

ViralStJames Bible Study #18: Waiting

The Background – Waiting

Luke 2: Simeon and Anna

As we endure a second lock-down, we find ourselves once again waiting for the opportunity to meet family and friends and share a meal, a cup of tea or a drink at the pub. We wait again for the day when we can join together in worship and share our praise in song.

Waiting does not come naturally to many of us. We are used to instant gratification – next day delivery when shopping; payment on credit card or buy now pay later rather than saving. We expect instant responses to e-mail or likes for our latest facebook post.

There is nothing new in this. The disciples were just as prone to impatience as we may be. James and John sought to gain an advantage over the other disciples by trying to claim the places of power next to Jesus before realising what was involved (Mark 10 35-45) and were only keen to ask Jesus to allow them to call down fire to punish and destroy those who did not immediately welcome them (Luke 9 51-55).

But the reality of the revelation we have of God in the Bible is that waiting is an intrinsic part of life, and it is what we do with this time that is important.

The Passage – Luke 2:21-38

Luke 2:21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Luke 2:22 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 firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Luke 2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Luke 2:33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Luke 2:36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

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The Questions

Simeon was waiting for 'the consolation of Israel', which is a reference to the coming of the Messiah. For the Israelites, the concept of 'waiting' included looking forward in anticipation. In v 25 Simeon is described as 'righteous and devout'. This describes his attitude to others 'acting rightly' towards them, and to God 'devout'. In other words, he may have been waiting, but he was waiting with anticipation, looking for what was to come, and putting his faith into action whilst doing so.

- 1) **Do you see waiting as an opportunity? Whilst we may find it frustrating not being able to meet with people, it doesn't stop us from 'acting rightly'. How can we help others during this lockdown?**
- 2) **Simeon had an advantage in that he was able to visit the Temple to meet with God. We are currently prevented from going to church – what opportunities are still open to us to meet with God?**
- 3) **Luke mentions the Holy Spirit no less than 3 times in in verses 25-27. What does Luke say the Holy Spirit was doing in Simeon's life at this time? Are we alive to the possibility of what the Spirit may wish to do in our lives?**
 - *He was 'upon him' – which implies was with him continually*
 - *Revealing truth about God to him (v26)*
 - *Prompting him (v 27)*
- 4) **Simeon appears inspired as he testifies to Mary and Joseph. For him, the time of waiting had ended. What does Luke say Simeon was waiting for? (v25-26)**
 - *God's salvation – the means of delivery of not just the Israelites, but also the gentiles – for all people – including us (v 31-32);*
- 5) **Simeon was waiting and watching for God to act – and his patience is rewarded. Can you see God at work during this time of waiting? Are we, like Simeon in v 28, praising God when we see it?**
 - *Are there things that you have noticed, or had your attention drawn towards, that you can praise God for at this time?*
 - *Even if we can't meet up with friends, we may still be able to venture outside, to marvel at a sunset or a starlit sky or the view from a hill, and give thanks to the one who created it*
- 6) **Do you think God's vision may be larger than ours? Simeon was waiting for 'Israel's messiah' (v 25). What does he find instead? (v 32)**
 - *He finds is a messiah who will deliver not only Israel, but all people -'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' as well as for Israel (v32)*
 - *Reflect on this: When the Diocese put the buildings opposite our church up for sale, the initial thought was that we would take over the small Estcourt Room that we had been using. God's vision was bigger – and now we have the St James Centre ready to*

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support the community's response to the second lockdown and to help in meeting the needs of our community

- *Might we/you being called to bigger things by God?*

7) Not all of Simeon's message would have been welcome – I suspect Mary would have wished him to stop before v 34-35. Not all our waiting will end with us receiving the news that we would like to hear. How can we handle this?

- *Perhaps a clue lies in remembering God's promises – would Mary have been able to recall the words of the Angel who announced to her the news of her first pregnancy? (Luke 1 30-33); or her own understanding of God's mercy set out in Luke 1 46-56? Remembering God's past dealings with us and his faithfulness may help us withstand times of trial. Psalm 90 v 12-14 shows the Israelites trying to keep things in perspective*

8) Anna crops up only in verses 36 – 38 and nowhere else in the Bible. What can we learn from this brief cameo?

- *Faithfulness has its reward, but it may be a long time coming!*
- *Older people may have much to teach us, reveal to us about God;*
- *God can use us whatever our age – from babies to women as old as Anna*
- *She acts as a second witness to Simeon's claims about the future role Jesus would play in delivering his people – the Israelites looked for two witnesses to verify a truth, but they normally did not count women – but Luke in his Gospel gives women a leading role, demonstrating how radically different and inclusive the Kingdom of God is from what has gone before (think also of the forthcoming birth of Jesus being announced to Mary; the mention in Luke 8 1-5 of the fact that Jesus and his disciples were supported by the resources of women; the witness of the women at the crucifixion (23 v 49) and the fact that they were the first witnesses of the resurrection (24 v 1))*

9) If you are tired of waiting, reflect for a minute on Jesus. He waited 30 years before beginning his ministry. It is thought that his ministry then lasted around 3 years. That's 90% of his earthly life spent waiting for the 10% of his ministry! Reading 2. v 40 and 51-52 gives us the briefest insight into this time of waiting – how did he use it?

- *Growing in wisdom and grace;*
- *Preparing – eg listening and asking questions in the Temple Courts (2.46)*

10) How can you use this time of waiting to prepare for the future?