

# Two People Who Understood

Luke 2:22-40

*Halifax: 21 December 2008*

## **Introduction**

We truly do live in an ignorant and perverted generation.

- I think this is especially striking at this time of year with all the hubbub about Christmas.
- As you make your way about the town and you have this crazy mix of people—
  - some who are all full of nostalgia,
  - some who want this to be the one time of year when everyone is sweet,
  - some who are bitter that the name of Christ should be spoken in public,
  - some who are desperately trying to make this all about Christ even though they never stopped to consider that God never told us when His Son was born,
  - some who are just glad to have an excuse to be off work... to get drunk... to visit family... or whatever.
- You have this crazy mix and you realise that the great majority have no idea about what God is doing in this fallen world—
  - or even that this is a fallen world.
  - It is so rare to find anyone who really “gets it.”
- And when you stop to consider that in the Census of 2001,
  - over 85% of the people of Nova Scotia said they were baptised,
    - you realise that we live in times of desperate apostasy...
  - Here are a people who ought to know better!
    - Here are a people who have been entrusted with the oracles of God—who have the word of God and His sacraments very near to them...
    - Yet, how sad it is to see how ignorant and perverted we are!

Oddly enough, this society is very much like Israel at the time when our Lord Jesus came into the world...

- They had their religious holy days and most of the men were circumcised...
  - But the great majority were ignorant and perverse....
    - They neither believed the truth nor practiced the truth.
  - Although the word of God was so near to them, they did not believe it or obey it.
    - Their religious leaders were full of vanity and pride,

- from the worldly minded Sadducees who rejected God's standards and would not believe His Word, much as in our Protestant Churches...
- to the legalistic Pharisees who were self-righteous and had made the word of God of no effect by their traditions, much like our Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.
- And all the while the general population was just pretty much indifferent to it all—they just wanted to get along the best they could in the world.

It can be quite discouraging for those who love the Lord to live in such times.

- More often than not, the times about which the Bible speaks are such times...
  - The general climate and nature of His covenant people is that of ungodliness.

But salted throughout the scriptures,

- the Lord has given examples of godly people...
  - People who truly knew Him even in the darkest periods...
    - During those very dark days when the judges ruled and everyone did what was right in his own eyes... when idolatry was the norm and immorality was strong...
      - we are given a glimpse into the very godly house of Boaz—a man of sincerity and generosity who feared the Lord.
    - And during the time of Elijah when Elijah was so discouraged that he wanted to die because it seemed to him that everybody was worshipping Baal,
      - the Lord shows him that He still has 7000 in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal—the Lord still had His people—a remnant according to election!
    - And during the time of the captivity when so many in Israel did not listen to Jeremiah and Ezekiel,
      - we are given that wonderful account about Daniel and his companions who continued to serve the Lord even while in Babylon.
- We need this kind of encouragement from the Scriptures in order that we may have hope in our own day of apostasy and darkness.
  - We also need to be this kind of encouragement to other believers in our day...
    - You know what an encouragement it is when you find someone who is truly seeking the Lord in these dark days...
    - God has graciously enabled some of us to find each other.
      - I'm not speaking of super-godliness here—
        - but just to find others who love the Lord, who believe His word, and are seeking to follow it...
        - What an encouragement that is to us.

- And so this morning,
  - I want to encourage you with the example of Anna and Simeon...
    - two godly people that dwelt in Jerusalem during the dark and perverted days in which our Lord was born.
  - They are rather obscure in a way—
    - only mentioned by Luke and not by any of the other evangelists...
      - They almost seem out of place—
      - It is surprising to find them...
        - even as we are sometimes surprised when we find a godly family in our neighbourhood—or a faithful church that we did not know about.
  - What a refreshing example they are...
    - and what an encouragement to us to others what they were during these dark days of apostasy and perversion.

So let me encourage you, first of all:

**I. In these dark times, see that you are among those who are trusting in God's salvation... looking to Him for deliverance.**

A. Anna and Simeon were.

- This is what made them stand out so much in their day.
- 1. We are told that Simeon was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel.”
  - You can see that in verse 25...
    - a. *Consolation* is relief or comfort that is brought to you in times of distress...
      - It is a word that is broad in meaning.
      - The word in the original (παράκλησις) which even broader in scope!
        - It refers to the bringing in of whatever help is needed—
          - It can be encouragement or rebuke or comfort and admonition!
      - In John, Jesus uses this word (παράκλητον *par-ak'-lay-tos*) to refer to the Holy Spirit...
        - The translators translate it with the word “helper” or “comforter”

TRANS> But this phrase, “The Consolation of Israel,”

- b. This was a term that had often been applied to the promised Messiah in Israel.

- Now you will remember that the word *Messiah* is the same as the word *Christ*, and that in English these words mean “the anointed one.”
    - They refer to the one that God officially sends to save His people—
      - He is anointed with the Holy Spirit to perform the work that is given to Him.
      - Prophets, priests and kings were all anointed ones,
        - but God had promised a particular one who would be *the* anointed one...*the* Christ, *the* Messiah.
  - And because God had promised that this anointed one would bring consolation to His people,
    - He was often called “The Consolation of Israel.”
      - He would bring the people what they needed.
- c. Everyone in Israel ought to have been waiting for “the Consolation of Israel,” because this is what God had promised...
- 1) Ever since man was kicked out of the Garden of Eden for his sin,
    - the Lord had promised to send this One to restore His elect to Himself out of the mass of fallen humanity.
    - And He had chosen Israel out from among the nations and promised to them that this One who would be His consolation would be born to them—of their descendents...even to David’s line...
    - And through the prophecies of Daniel, the Lord had designated the time of His coming!
      - And indeed, many in Israel were looking for a Messiah...
        - The only problem was that they were looking for the wrong kind of consolation...
  - 2) Throughout the years of Israel’s history,
    - the Lord had shown them what kind of consolation (what kind of help) they needed...
      - That they needed a Messiah who would save them from their sins!
    - He had shown them this in all the ceremonies He appointed for them...
      - He showed them that He was holy and they were unclean...
        - and that unless they were sanctified by the shedding of blood, they could not come near to Him...
        - They had been promised that God would provide the sacrifice that they needed to take away their sin.
        - This would be their consolation.

- We are given an example of this instruction right here in Luke 2...
  - Just look at the ceremonies that are mentioned as appointed by God in His law pertaining to the birth of a son...
    - and how they point to the need for salvation from sin.
  - First of all, that every male had to be circumcised on the eighth day—
    - At creation, man had been given the ability to reproduce children who were the very image of God!
      - This was an inestimable privilege!
    - But by the fall, man would still bring forth children who were constitutionally God's image,
      - but now they would be a distorted image of Him.
        - Rather than showing forth his wisdom, they would show folly...
        - rather than purity and holiness, defilement,
        - rather than love, malice and envy,
        - You get the idea.
    - And so God had commanded his people that every male among them must be circumcised...
      - By this they were reminded that the fountain of procreation was defiled and that God must cleanse it by the shedding of blood.
    - Besides this, the Lord also cursed the woman in childbirth so that now blood would be associated with the birth of a child...
      - There would be blood in her monthly cycle and blood in the delivery of a babe...
    - And in association with this blood, the woman was pronounced unclean in the rituals God gave to Israel—
      - This reminded her that this blood was God's curse...
      - And after the birth of a child, she was commanded to offer two sacrifices for her purification...
        - One as a burnt offering and one as a sin offering.

- This is just one of the many ways that Israel was reminded that they were unclean and needed—more than anything—to be saved from their sins.
    - That was the kind of consolation or help they needed from the Messiah!
      - A Messiah who would save His people from their sins!
- 3) But even though the Lord had shown Israel again and again that this was their greatest need in their regular ceremonies...
- Most of the people were looking for a Messiah that would come to shed the blood of their enemies rather than to shed His own blood.
    - To them, it was preposterous to think that He would be born to a poor carpenter and his simple young wife.
  - What I am saying is that they were centred on consolation that was different than the consolation God had promised!
    - They were offended at the very idea of a Messiah that would come and die as a bloody sacrifice for their sins.
    - They only saw their need of deliverance from the hand of the Romans or whatever else was unpleasant to them.
      - They were blind and ignorant of their much greater need for redemption from sin!

TRANS> But Simeon stood out among his brethren in Jerusalem as one who was looking for the consolation that God had promised.

2. In the same way, we are shown that Anna was one who “looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”
- a. We are told this indirectly in that when she saw the little baby Jesus and learned that He was the promised Messiah,
    - she went to tell all those who “looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”
      - Isn't it extraordinary that this seems to be a special classification of people...
      - You would think that all in Jerusalem would have been looking for redemption...
        - but apparently it is only some, and Anna knows them.
  - b. Redemption refers to the removal of a slave from his master—either by conquest or by purchase.
    - And the Scriptures declare from the beginning that when we fell, we became enslaved to Satan...

- As his slaves, we became, as I mentioned before, a defiled image of God who cannot serve God because we are in bondage to sin.
- And not only that, but we are also in bondage to death because God has sentenced us to death as a penalty for our sins.
- But God promised from the beginning to redeem His own...
  - by conquest, conquering Satan,
  - and by purchase, redeeming us from His own sentence of death by dying in our place.
- Many in Israel were looking for redemption from Roman domination,
  - but they did not see their need for redemption from sin and death.
  - They were ignorant of their sin and of its penalty and supposed the Messiah would have no need to help them with these matters...
    - They only needed His power and military might to give them rule in the world...
      - then all would be well.

B. My brothers and sisters, let me ask you, what is the salvation that you are looking for?

- What is the consolation you seek?
1. Most of you are baptised in the name of Jesus Christ—
    - Baptism is a picture of God's promised cleansing...
      - But what do you seek from Him?
    - Are you like the Jews in the days of Simeon in Anna who want salvation from your felt needs—
      - from your perceived problems—
      - from the things that make you unhappy—
    - Or are you gripped with your need for salvation from sin?
      - Everyone would love to have a Saviour from the things that make them unhappy...
        - but the question is,
          - do you want salvation from sin and from sin's penalty?
  2. Now that the Messiah has come, it should be all the more clear to us that this is our real need...

- In Him, we have set before us a bloody crucified Saviour who bore God's curse for us.
  - This was done on account of His people's sins!
- But I will tell you something...
  - Go and ask the average churchman about the reason Christ came and about the best answer you will get is that He came to be an example—to show us how to be good.
  - They will may use the language of dying for our sins,
    - but they do not use it to speak of Him bearing the wrath and curse of God for us!
- Just as it was in Jerusalem when Jesus came so it is today,
  - Most of the covenant people are looking for consolation,
    - but they are not looking for consolation from a crucified Saviour as Anna and Simeon were!

TRANS> I tell you, if you are among those who are looking for the true consolation and redemption that God has promised (as Anna and Simeon were),

## II. You will stand out from others in three ways...

A. First, you will stand out as one who has a holy life.

1. I want you to notice what it says about Simeon and Anna's lives...
  - a. Of Simeon it says, that he was *just* and *devout*...
    - ***Just*** means that he was righteous in his dealings with others...
      - He did not lead a scandalous life, but was a man of integrity who walked in the fear of God.
        - He did not cheat anyone or lie.
        - He ministered to the needs of those around him.
        - He was generous and gracious.
        - He was not an immoral or an unchaste man.
    - ***Devout*** means that he was dedicated to God.
      - He poured out sincere prayers to the Lord...
      - And, as we have seen, he had a heart that sought the Consolation that the Lord had promised.



- He was gripped by his need of salvation and he was delighted with God's promise of salvation—
    - and so He was attached to His Lord with true dedication.
- b. And likewise Anna...
- Here was this woman who had been a widow—either for 84 years or who was 84 years old—the language is ambiguous...
    - But whatever the case, her life was one of trust in God...
  - She spent her days not in vanity, but in prayers and fastings.
    - She is said to have been in the temple night and day...
      - Not that she lived there, but that she was at all the services and then some.
  - She was there to minister to others, and she was there to pray to her God...
    - You can imagine the nature of her prayers as she saw the ungodliness of Israel...
      - Surely her prayers were poured out for the Lord to send the Messiah—
        - not as so many who fasted as a mere ritual...
        - This woman fasted as one yearned for deliverance for herself and her people.
      - She was a godly woman!
2. And I say—if you are one who is truly looking for the salvation that God promises...
- salvation from sin and from sin's penalty...
    - you too will have a holy life like Anna and Simeon.
  - It cannot be otherwise.
    - Don't kid yourself!
    - If you want to belong to God—if you want to be true to Him—if you want to be reconciled to Him...
      - You cannot but cry out to Him and you cannot but change the way you walk.
    - The same grace that gave you the desire for God's salvation will also begin to transform you.

- If God's Spirit is truly present in you to lead you to yearn for Christ and to lay hold of Him,
- His Spirit will also be present to cause you to lead a life of holiness.

TRANS> So you see that holy life is the first way you will stand out if you are truly looking to the salvation God has promised.

B. Second, you will stand out in that you will see God's redeeming grace at work in the world.

1. As one who is looking for God's salvation, you will see that salvation when others are completely blind to it...

a. Simeon looks at this child, born in poverty such that his parents had to offer two birds because they could not afford a lamb...

- He and Anna both look at what is despised by the world and they see salvation there!
- Look at how Simeon describes Him!

1) A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles.

- Not by the appearance of things—but by the word of the Lord,
- Simeon sees salvation breaking forth into all the world through this child!
- He sees that He will be made known to the people who now sit in the darkness.
- He sees that the nations will come forth to praise His name!

2) And not only that, but he sees him as “the glory of your people Israel.”

a) Throughout her history, Israel was distinguished by one thing...

- God was their God and they were His people...
- God was present with them...
- The Shekinah glory was Israel's glory—the thing that made them unique among the nations...

b) And now Simeon sees that that glory is going to be seen like never before in this child...

- He sees Him as “God with us.”
- God come to dwell gloriously in the midst of His people.
- In Him was to be seen the revelation of the glory of God like never before!

- c) Consider what He was coming among them to do!
  - He was coming in love and mercy to make Himself an offering for their sin!
  - Here was to be seen His holiness like never before—that they could only be purified to stand before God by the blood of His Son...
  - Here was to be seen His love like never before—that He should love them enough to do such a thing for them...
  - Here was to be seen His mercy and grace and wisdom and power like never before!
    - They had the shaking of Mt. Sinah and the burning bush and the cloud and the fiery pillar—
      - but now they would have Christ and Him crucified!
      - This would be the supreme revelation of God forever and ever!

b. And you see further that both Simeon and Anna are filled with gratitude and praise to God for things that others do not recognise...

1) Simeon picks the child up in his arms and blesses Him!

- even as would later be done at the triumphal entry of Christ when many would gather before Him with palm branches and declare
- Hosanna, blessed be the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

2) And Anna—we are told that in the very instant she heard gave thanks to God and spoke of Him to all...

- She had a gratitude that others did not have because she saw the hand of God in ways that others could not see it.

TRANS> I have no idea how much of the details Simeon and Anna understood, but one thing is clear,

- they looked at this child and by God's grace saw what others could not see.
  - And they passed it along to others who were looking for true redemption from God...
  - You see, they were hungry for the redemption that God had promised...
    - so when it came, the Lord was pleased to show it to them...
    - He knew that they would not despise it.
      - He shows the secret of His covenant to those who fear Him.

2. And my friends, so it must be with you...
  - a. Let others look for a big religious movement to impress them...
    - you look at Christ crucified.
    - You look at a suffering, despised, rejected Saviour and see in Him the glory of God...
      - because God has shown you the glory of it!
  - b. It is here that you see light for the nations...and the glory of God's people!
    - It is here that we learn what we are and what God must do to save us...
    - It is here that we learn how much God loves us and what He has done to save us.
  - c. Oh my brothers and sisters, do you hunger for this salvation?
    - Do you yearn to be set from your sin?
    - Do you yearn to be holy as He is holy?
    - Do you yearn to be pardoned by His blood?
      - If you do, they what is offensive to others will be precious to you!
      - What is despised will be glorious.
3. And this will carry over into your whole life...
  - a. When holiness is your aim—when being delivered from sin is your desire...
    - You will glory in your tribulations...
      - You will see the hand of God at work when others do not see it at all.
  - b. As Simeon held up this little baby and saw Him as the Lord's salvation because of the promise of God in Him,
    - so you will see Him now crucified and in this you will the Lord's salvation and in this you will glory...
      - And when you are called to suffer with Him, you will not despair, but you will see the hand of God...working as He promised... working as you share in Christ's sufferings.

TRANS> And it follows from this that...

C. Third, you will stand out in that you will not be a Pollyanna.

1. Do you know what a Pollyanna is?
  - a. A Pollyanna is someone who is foolishly or blindly optimistic.

- It comes from the name of the heroine in book written by Eleanor Porter in 1913 entitled *Pollyanna*.
  - Pollyanna is an orphan in hard times who always looks on the bright side and who always sees the best in every situation.
- b. Of course, in a certain respect, we may be thought to be like that because our hope in God always provides us with true hope in the worst of circumstances...
- When Chrysostom was called to stand before the Roman Emperor and was threatened with banishment, he said,
    - “You cannot, for the world is my Father’s house; you cannot banish me.”
    - “But I will slay you” said the emperor...
    - “No, but you cannot,” was the reply, “for my life is hid with Christ in God.”
    - “I will take away your treasures.”
    - “No, but you cannot,” was the retort, “in the first place, I have nothing you know anything about. My treasure is in heaven, and my heart is there.”
    - “But I will drive you away from man, and you shall have no friend left.”
    - “No, and that you cannot, for I have a Friend in heaven from whom you shall not separate me. I defy you, there is nothing you can do to hurt me.”
  - But that is not being a Pollyanna at all!
    - That is trusting in the Lord with a steadfast hope.
- c. What I am talking about is that gross error taught by many today such as Robert Schuler,
- That error that we are all good on the inside and that all the religions of the world are just so many different ways to serve that same God...
    - that great delusion that everyone will be saved in the end...
    - That is not a godly hope because that is not what God has promised.
  - And there is a slightly different version of Pollyannism...
    - that once you become a Christian, you will have no personal trials and difficulties.

TRANS> No—this is all wrong!

2. You see that Simeon expresses the reality that when Christ is revealed, it will bring much division in Israel...
  - Look at what he says in verse 34.
    - Luke 2:34: "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against
  - a. You that Simeon says that Christ is destined (or appointed) for the fall and rising of many in Israel...
    - 1) Of course this is exactly what happened...
      - a) Pollyanna would expect that when Christ is revealed to the world, everyone will love Him...
        - But this is not so at all—even in Israel.
      - b) Instead we see in the gospel accounts that the more clearly Christ is revealed, the more He is hated...
        - He actually brings out the worst in them...
        - They show their venom toward their Maker, rejecting Him even though He has come as one who is meek and mild...
          - even though He comes as one who heals and shows mercy...
          - The more the light shines the more the hate it because their deeds are evil and they do not want to be exposed.
      - c) What happens is, their true character is revealed of those who do not even want to be saved.
        - They *want* to be at enmity with their Maker even when there is a way of reconciliation...
        - They refuse to come to Him.
          - This is the way we all are apart from the transforming grace of the Spirit who makes us alive from the dead.
    - 2) Simeon had surely grieved at the hardness of the hearts of many in Israel...
      - He must have shed many tears when he perceived that so many of his fellow-Israelites did not have genuine faith.
      - And now he sees that when Christ is revealed to them,
        - their wickedness will be made evident in a most striking and horrible way.
        - Christ will be to them a sign—a true revelation of God—that will be spoken against.

- He would become the focal point of their opposition...
  - A stone of stumbling and rock of offence!
- 3) And notice what it says about the others—they are said to rise...
- The term is actually the one that is elsewhere translated resurrect!
  - Those who do come to Christ are those who are actually given new life by Him...
  - They are not left to do as they will or as they would, but they are given life out of spiritual death.

TRANS> So Simeon explains that the Messiah will actually produce a great division in Israel—

- When Christ is revealed, rather than minimising the differences in men,
    - the differences are rather brought out all the more fully.
- b. And I tell you that it is the same today...
- 1) Many are deceived about this.
- They believe that whenever the gospel is preached in the right way, it will be attractive to everyone...
  - But this never has been the case.
    - It is rather the case that the more purely the gospel is preached, the more it will be opposed even by those are among God's people.
    - And at the same time, the more it will bring comfort to those who are being saved.
- 2) You need to understand that this is what was appointed...
- a) You must not let your faith be disturbed when you see that many in the church do not accept the gospel...
- when you see the many of the most prominent leaders are antagonistic to the Christ who is revealed in scripture, even though they claim to love Him.
- b) I know so many that are sitting in the pews of apostate churches today,
- rotting away all the while...
  - rotting away because "this is the church,"
    - not supposing that some of the most venomous enemies of Christ are to be found in the garb or ministers and priests.

- c) Simeon recognised that it was so in his day, and you must recognise that it is so today.
    - Do not be surprised if in following the truth other Christians call you evil and hate you and hate the message you preach.
    - Our Lord has told us that it will be so...
3. And not only does He tell us that there will be this division in the church when Christ is revealed...
- a. He also tells us that we will experience personal sorrow...
    - Here, Simeon tells Mary that a sword will pierce her soul...
      - Her Son will not be exalted in this world!
      - He will not be welcomed and honoured and received!
      - Instead, He will be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...
  - b. And the sorrow and tribulation of His rejection will reach to all who love Him.
    - Mary, His own mother, is here representative of the pain and suffering that every believer must bear for His sake...
      - For those who love Him constantly see Him rejected.
      - We cannot expect to be exempted from His sufferings as long as we are in the world.

TRANS> Yes, Simeon and Anna saw glorious things in what was despised by others, this was no Pollyanna vision—

- they also saw sin and trouble in places where others expect nothing but good.

### **Conclusion...**

Oh my brothers and sisters,

- How encouraging it is to see these faithful servants of God in the midst of an ignorant and perverted people!
- By the grace of God, it was so...

And by the grace of God it is so in all of you who love the Lord in this generation!

- How thankful I am for all of you who love our Lord Jesus with sincerity!
- May the Lord preserve you and multiply you.