon that the crew of the Apollo 17 took one of the most famous pictures ever taken...
- A picture of the earth, called "the Blue Marble," taken from 28,000 miles into space **[see pic]**.
- You look at this picture... and it's almost stunning how perfectly round the earth seems to be.

I shared, a few years ago, about a book I heard a little about called *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*

- that addresses what we understand to have been the seemingly prevailing Medieval idea that the world was flat.
- But, the truth is that, in the Middle Ages, all educated people knew the world was round.

- Benedictine friars such as **Roger Bacon** in the 1200 spoke about the spherical nature of the earth.
- Even **Plato & Aristotle** knew way back in the early 4th century BC that the earth was round.

So **why do we think** they believed in a flat world in the Middle Ages?

- Well it **turns out that, in the 1820s**, an American writer...
- Washington Irving... wrote a biography of Christopher Columbus, and he made up this scene where there's a trial,
- where church leaders accuse Christopher Columbus of heresy for saying the world was round.
- Actually, there never was such a trial. The church never taught the earth was flat, **but the scene sounded so dramatic**, artists started painting pictures of it, and eventually the idea just spread.

You see, it's appealing to think that people thought of the world as flat,

- because it flatters us to think we're so much smarter than those who lived in ancient times.
- But that actually is not so. Just look at some of these maps of the world drawn in the middle ages...
- **[2 Pics: First from 1265... the second from 1460.]**
- In spite of inaccuracies and detail, it's pretty clear that they understood the earth to be round!

But that lack of detail wasn't that important since **maps in the Middle Ages** served quite a different purpose than maps do today.

- In other words, **they weren't created to provide directions** from one place to another, but rather,
- They were created as a **means of expressing just how the**

people of their day saw the world.

Now, a real interesting feature in a lot of these medieval maps is that, at the center of everything, stands the city of Jerusalem **[see map 1581]**.

- And the reason behind this **reflected the belief of Western and Near-Eastern** world that Jerusalem, and particularly the temple, was at the heart of everything...
- That, it was the holiest place on earth... **a sign to the human race** that the God who created the world **was still present** in the world...
- And, that **in spite of how much sin has messed everything up**... His passion was to nonetheless, to see it redeemed!

You see, that's Good News... that the rule and reign of God has **broken into this sin and despairing** world...

- And the **One who will usher in this rule & reign** will, as Luke 2:10 says, **bring great joy** to all people.
- In **Matthew 1:2**, the Angel that appeared to Joseph told him to name Him, Jesus, *"for He will save His people from their sins."*
- According to the **Prophet Isaiah**, chapter 7, *"He would be called Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'"*

And **the temple was seen as the focal point** for all of this... a reminder that, in the midst of all the darkness in the world,

- there really was **a place that represented God's dwelling** amongst His people.
- **Israel marveled at this**, and they would say things like, *"But the LORD is in his holy temple..."* (Habakkuk 2:20).
- In **2 Chronicles 5:14**, the author talks about how the ***"glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple of God."***

New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright talks about how Israel would think about heaven & earth *not* as two completely separate spheres,

- but that **they actually overlap and interlock; and for Israel, that looked like this [see pic].**
- There's heaven, the place where God dwells... and there's the earth.
- And, the temple is where heaven and earth meet.

You see, it meant the world to Israel that, in this one tiny place in the world,

- **people could get a glimpse of what it would be like** for heaven to invade earth...
- That's why Israelites loved the temple... this place of hope... this place of redemption! That's why they revered it.

That's why they came to the temple in Jerusalem three times every year,

- to remember that *one day*, not just the Temple, but the *whole earth* will filled with the glory of God...
- That's why the temple was so central. That's why Jerusalem was so often seen as the center of the earth.

But then, in the middle of redemptive history, right between Abraham's day and our day...

- **Immanuel comes...** the One whose very name **speaks of His nature to save & redeem.**
- And, when Jesus does come, His relationship with the temple will be so very important.
- In fact, this connection between Jesus & the Temple began in the beginning of the Gospel story in **Luke 2:21-24.**

In **Luke 2:21-24**, we read, "**On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had**

*given him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to **be consecrated to the Lord**'), and to **offer a sacrifice** in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord..."*

Now this whole event of dedicating your child in the Temple may seem like little more than religious ritual to us...

- but, in a very real way, what happened during this dedication was a reflection of what happens when heaven invades earth.
 - You see... **circumcision** was a symbol of being in a covenant relationship with God;
 - **being given a name** happened in the temple because it means I have an identity before God;
 - being **consecrated to the Lord** means I've been given a purpose from God;
 - and, the **offering of a sacrifice** happened in the temple as a picture of having been forgiven & made right by God.

You see, it's not accidental or coincidental that for many centuries, acts like these took place in the temple...

- because the temple is the place where heaven was invading earth.
- And, **when heaven invades earth**, these amazing things happen:
 - **Sin gets forgiven; people get purified.**
 - **Nobodies become somebodies;**
 - **people get a new names & new identities...**
- Outcasts enter into a covenant relationship with God... and

human lives are given divine purpose.

- Israel loves this, and its part of why they love the temple.

So, when Mary & Joseph are walking out of the Temple courts with their baby Jesus, they've experienced all these things...

- Where **Jesus is circumcised & consecrated** to the Lord...
- and **formally given His name**; where a **sacrifice is offered** to God.

And, as they're leaving the Temple, full of joy, they're approached by an older man named Simeon.

- **Luke 2:25-26** says, "*At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.*"

There's not a lot that we know about Simeon. He was a righteous & devout man who had a rich relationship with God.

- He also hungered for the day **when God's glory would not simply fill the Temple...** but thru the Messiah... fill the world!
- But, even with that hunger stirring inside him through his life, Simeon never set out to **lead a movement**.
- He didn't **form a political action** committee...

He simply waited. He watched. He prayed... **Until he would see "the Lord's Christ," the Messiah.**

- And, by doing this, without even fully understanding it, Simeon's hope was kept alive...
- Hope that, **as Habakkuk once said**, "the glory of the Lord would cover the earth as the waters cover the seas."

It's as if he was saying, *“In spite of everything I see with my natural eyes, I believe God is about to do something in this world that will truly change the world... and I want to see it with my own eyes. I know in my heart that God is doing something to restore hope and I want to be part of it.”*

In **Psalm 33:20-22**, David says, *“We **wait in hope** for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, **for we trust** in His holy name.”*

- That's just what Simeon was doing. He was **waiting in hope** for the “hope of Israel”.
- Truth is, **nobody likes to wait!** There isn't a child who isn't waiting painfully **for Christmas** morning to come.

I can't say I like waiting all that much myself. Just this week, I sat, waiting in several traffic jams.

- I waited in a doctor's office, at a long line in BJ's, I waited for a flight... I waited for Sarah to get home from college for her winter break;
- And now I'm waiting for tomorrow for Becca to come home for the holidays!
- Do I like to wait... I hate waiting!!

And yet, as frustrating as it may be, we somehow manage to put up with these kinds of waiting.

- But, of course, **there are other, more serious and painful kinds of waiting.**
- There's the waiting of a person **suffering from depression** who has to struggle every day to get out of bed because of the **absence of hope** in their life.

There's the waiting of someone who **longs to have work** that's

meaningful and significant... the kind of work that seems to matter.

- There's the waiting of a **single person** for that right person to come along;
- Or the kind of waiting you may **experience in ministry**... waiting for God to **move powerfully**... to **bless the work** you've invested so much into.
- There's the **waiting of a parent**... waiting for God to bring their son or daughter back into fellowship with Him.

Unfortunately, like Simeon, we understand that "waiting" is just one of those **inevitable realities** of life.

- In Genesis, for example, we read how **God comes to Abraham, at 75 years of age**, and says, "*Abraham, you're going to become a father. You're going to be the father of a great nation.*"
- But... "*it won't happen today, it won't happen tomorrow.*"

In fact, do you know how long it was before that promise came true? Twenty-four years!

- Think about being **75 years old** and being told that **instead of heading to the retirement home**,
- you're about to head for the **maternity ward**. (Diapers and Depends in the same trip!)

Now the obvious question is WHY? Why does God make us wait? **If He can do anything**... then why doesn't He bring us relief & answers now?

- I mean, **it'd be nice to make the move into 2018** with a little more resolution... with a few more questions answered!
- And yet, what I think we're all discovering, more and more in our lives, is that... **what God does in us while we wait is as important as what it is we're waiting for.**

This is such an important time of the year to remember this.

- Because as much as we may be dreaming about white Christmases,
- The reality is that for many, Christmastime can be very blue.
- Another words that **gap between where we are** and where we had hoped to be can trigger us more during this season than any other.

But, as hard as it might be for us to embrace this when we're in the middle of it,

- the reality is that **there's a kind of maturity & growth that can only happen** to us through these difficult seasons of waiting.
- In **Romans 5:3**, Paul says that **while we're waiting for God** to set everything right, we suffer...
- But that this suffering will produce perseverance, and perseverance will produce character, and character will produce... HOPE!

What that means is that biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want.

- Instead, **waiting is part of the process** of becoming what God created us to be...
- the process of becoming the kind of person I think we all want to be.

Moving closer toward Christmas... and closer toward 2018, my hope is that our heart desire for the New Year is greater intimacy & friendship with Him.

- But to get from where we are to where we want to be means that...

- we have to allow for **the kind of work** He needs to do in our lives to create that deeper intimacy.
- And so, while in the middle of it, our job is to **surrender to what He's doing** in our lives while **trusting in His timing**.

Now, that doesn't imply that the act of waiting is simply a passive process...

- that we sit around doing nothing **till God does what we want** Him to!
- We're told in this passage that Simeon was "righteous & devout;"
- A man who lived his life "full of the Holy Spirit".

While waiting, he continued to live the life God had called him to.

- **Till one day, the Spirit urged him** to go to the Temple... and so he did... and it changed his life.
- You see, Biblical waiting isn't passive.
- Instead, it's a **confident, expectant, active, sometimes painful clinging to God**.

Of course, in the midst of the waiting, its easy to **forget** or **doubt** that **He really is at work in us...**

- and we can so easily **loose sight of the fact** that what He's wanting to do in us through the waiting,
- is, in fact, as important as what it is we're waiting for.
- You see, waiting means we trust that God knows what He's doing.
- That's why David writes in **Psalm 31:14-15**, "*I trust in You, O Lord... You are my God. My times are in **Your** hands.*"

Well, Simeon was a man of around 75 years of age, **comes to the Temple that day** hoping to see the fulfillment of God's promise of the Messiah.

- Now we don't know how many months or years or decades Simeon waited.
- But, *what if he had given up on his hope?* What if he had just decided, *"It's not worth waiting for, it's never going to happen, and I'm making a fool out of myself?"*
- **What if he never went to the temple that day?**

He would have missed the moment for which he was created.

- Instead, he just kept waiting **until one day Mary & Joseph are coming out of the temple** with a baby.
- And, when they did, Simeon asked if he could see him their baby... if he could hold him.
- And, as Simeon **took Jesus in his arms and looked this baby in the eyes**, he knew.
- We are not told how he knew, but he knew.

Verses 27-32 go on to say, "**That day, the Spirit led him to the Temple.** So, when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations and He is the glory of your people Israel.'"

- Then **he hands the baby back to Mary and Joseph**, and he blesses them.
- We're told, in **Luke 2:33**, that Joseph & Mary marveled at what Simeon said about their son.
- How could they not "marvel" at something like that?!

This devout & righteous man picks them out of the crowd...

- And asks to see their baby! But then, this man of incredible reputation,
- this godly man of faith, **asks to hold their baby boy...** and begins to pray.
- And when he finishes his prayer, he just looks up and says,
- *“All right, God, you can take me home now. I can die happy now for my eyes have seen Your salvation, the Messiah.”*

You can just imagine Mary & Joseph bursting with joy, knowing how this affirms everything the angels had already said to them.

- But then, in **verses 34-35**, Simeon says something far more chilling to Mary, He then says...
- ***"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising 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 will pierce your own soul too."***
- He says that to them... and then he leaves. And, that's the last we ever see of Simeon.

This Child... He's the **long-awaited hope** of the world.

- He's what Simeon has been waiting for his whole life.
- **And yet, this "long-awaited hope," will be spoken against... Many will oppose Him.**

And, for all its vagueness at the time, he's saying that great pain is coming to Mary...

- a pain so severe that it will pierce her soul.
- Of course, years later, **as she stood at the bloodied feet of her Son** at Calvary, she'd no doubt remember Simeon's words.

But no sooner does Simeon walk away, did Mary & Joseph have another life-changing encounter... with a **woman named Anna.**

- Many years early, Anna had been married for only seven years before her husband died.
- From what we can tell from Luke's text, she lived another 84 years as a widow.
- In a culture like that, **it would've been so easy** for Anna to fall into despair and hopelessness. But she didn't.

Instead, in **Luke 2:37-38**, we're told, **"She never left the temple** (where would she never leave? Yes... the temple!) **but stayed there day and night, worshipping God with fasting and prayer. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary & Joseph, and she began to praise God.**

We're told that Anna **"talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly..."**

- This waiter went about talking with everyone else who was also waiting...
- Everybody else who was waiting & hoping **"for God to rescue Jerusalem."**

I hope you're catching this. That, as Jesus grows up, there's this connection between him and the temple that runs very deep.

- There's very little written about Jesus' early years.
- Though, we do know from Scripture that, when He was an infant,
- **His mom & dad bring Him to the Temple** in Jerusalem.
- It's where He's dedicated and it's where these encounters happened between Simeon and Anna.

The only thing written about Jesus' boyhood is when He was twelve...

- **where, again, His parents bring Him to the Temple** in Jerusalem.
- In fact, we're told that, even though Mary & Joseph thought Jesus was with them as they made their way back to Nazareth, He ends up staying behind.

And, after looking for him for **three days**, do you remember where they find Him?

- **They find him at the temple.**
- Needless to say, Mary was distraught... and when she finds Him, she says, in **verses 48-49**,
- ***"Son, why have you treated us like this?"***

Jesus says, *"Why were you searching for me... Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* ... that I **had** to be in the temple?

- Remember, **the Temple is where heaven intersected with earth**... where heaven was invading earth.
- You see, somehow Jesus' work and the work of the temple are very closely connected.

So, imagine how blown away people must've been when Jesus, while in the Temple, said in **Matthew 12:6**,

- that ***"One greater than the Temple is here."***
- No one every said anything like that before.
- In the Book of **Exodus, chapter 40**, we're told that the glory of God appeared in the tabernacle...
 - **but now** the full expression of God's glory would be expressed in Jesus.
- In **Exodus 33**, we're told that the tabernacle was the place where God met man.
 - **But now**, the place where God would meet man is through Jesus.

- In **Exodus 29**, the tabernacle was the place where atonement for sin was made and God's wrath was settled.
 - **But now**, it would only be through Jesus that sins would be forgiven and where God's anger is satisfied.

To show His ultimate connection to the Temple, Jesus said, in **Matthew 26:61**, that **"I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days."**

- Even those closest to Jesus didn't understand what He was saying.
- Not until after the resurrection did they realize that He was really talking about himself.
- This is staggering because even **Jesus is talking & acting as if the whole idea of the temple was to point to him!**
- Tear down this physical Temple... and, in three days, **this NEW Temple will be raised up** in its place.

He's talking **as if everything the temple represented** was now being ultimately fulfilled in Himself...

- That, it was through He Himself that heaven had ultimately invaded earth **[see pic: Interlocking Circles]**.
- And, remember, what happens when heaven invades earth?
- **Sins get forgiven; Outcasts are invited into a covenant relationship; Nobodies become somebodies;**
- **the Poor in spirit get blessed; People get new identities; and followers discover a new mission** in life.

It's all happening now in Him. Heaven is overlapping earth.

- Heaven is invading earth, and, **thru Him**, anybody who wants to get in on it can.
- *You* can if you simply receive His sacrificial offer of

forgiveness and **submit your life to Him** as Lord.

Because of His coming 2000 years ago... because of the Cradle at Christmas and the Cross at Easter,

- **Jesus has become both our temple and our high priest...**
- and, because of Him, heaven can invade earth here & now in you.

God's heart to redeem has now been fulfilled in Jesus... **the Messiah who left His perfect throne** in heaven for earth.

- He's the long-awaited Immanuel: The God who **has come to us** and **who dwells with us**.
- And that will change your life & my life in part, **because this invasion of earth by heaven** doesn't stop with Jesus.

Through the indwelling Spirit in the lives of Jesus followers, **heaven starts invading earth through regular people** like you and me.

- Now **heaven is invading earth** not through the temple **but through Jesus and His body, the Church**.
- In 2 Corinthians 6:16, Paul says, *"...you yourselves are God's temple."*
- He then says, ***"For WE are the temple of the living God."***

You see, as much as Jesus is the hero of everything we're celebrating this (and every other Christmas season),

- As much as we're celebrating (in a more heightened way) **what it means for Jesus to have come as that bridge that intersects both heaven and earth**,
- Remember also that God **wants heaven to intersect with earth... through you and me!**
- He wants His will to be done **on earth as it is in heaven through you and me...**

- as He fills & empowers us through the Holy Spirit.

In **2 Corinthians 5:17**, Paul says that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person... a new creation!

- Verse 18 says that *“All of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him... giving us the wonderful message of reconciliation.”*
- And so, **through His ministry** in and through us... we can then have a ministry of reconciliation to the world around us.
 - Through the ministry of the Spirit in our lives, people can experience a new relationship *with God*.
 - They can experience a new identify *before God*...
 - and a new purpose *from God*.

You see, because heaven has invaded earth through Jesus... and **because He has made His home** in those who've given their lives to Him...

- Whenever you **love & pray for** or **care & minister to** those around you,
- you're simply being the Temple of God to the world around you.

You know... I wouldn't say I have *a lot* of heroes... but I do have heroes.

- People like Astronaut **Jim Lovell** who served as the commander of the **Apollo 13** in 1970,
- which never made it to the moon because of an oxygen tank that exploded.

Another hero of mine is Billy Graham, who turned 99 last month.

- It's sad for me that so many younger men & women in the church today know so little about him...
- But he and his wife, **Ruth**, centered every part of their lives around Jesus, our ultimate hero of heroes!

When **Ruth Bell Graham** died back in 2007, she could have had all kinds of things written on her gravestone to reflect her many accomplishments. But, she didn't.

- Some years earlier, she had been driving along a highway through a construction site,
- and there were miles of detours and cautionary signs and machinery and equipment.

She finally came to the last one, and the final sign read, *"End of construction. Thank you for your patience."*

- That's what is written over Ruth Graham's grave: *"End of construction. Thank you for your patience."*
- Those simple words reflected a life of hope that was always "under construction"... always waiting in hope & serving in hope.
- Like her husband, she knew the joy of being in Jesus' presence...
- and spent much of her life engaged in "being the temple" to the world around her.

Like her, Simeon was a devout & righteous man... who waited in hope... until that day when Jesus changed His life forever.

- In **Romans 15:13**, Paul offers this prayer for us...
- Especially those for whom this is far more a blue Christmas than a white Christmas.
- He says, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him"...* as you wait on Him...

- *“so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Like it or not, in this life we all wait. In fact, waiting will always be the hardest work of hope.

- But, because Jesus has been born into this world as our ruler and king, **Psalm 33:20-22** says that,
- *“We **wait in hope** for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, **for we trust** in His holy name.”*

We wait in hope for the One who came to us on that first Christmas...

- For the One who will come again to bring the fulfillment of every promise...
- For the One who will, once and for all, turn blue Christmas into white...
- For the one who will turn our waiting into joy and celebration.

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