

Patience

Luke 2:22-38

Central Idea: Those who wait on God and trust in His promises will not be dismayed!

Introduction

It's hard to have, and then practice patience in our world today. We're used to getting what we want, when we want it. Advertisers promise that very thing, and they help us to avoid working on the discipline of patience. We don't like to wait for anything, whether it's food, meetings, the famous line at the DMV, or any other kind of line. Just the other day, I thought it would be faster in the Christmas rush at a store to step out of my checkout line into another line the store just opened, and yet, it took even longer when I switched lines because several people got to that open line before me.

Our patience can be frustrated even further by these events, because we directly act out of impatience and end up having to wait even longer. We have no idea what delayed gratification is, and when we don't wait for things, we don't value them nearly as much as the things that take time and patience. In the Christmas story, there are a couple of very special people who understood the discipline and art of waiting on God. They didn't just sit around. They actively waited on Him, and He rewarded their efforts when Jesus was born. Let's take a look at their stories to learn how to have patience today!

Text – Luke 2:22-38

²² And 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 male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” ³⁶ 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, worshipping 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 to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

I. God brings our hopes into reality in His time (Luke 2:22-35).

A. His promises fuel our hope in Him.

- i. God works throughout the Bible through promises to His people. From the very beginning of time, God has used this method to ensure the future. Promises bear God's character as their seal of coming to pass.
- ii. Promises engender trust in the one who promises them. They have yet to be fulfilled in reality, and this is key because it is not that God has already completed the promises.
- iii. Paul puts it like this: "Who hopes for what he already has?" Promises and hope look to the future. They provide the foundation for trust in God. And it is abundantly important who is promising the promise.
- iv. Their fulfillment depends on that Person and His character. Is that person the sort to promise and not deliver? Or has that person always been faithful to bring about everything they've promised. Perhaps they are between the two.
- v. But we know of God, especially as we have celebrated Christmas, that He promises and delivers. This makes our faith more valid and more foundational, because the one we put our trust in is trustworthy to deliver the promises to our reality.
- vi. This man, Simeon, is one such individual who has been promised something wonderful by God. He has been promised that God would reveal to him personally the promised Messiah before he died.
- vii. This is a man who is most likely elderly already, and like all of those who have gone before, he waits on God's promise to be fulfilled in his lifetime.
- viii. He trusts that the promise is going to happen in his life, even though God has been silent for 400 years since Malachi spoke His word prophetically. He trusts that this Messiah is coming even though He has been promised since the times of Moses!
- ix. **Application:** God can use time as a way to test our trust in Him. Time is a great sifter of those who are patient and those who are not. It is in the waiting process through time that we are challenged the most. God has said this will happen in reality, but it still has not. Is it coming? Was I wrong about its coming, or even worse, was I wrong about the one who promised? These questions surface the longer we wait for the promise, and

some get discouraged that the promises are not yet fulfilled. But this is where endurance is required to pass the test!

- B. He provides points of contact with hope being fulfilled.
- i. Simeon is not the first, nor will he be the last, to wait on God's promises to come into reality. Throughout history, men and women have been tested with the promises of God.
 - ii. There's Abraham who was promised an heir in his old age with a barren wife, and he and Sarah had to learn to wait on God's promise in God's time.
 - iii. David was promised that God would have a king from his lineage forever on the throne of Israel, and that happens beginning at Christmas with the birth of Jesus the Messiah!
 - iv. The prophets trusted that one day, the Day of the Lord and the salvation of God's people will take place. That day has yet to come, and we live in the waiting period even today for that.
 - v. We have been promised many things in the New Testament as well, such as the second coming of Christ. We wait and serve. We know that He is coming because God has fulfilled other promises.
 - vi. You see, Simeon put all his trust in the promise of seeing the Messiah in his lifetime for two reasons. The first is that he has read about God's fulfilling His promises in the Word of God, and the present day of Simeon is based on past fulfilled promises by God.
 - vii. The second reason is that Simeon has personally never been disappointed by God and His promises in his own life. Many, if not all of us, can tell of God's ways of fulfilling our faith.
 - viii. Paul explained our life in Christ in this way: Three remain, faith, hope and love. Hope is the future, the promise, that we wait upon. Faith is the active pursuit of the promised and hoped for reality. As we hope, we live in faith based on the promise being for real. And love is the way that our faith is spread to others. Through loving others, we show that faith as an active pursuit of the hope of God.
 - ix. Because Simeon lived his life in such a way that showed his devotion and faith in God, the promise would come to pass for him. The promise gives us faith to endure the things in life that don't agree with the promise. The question is, what is greater, the promise and my faith in God, or whatever trial is going against the promise?
 - x. Application: What has God promised you personally? What about the promises in His Word. When you get discouraged, how do you deal with those things in life that disagree with God's promises? Our trust in God to bring His promise into reality must be stronger than the trials that we face.

We must think of the promise as reality rather than the present circumstances. Don't allow time and circumstance to steal your trust in the God of all things!

II. God rewards faithful devotion with revelation (Luke 2:36-38).

A. We must be faithful to God and to His word.

- i. Promises indeed engender faith in us, putting hope in the promises as the object of our faith. But there seems to be in the story of the second character, Anna, a pattern for seeing God's promises come to pass.
- ii. The promises depend on our trust in God. That trust cannot simply be a mental ascent to what He has promised. We have to live as though the promise is true, because it is!
- iii. Patience and endurance have a very close relationship in the Bible, and as this woman waits on God, it seems to be that God lets her know about the same promise He made to Simeon.
- iv. This is not just any woman who "got lucky." There's a method to her part in the Christmas story. First, she is a prophetess, being used of the Lord in her gifting.
- v. She is also dedicated and devoted to God and to the temple. She is there when the doors are open. It's most likely that she would travel to the temple and be there often, not that she never left at all.
- vi. She has also maintained proper ritual purity and been faithful to her husband of seven years. She never remarried. Can you imagine only being married for seven years, and then never remarrying? That is not only unheard of in our culture, but was rare even in Israel!
- vii. She is devoted by being in the temple, fasting and praying, worshipping God and offering her all. It's clear also from the last verse that she has a passion for the fulfillment of prophecy and promise.
- viii. It is no surprise that this woman, who has done the hard work of seeking God and devotion, is rewarded by God to be part of the "inside track" of what He is doing right now in Israel.
- ix. There is a method to our patience and our waiting. Our endurance means that we trust in God and live the promise out. We don't give up on it or live contrary to its premise.
- x. For instance, if Jesus has promised that He is returning to take us home and to judge the world, then we must live lives that glorify God and don't cause Jesus to be upset with us. And we look to His return. We don't suggest it's not going to happen.
- xi. **Application:** What's the hardest part of waiting for promises from God in your own life? We all have different struggles whether they be time, reasoning away the promises, losing hope, faltering in faith, or whatever

they may be. But we must gather together and encourage one another to continue and endure, for the end is near. We must never give up our trust in the hope that Jesus is returning and that what He has said will happen will be reality soon!

B. We must seek God with our everything.

- i. When I think about Anna the prophetess, I am struck by her patience. This woman is 84 years old and she still goes to temple every day, spending time in prayer, worship, fasting, and seeking God.
- ii. It's clear from the verses that she is part of some group that is especially open to the promises of the Messiah. She is devoting herself completely to God in these verses.
- iii. She has remained without a husband and focused on her life in God all that time. Time has only proven her devotion. And her passion is also clear from that time spent.
- iv. The disciplines that we set up and pursue can bring to us a world of joy that no one can understand or take away. They can also open the door for God to entrust more of His plans to us.
- v. When we show that we are actively waiting through pursuing God and the things of God, God sees our effort. He rewards us for faithfulness to Him, because faithfulness in our world is so rare.
- vi. Faith is the ability to stick to God despite our circumstances. It is not that we ignore the reality or gravity of our situations, but that we don't let them be our final word on the matter of the promise. We let the promise speak to reality, rather than reality slander the promise.
- vii. Anna teaches us that faithfulness to God and His promise above all other things in life will reward us in ways we could never imagine. You can't calculate how your trust in God's promise will reward you, but it always does.
- viii. So here we are, waiting on God's promises today, and we are tempted to think that they may not be fulfilled. Those little seeds of doubt are planted in a million different ways by the enemy and by our own impatience.
- ix. We must ignore the temptations to place our faith in something or someone else. The promise may not yet have become reality, but all of God's promises in the past have come to reality, and so will this one.
- x. Don't forget that the one who promised is faithful and true. He doesn't promise us these things as a science experiment. He wants our very best, and He will bring it to pass if we wait on Him and don't give up on the promises He has for us!
- xi. **Application:** The greatest gift for us as we wait for the promise is encouragement and endurance. This is one of the reasons we gather

together here in this place. As we live life together in fellowship, we can encourage one another, hear the prophetic and written Word of the Lord, and seek God for these promises. And walking the path with someone helps us to endure because it provides not only encouragement, but also accountability so that when we are tempted to live contrary to God's promises, someone will remind us we need to endure.

Conclusion

Oh the joy of seeing that promise fulfilled! And one day, if we learn true patience and endurance, we will see that promise fulfilled. It will happen whether we remain faithful or not, but we will be part of it when we remain faithful to God through the waiting period. These two characters show us diligence in our wait, and the joy of the prize for patience. Let us keep Jesus as our prize always before us, and we will see His promises come to reality.

In 2013, we will be talking a lot about what God has promised and what is coming to pass soon. We'll be talking about the end times, the last days, and the need for endurance. Let us lift one another up in encouraging and enduring together until the promises are fulfilled. Let us place our focus not on the promises not yet being fulfilled, but on the promises that have been touchpoints of God's faithfulness, those promises that have already been fulfilled, like Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection!

Action Points

- Patience is the posture of the believer who hopes in promises yet to be fulfilled. Touchpoints through history show that God is faithful to fulfill them, but it takes time.
- Time and circumstance can become enemies of endurance and trust in God. Don't let your circumstances tempt you to doubt God's plan or promises. He is working every moment for their fulfillment.
- Endurance and encouragement are the best medicine for us as we await God's promises being fulfilled. We can fellowship with like-minded believers to help us stay the course and finish strong in our faithfulness to God. Don't go it alone. Seek others to walk with you in these promises!