

Today's Sermon

Anna and the King

Luke 2:36-38

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, December 26, 2021

It was on Christmas Day in 1849 that a teenage British woman named **Anna** got married. But in the 1850s her husband tragically died, and Anna became a widow for many years. She gave herself to serving and teaching **in Siam** (called **Thailand** today). She was a strong woman, and the **King in Bangkok** respected her, and she served in his court for many years, influencing many.

Their relationship wasn't romantic in real life, but it was made famous in the 1950s by a Rodgers and Hammerstein Broadway musical and movie "The King and I" starring Yul Brenner. Its songs include "Getting to Know You," "I Whistle a Happy Tune," and "Shall We Dance?" In my high school musical play I remember laughing at the King saying "etc., etc., etc."

A 1999 remake with Jodie Foster and Chow Yun Fat: "**Anna and the King.**"

2,000 years earlier, not long after the first Christmas day, there was another woman named **Anna** (not British, but Jewish). She married as a teenager, but in the first decade of her marriage, her husband also died, making her a widow for many years. She was a strong woman, respected by many and influencing many. She also gave herself to serving and teaching. In Mt 1, men from the East asked '*where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*'

In Lk 2 Anna sees this King. Simeon in v. 27 first sees the baby Jesus Christ (aka Messiah-King) then Anna joins, maybe whistling a happy tune, or even dancing in the courts. Lk 2 is the original true story of "Anna and the King."

Let's read about it, Luke 2:36–38: *And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him [the newborn King] to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Watts: About the young Redeemer's head, What wonders and what glories meet!
An unknown star arose, and led, The eastern sages to his feet.
Simeon and Anna both conspire, The infant Savior to proclaim;
Inward they felt the sacred fire, And blessed the Babe, and owned his name.¹

Last week we saw **Simeon** in these temple courts in v. 25-35. He saw the baby Jesus and said he had seen God's salvation, that was for all peoples, a glory for Israel and a light for Gentiles, but He would suffer and Mary, too.

Mary and Joseph marvel and are amazed, and in v. 38 Anna comes up and joins in the praise at the same time, thanking God, and speaking to others about redemption they were waiting for. She could say "the King and I met and He's the redemption of Jerusalem, for all who see Jesus as their King."

1. This Special Character in the Christmas Story (v. 36)

2. The Special Place God Has for Widows and Elderly (v. 37)
3. The Special Ministry God has for Women and All (v. 38)

TALK ABOUT OTHER CHARACTERS IN CHRISTMAS STORY
TALK ABOUT BABY JESUS WITH SIMEON AND ANNA, TWO SPECIAL CHARACTERS WE FORGET IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY
TALK ABOUT V. 22-35, IMAGINE THE SCENE AS ANNA ARRIVES

Notice her special description in v. 25: *And there was a prophetess...*

- only 3 others called *prophetess* (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah). Extra special mention, why? Had long been no prophets, male or female.
- Ancient rabbis recognized the Spirit of prophecy had ceased more than 400 years earlier, and hadn't returned as the temple was rebuilt.
- A rabbi said 'From the days the sanctuary was destroyed prophecy has been taken from the prophets... Many believe that the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of prophecy is one of the... things which the second temple did not enjoy [along with visible glory of God]'²

This is an incredibly special moment for this special character in the story:

- In v. 32 Simeon says and sees the glory returns to the temple in this child. The same glory of God that was in the OT tabernacle, John 1:14 says God "*became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld His glory ...*"[!]
- in v. 27 the Holy Spirit has returned to His temple again in this scene
- and prophecy is in the temple again, v. 36 says '*there was a prophetess...*'

God passes over the ungodly men leading Israel and uses a godly woman named Anna to be His prophetic proclaimer of redemption in Jesus Messiah

- Joel 2 prophesied a day God pours out His Spirit on all, young *and old*, men *and women* *prophesy* (the man Simeon also prophesies in v. 34-35)
- Haggai 2: '*I will fill this house [this temple] with glory ... and in this place I will give peace,*' declares the LORD of hosts." (v. 7, 9)
- Malachi 3:1 promised "'the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.

- That's what the last book of OT said as temple was being rebuilt.
- Then prophets and prophecy ends for 400 years.
- But God promised those who were seeking Him that He would suddenly come to His temple...the rebuilt temple that didn't have God's presence.
- Simeon was seeking Messiah (v. 25) and so was Anna and others (v. 38), and suddenly He comes this day. And God's glory returns to His house, as He promised, Joel said both men *and women* prophesy (they do in Lk 2).
- Haggai promised when the glory returned to His house, peace would be given in that place, and Simeon experienced it in v. 29.
- Anna delighted in this messenger of the New Covenant (Mal. 3:1).

There's a lot special going on in v. 36: *And there was a prophetess, **Anna**...*

- Greek form of **Hebrew Hannah** (we have several of both at GCBC)
- More than 1,000 years earlier, another Hannah was involved in a dedication of a son in the house of God, another very special birth, Samuel the prophet (1 Sam 1), who would anoint David as King
- Now another Hannah/Anna is here in Luke 2 as a boy is brought to the temple to be dedicated to God; He would be *the Anointed* of God (what Christ means), the *greater* Son of David, the *King of Kings*.
- There's a lot going on in Lk 2:36 when it says: *And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.*
- Side note: no lost tribes to God (James 1:1, Acts 26:7, Rev 7:6)
- **Anna/Hannah = grace** (Heb. root idea God 'stoops to show grace')
- **Phanuel = face of God** (where Jacob saw it and lived to tell others)
- **Asher = happy, blessed, like in the Psalms, because of God's grace**

This is a special way to describe this special lady, usually the gospels don't mention the tribe and father's name of a woman, but I think Luke wants to point out these little details that show us how big God is and His care for all His people. She experienced the fulfillment of what those names mean, by *grace* (what Anna means) got to see *God's face* (Phanuel) receiving God's *blessing* (Asher). She was happy and lived to tell about it to others, v. 38!

GIVE GOSPEL HERE – EPH 2:8-9, 2 COR 4:6, ROM 4:7-8

#2. The Special Place God Has for Widows and the Elderly

Middle of Luke 2:36 says of Anna: *She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.*

Luke mentions she was a virgin till she had a husband to highlight she had been faithful physically before marriage. Then he highlights her spiritual faithfulness after marriage. She was widowed, probably in her 20s, and now is 84 years old.

This special woman meets Christ, held by another special woman, Mary, probably 70 years younger than Anna, with a special baby.

God has a special place for elderly and widows, more than 1 way:

- God has a special place *in His heart for them*
- God has a special place *in His people for them to serve*

God has a special place in His heart, first, for the elderly or aged:

- Look back at Luke 1:18, where Luke's gospel begins with similar terms, Zechariah in 1:18b: "*I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.*"
- Luke's gospel begins with God's special favor to older people
- In chapter 2, we don't know how old Simeon was, but it seems he is on the verge of death in v. 29 and he's glad to depart now and rest in peace
- Anna in v. 36 is called "advanced in years" and it lists her years as 84
- She experienced Ps 146:9, God "*supports/sustains/upholds the widow.*"

v. 39 says they did all that was in the Law. The Law honors widows/elderly:

- widows were to join families in meals and feasts in Israel (Dt 16:14)
- food was to be provided for widows (Dt 24:19-21, also Acts 6)
- pure religion includes visiting widows in their affliction (James 1:27)
- God's Law provided for those who couldn't provide for themselves
- Lev. 19:32 "*rise up before the grayheaded, and honor the aged*"
- Dt 28:50 speaks of ungodly people who *do not respect the elderly*
- Isa. 3:5 speaks of judgment on a nation where the youth despise or disregard the elderly. Isa 47:6 says God is angry with His people who don't treat right the elderly (Christian young people, listen up)
- The younger generation must honor the older. God commands us to honor the senior saint, to talk to them with respect, provide for widows (1 Tim 5)

God has a special place in His heart also for widows in particular:

- v. 37 says Anna was a widow and had been for decades, but she was intentionally continually *with God's people in God's house*.
- It says she was always in God's house. v. 38 says she kept speaking to other believers. This is a great pattern for those who have lost.
- In Scripture, God's heart for widows is to be shown by His people.
- The godly seek to bless and encourage widows to rejoice, as Job said, he had "*caused the widow's heart sing for joy*" (Job 29:13)

Look at Luke 7, at another widow the Lord gave special care to, a moving scene that moved Him: **7:12** *As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, **the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.*** ¹³ *And when **the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her ...***"

How is your **compassion in action** to those who've lost loved ones? Does your heart go out to them? Why not invite one or more over for a meal like those verses said, or try to encourage them as Job said? Why not write a card and involve your kids if you have young ones? Our girls drew pictures and wrote little things. I tried to bring them along when I visited, sometimes they would sing. As we encourage/bless senior saints, it does that to us, too.

We have **11 people in our church who have lost their spouse just this year**. God has a special place in His heart for widows and widowers, and wants His people to have a special place in their heart for them, esp. in the church.

If you have God in your heart, you should have His heart for these. James 1:27 says true religion involves *caring for/visiting widows*. If you have a heart to care for or visit widows or elderly or shut-ins or to write cards, we have a list at the kiosk, or talk to me or Donna Hall (helping us in office).

Resources: *Comfort Those Who Grieve: Ministering God's Grace in Times of Loss*, by Paul Tautges (designed for elders / deacons / any caregiver)

The Undistracted Widow: Living for God after Losing Your Husband, by Carol Cornish (written esp. for a widow by a widow). Table of Contents:

- Identifying Yourself Anew
- Gaining Comfort from God's Word
- Learning from Examples of Biblical Widows
- Grieving in a Godly Way, Managing your Emotions
- Overcoming Loneliness, Facing Your Fears
- Learning to Be Content in Your Circumstances
- Remembering the Past, Stretching Forward
- Distraction and Devotion
- Making Important Decisions
- Numbering Your Days with Wisdom
- An appendix on "How to help a widow" (I can photocopy)

Ps 90 says: *The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty ... teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom ... Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days... Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us...* [serving and praying like Anna]

This was Anna's heart. God has a special place in His heart *for widows* and God has a special place in His people for them to serve. The middle of Lk 2:37 says this widow didn't leave the temple, she kept on serving God or worshipping God night and day, she ministered esp. by praying and fasting. She would often go without eating to deny self, and remind herself to pray.

She didn't stay stuck in her sorrow and loss, she moved on and was moving forward, and kept herself moving and busy, about the house of God serving, praying. Anna wasn't consumed with self/self-pity. Despite her loss, she was consumed in serving others for their gain. *'Night and day'* is a NT way to say '24/7' or 'that was her life.' We might say today 'she lives at church,' or 'whenever the doors are open, she's there, it's like she never leaves.' The worship service ends but she stays and prays and talks with all people after.

Whenever God's people gathered for worship, whenever there was an opportunity for service she's physically capable of, there she is. And as she speaks to people, v, 38, she's continually praising God. She loves to talk about redemption, or the gospel. She doesn't *have to* worship, she *gets to!*

TALK ABOUT 2020 WIDOW URGING ME TO KEEP CHURCH OPEN

TALK ABOUT WIDOWS/WIDOWERS WHO SERVE AND BLESS US

- Dale, Ron, Donna, Debbie, Betty Jo, Bonnie (Orr and Bachich), Louise opening up her room, too many to name
- How blessed I am to see people who I know it's hard to get here: Wes, Terry Mee, Janice Rucker, Bill H, Nancy Ross,
- You can **serve by your presence**, by your **attitude, and other ways**.
- Some of the most smiling faces here have gone thru hardest times
- In the past I think of Diane Ross, Mina Cameron, Dottie Gardner

Listen to Ps 92:13 *Those who are **planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God.** ¹⁴ **They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing** [Anna was a Psalm 92 saint!]*

Maybe you're thinking 'I don't know how to serve like Anna did.' But **do you know how to pray (v. 37)?** Do you know how to **talk to others (v. 38)?** Start there. 'But I'm too busy, I'm too tired to serve,' you say. Anna could say 'hey, I'm 84! **Quit complaining!!** I've been in pain for decades, I've been single and lonely for more than 60 years; you think what you're going through is tough? Let me tell you about the God I serve who has sustained me and will sustain you. He will minister to you as you minister. I can't run programs or run around with kids, but if I can do something, you can do something, too.'

Last point: The Special Ministry God has for Women and All

³⁸ *And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

What a **great pattern for women's ministry Anna is!** Committed to the Lord's house, serving the Lord's people, thankfulness comes out of her mouth, and she just can't stop talking about Jesus and the redemption He accomplished for His people in

Jerusalem on the cross. She was a witness to all. **Young ladies**, if you want a hero, don't look to TV, MTV, magazines or movies ... look to Anna in this text and look to ladies in the church like her

1 Tim 5 says '**Treat ... older women as mothers** ... Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. The **widow who is really in need and left all alone** puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help... [it says a church should support a widow who] is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds... If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need (1 Tim 5:2-16 NIV)

Younger women, what should you want your life to be marked by after 6 decades? Here it is: If you have children, raise them in the gospel. Do good works to saints with a humble foot-washing heart and actions. Be hospitable to people you don't know, invite them to your home. Assist people in distress. Be devoted to doing good. That's the type of woman Scripture honors and calls the church to.

Now turn forward a few pages to Titus. How are younger women to learn these things? What ministry is there for the older women? READ 2:3-5

- **Older women, seek out younger women** to encourage along these lines, invite over, go through book (*The Excellent Wife, Disciplines of a Godly Woman, Feminine Appeal, Idols of Heart*, talk to Jaime)
- **Women of any age**, seek an older/mature women for discipleship
- HEART 2 HEART OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE
- We welcome your ideas and involvement, care team, widows, etc

All of us young or old, men or women, can emulate Anna. Ps 72:

⁸ *My mouth is filled with Your praise And with Your glory **all day long**.* ⁹ *Do not cast me off **in the time of old age**; Do not forsake me when my strength fails...*¹⁷ *O God, You have taught me from my youth, **And I still declare** Your wondrous deeds.* ¹⁸ *And **even when I am old and gray**, O God, do not forsake me, **Until I declare Your strength to this generation**, Your power to all who are to come.*

What do you do when you reach an age or state when you can't do as much? **Can you talk to people after service, SS, or study?** If we can't do that (as voice or health fails), **may we still pray like Anna**. I've prayed this for dying saints this year, from Ps 73:26: *My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart ..."*

John Angell James wrote *The Widow Directed to the Widow's God* in 1841. Its **chapter on Anna applies her example to aging saints:**

‘Withdraw your attentions from this world ... Let it not distress you, if you cannot be so vigorous in the service of God, as you once were. Do not be cast down, if you cannot hear with the same attention—or pray with the same length, fixedness of thought, and fervor of emotion—or that you cannot remember with the same power and accuracy, as you once did. It is the decay of nature, rather than the decline of grace ... [rely] upon the faithfulness and unchangeableness of God. You must rest upon the simple promise, and rely upon the pure and unmixed word. Aged saint, believe, believe—hold on to the end, by faith. By faith lay hold of God's strength, to support your faltering steps, and sustain you to the end.

Be as cheerful as you can—for the smiles of an aged Christian, happy in the Lord, are as beautiful as the rays of the setting sun ... Yes, though an aged widow, apparently forlorn and desolate—send forth notes of cheerful praise. Like good old Anna, who when she came in and saw the Lord, gave thanks, and spoke of Christ to those around—so you should likewise do. Encourage the younger widows to put their trust in God. Tell them how he has appeared to sustain you. Bear testimony for him, and remind them, that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.’ (p. 160-62)

And all God's people, young and old, men and women, say *Amen!*

¹ *The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts*, Hymn 136.

² *TDNT* 6:819, 815-16