

Waiting For Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you, John and Fiona. Good evening, folks. As has been said, my name is Alistair. It's my joy to be the assistant here and to bring us God's word again today. Keep that passage open in Luke in front of you as we go through it. But as you maybe turn there again, let us pray together. Let's pray.

Father, we come before you and as we spend a few moments thinking about your servant in Luke, as we think about Anna, the prophetess, Father, would we be encouraged? Would we be challenged? Would we be spurred on to be better disciples who love you, who serve you and who give you everything? We ask this in Jesus' name and for the upbuilding of your kingdom. Amen. What are you waiting for? Maybe you're waiting for the return of normal life as we've gone over yet another weird Christmas. Maybe you want normal Christmas again. You're waiting for the ability to go out and meet all of your friends and all of your family members to have fun and laugh together without thinking about masks or hand sanitizer or restrictions.

Or maybe you're waiting for the return of normal life as we've gone over yet another weird Christmas. Or maybe you're waiting to hear the result of a job interview. You've been out of work for a while and you really, really need that job. Or maybe it's a doctor's test result that you're waiting for and it's terrifying. Waiting isn't always fun and it isn't always easy, is it?

Waiting isn't always fun. Waiting isn't always fun or easy, but it is something that we do all the time, is it not?

[1 : 54] And for the Christian, there's an added element of waiting because as Christians, we are called to wait on the return of the Lord. Jesus told us that he will return one day and we are to eagerly anticipate that day.

but the question I find a lot of people ask is how exactly should we be living in this period of waiting how can we wait well for that day when the Lord Jesus will return well this evening we're going to look at the example of Anna in Luke 2 and we'll see how she too was waiting for the Messiah to come and I believe Anna can be a great example for us today of how we can live our lives as we wait for Jesus to return so let's do a little bit of background work in Luke 2 before we spend most of our time thinking about Anna together and what we can learn from her extraordinary life so in Luke 2 we are given signs to tell us the reality of Jesus's identity that he is the sent one from God the Messiah of God's people the Savior of the world Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple to present him before the Lord following the Old Testament law that you can read all about in Leviticus but in the temple something different happened this day Mary and Joseph were met by two people first Simeon and second Anna two faithful servants who were looking for and waiting for the Messiah but unlike the rest of Israel they weren't looking for a strong political leader they weren't blinded by the popular desire of a military Messiah who would come and kick out the Romans and free Israel to live as they pleased Simeon and Anna were drawn by the Holy Spirit to see the Son of God in the humble form of a baby helpless and in the arms of a poor young mother who walked into the temple that day it's interesting that in Luke 2 the only it's only the humble and so-called unremarkable people of the day who actually recognize Jesus for who he really is the shepherds and these two people in the temple not exactly the trumpet sounding entrance we would expect of a king and yet isn't it fitting because this king is humble and he is gentle so let's take a look inside the temple

Simeon prompted by the Holy Spirit goes into the temple and meets this new family and he realizes who Jesus is Simeon has been waiting and the passage says for the consolation of Israel meaning the moment the Old Testament promises would be fulfilled and the Messiah would come to save the Lord's people and so after seeing Jesus Simeon knows that he can die peacefully because this promise has been fulfilled before him his eyes have seen the Savior of the world that's why in his

short song of praise Simeon declares for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel and then in verses 36 to 38 we are introduced to a wonderful woman of God called Anna we don't have a huge amount of detail about her her life all we have are these three verses but they do tell us quite a bit about her so let's meet Anna briefly and then I want us to focus on three things that characterized her life and how they should challenge and encourage us all this evening as we wait for the return of the Lord so Anna's described look at verse 36 as a prophetess or a prophet she was someone who knew God's word who loved the Lord and who spent time in the temple based on what we see in verse 38 how Anna kept on telling people about Jesus

I think I think Luke wants us to see Anna as a great fourth teller of God's word by spreading God's word she's joined the ranks of other women in the Old Testament like Miriam, Deborah, Hannah and others go check them out in your own time Anna is a prophetess because she is proclaiming God's word verse 36 also tells us that Anna was from the tribe of Asher one of the northern tribes of Israel who were largely seen as the unfaithful ones because in the Old Testament they had separated from the southern kingdom and they'd followed a different line of kings from the line of Judah who were under the lineage of David so Anna represents a faithful remnant within the northern tribes of Israel and the last biographical detail we get about Anna before we dive into the three characteristics of her life is that she was a widow so Anna at this point is an old woman now probably around 83, 84 and she has not had an easy life at all she was married but just after seven years her husband died and she has been a widow ever since now why do you think Luke highlights that?

[7 : 42] I think he highlights it so that we can know that regardless of your age and stage regardless of your marital status regardless of whether you have children or not Luke wants you to know that nothing, absolutely nothing hinders us from serving the Lord Anna didn't let her circumstances stop her from serving God she didn't think that she was too old or detached from the younger generations she recognized what she could do and she got busy doing it which is precisely what we should be doing as well but more on that later on so these are all the biographical details we have about Anna but it is just the beginning of the story because in these three verses we can see three things that characterize the life of this extraordinary woman so we'll look at each of these and see how they should also challenge us as we wait for the coming of Christ the first thing we see that characterizes Anna's life is faithful devotion faithful devotion look at verse 37 with me it says she did not depart from the temple worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day

Anna was always in the temple so imagine for a minute you're the one with the keys to open the temple gates you are the first there and the last one out you get up early so that all the people in Jerusalem can start their prayers and sacrifices on time you walk to the gates just as the sun is coming up over the horizon and as you twist that key and pull the gate towards you you are greeted with the same face every single morning that was Anna she'd become a feature of the temple but she wasn't just hanging around the temple because it gave her something to do or because she got company there she was in the temple all the time because she loved the Lord and she was eagerly and patiently waiting to see the Messiah that's why in verse 38 after Anna saw Jesus and gave thanks to God for him she went out telling people about him she's an example of faithful patience and devotion as she waited in the temple day and night learning the Old Testament promises about God and the coming Messiah praying and fasting joining in with others as they prayed and waited for Jesus to arrive her patience was the result of her devotion to the Lord and brothers and sisters I pray that we too would be characterized as a people of faithful devotion not devoted and patient for the arrival of God's Messiah to save his people that already happened when Jesus came and lived the life that we never could when he died the death that we all deserve and was raised to life victorious over sin and death but faithfully devoted and patient as we wait on his second coming I pray that we would be faithfully patient for the return of our Lord the risen ruling and reigning King who has promised that he will come back and who is currently seated at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf and who will come and take us to be with him in the new creation forever but until that day comes we are called to be faithfully patient and have faithful devotion what a timely reminder Anna is for us in our present times because throughout this pandemic we've become used to sitting behind screens haven't we isolation social distancing have become normal but it has affected churches too it's become easy to watch church from the comfort of our couches at home it's become easy not to engage with church meetings and to almost forget about church

altogether until Sunday morning comes around again friends if we are Christians we are called to eagerly anticipate the Lord's return and we are called to gather with the Lord's people gathering as a local church body is not a Sunday activity churches aren't social clubs that gather around tea and cake we gather out of a devotion to the Lord out of a love for his word and a love for his people we gather to give God all the glory and to help each other grow in our understanding of his word and his will for his people

Anna isn't here to teach us that we simply need to get busy with church and have a full diary all the time that we always need to be in the building but Anna is a reminder to us of the importance of spending time with the Lord's people and building one another up spurring each other on until the day where we are taken to be with the Lord or he returns so brothers and sisters please gather together fellowship together spend time in God's word together in church in coffee shops around your homes around tables around meals do everything you can to have faithful devotion until Jesus returns and the second thing we see that characterizes Anna's life is faithful prayer and fasting faithful prayer and fasting look at verse 37 again she did not depart from the temple worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day

Anna used her time to pray and fast but she goes above and beyond what was asked of her under the Old Testament law according to the Old Testament law there was only one day a year where Israel were required to fast and that was the day of atonement but it does seem that around about this time of Jesus' birth fasting had become quite a common practice among some Israelites remember maybe in Matthew 9 when Jesus is asked by John's followers why his disciples don't fast and Jesus says that to them then why should they mourn when the bridegroom is with them but a time is coming where the bridegroom will not be there anymore and Jesus says his disciples will fast now prayer and fasting go hand in hand fasting means voluntarily going without food for spiritual purposes now when I was studying at the Faith Mission Bible College here in Edinburgh a number of years ago

[14:49] I did my final dissertation on fasting the role of biblical fasting in the lives of believers today because I had no idea about it I wasn't taught about much in church and I hadn't really thought about it much and in my research for that paper I realized that fasting is either focused on too much and almost seen as a some kind of secret spiritual superpower that strengthens your prayers or in the other extreme it is neglected and not talked about at all and not practiced at all sadly we don't have time to go into this massive but wonderful topic of fasting in depth but in your own time please do read Isaiah chapter 58 Matthew chapter 6 and Matthew chapter 9 to learn more about what biblical fasting is but Anna used her time for prayer and fasting so much of our time is spent with food in front of us isn't it?

I mean I don't know about you guys but I definitely had a food coma over Christmas we sit around the table we catch up with people and we spend time together Sabina and I were in Austria with my in-laws in September and we always laugh because when we're there our lives revolve around food we have breakfast and at the breakfast table we're already thinking about what's coming for lunch and then we have lunch and it goes straight into coffee and cake and then thinking about dinner and then there's a few snacks in between before we actually hit dinner and then there's some sweets afterwards too food is a very good gift from God that should be enjoyed and it takes up a lot of our time which is a good thing but Anna voluntarily gave up food for periods of time and devoted herself to prayer we don't know exactly what she was praying but based on these verses I'm sure she was thanking God for his care for her over all the years that she'd been a widow and I'm sure that she was praying that the Messiah would come and save the Lord's people so she is an example of faithful prayer of time dedicated to the Lord and spent on her knees before him in worship our brothers and sisters

I pray that we too would be a people characterized of faithful prayer and fasting why don't we very practically take Anna as an example and look into the practice of fasting and if you are physically able and if it's wise for you to do so think about voluntarily going without one meal and spending that time in prayer instead start a prayer list keep it on you at all times as you go about your day to day life and when you have a second pull it out pray for people pray through psalms pray prayers that we see in the Bible use whatever tools you can think of to raise your voice in praise and thanksgiving to the God who loves you and who gave his life for you fast and pray in light of the return of Jesus Christ pray that the church both this church and the global church would be strengthened in the knowledge of God's word pray for our elders for boldness and strength as they

lead this church pray for wisdom for you to know how to glorify Christ in every area of your life every single day and pray for the non-Christians in your life that they would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus and that they too would eagerly await his return jot down those names pray for them keep them in your phone in your wallet anywhere but pray for people to come to know Jesus

Jesus will return and that will be a glorious and a dreadful day glorious for those who are Christians and have put their trust in Jesus because on that day we will go to be with our Lord forever in perfect harmony but a dreadful day for all those who have rejected Jesus because for them that day will not be one of rejoicing but one of judgment and so we need to pray that people would come to know Jesus that they would have forgiveness and that they could look forward to eternal life that is only possible through Jesus so we should be people characterized by faithful devotion faithful prayer and fasting and the third thing that characterizes Anna's life is faithful proclamation faithful proclamation read verse 38 with me and coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him that's Jesus to all who were waiting for the redemption of Israel so Anna realizes who this little baby is and she gives thanks to God for him and then she immediately goes out and starts to speak about him she proclaims to every single ear that will hear who this little baby is and it's her role as a prophetess she began to share

Jesus with those who were patiently waiting for the Messiah but that didn't just happen on this day the words used in the original language point to a continuous talking so basically from this moment on until the day that Anna breathed her last she kept on spreading the news of Jesus the news that the long awaited Messiah had already come this extraordinary woman proclaimed Christ to the people of Israel and because she was probably around 84 she most likely died before Jesus' public ministry began some 30 years later she saw who he was before the rest of Israel even got a glimpse she knew that the Messiah had come and she could not keep that good news to herself she needed to spread the news to all those who would listen so that they knew the one who could save them had arrived

[21 : 37] Anna was still only able to see a little part of the story she couldn't tell people of the teachings of Jesus of his miracles of his perfect life she couldn't tell people of his death and of his resurrection and how Jesus was the perfect sacrifice needed to take away the sins of all those who trust in him and to bear the full wrath of God against the sins of the world but friends because of where we stand in history we have the full story we know the whole gospel and we have a job to take it out to the world and to spread it as freely as we possibly can if you're looking for a new year's resolution this year make that one that you take every single opportunity to share Jesus Christ with the world that needs to know of him

Anna only knew a little bit of the story but she makes sure everyone knows about it are we faithful in our proclamation of Christ or do we hide it maybe you're sitting here this evening and you're nodding away sounding your amens but thinking that this devotion this prayer and fasting and proclamation is only for the younger generation maybe you think you've served your years in the church and you just need to step aside and let the young folk do their thing let me push back on that a little bit and say that you cannot retire from the Christian life there is no such thing as being too old to serve look at Anna probably in her 80s and yet she gathered with the Lord's people and she proclaimed Christ all the time she spent her time in prayer and fasting out of a deep rooted devotion to Christ friends if you are old teach the younger generation because we need to know how to follow

Christ well we need to learn from your experience we need to know how to faithfully proclaim Christ to the world let us learn from you we need to know how to serve Christ to the best of our ability but that doesn't mean you stop I know so many people in this church and elsewhere who are too frail who are too ill to gather with the rest of the church family on Sundays and other meetings however their service has not stopped they spend every free minute they have praying for the people of this church praying for the outreach of this church praying for the leaders and praying for individual members and caring for them as well praying that the Lord would do his work praying that the church would grow and ultimately that God would be glorified so regardless of how old you are the Lord has a work for you to do in your season do not neglect it but out of a deep love for the Lord a deep love for his people a deep love for his word serve to the best of your ability like Anna did that goes for both young and old and you will be mocked for sharing the gospel persecution may come and you will definitely have awkward conversations but that is what we've been called to do we live in a world that is dying without the knowledge of Jesus and the gospel and

we have a responsibility to take that news to the world we should never be ashamed of the gospel or hide it out of sight but instead we should boldly and faithfully proclaim Christ to the world that needs to hear I think if each one of us lived this kind of life using Anna as an example I think the church this church global church would be a different place we would be a people marked by a great love for the Lord for his words for his people and a great love for the lost of our country that is the life that we are called to live that is how we live in light of the return of Jesus so our lives are full of waiting waiting for important days doctors results interview outcomes time with friends and family and that waiting isn't always fun and it isn't always easy but Christians should be waiting eagerly for the return of Jesus we should be waiting well by following Anna's example of her faithful devotion her faithful prayer and fasting and the faithful proclamation of the gospel living like this will bring glory to God and will prepare us for that glorious day when we see him face to face let's pray together heavenly father we thank you for the wonderful promises in scripture we thank you for the lord jesus christ who promised that he would return and take us to be with himself in a wonderful new creation father we ask forgiveness for the times where we don't take that seriously for the times where your return is not something we're even thinking about father would you give us a burden for the people around us give us a burden for this city for this neighborhood for this country and for the world that people would come to a saving knowledge of jesus christ father we recognize that that work must start in our own hearts first and so we ask that by your spirit you would convict us you would challenge us and that you would give us opportunities to share the gospel help us be faithful help us use our time to pray and to fast and help us proclaim christ at every opportunity we get we ask this in his name and for the upbuilding of your kingdom amen