

There was a man named Simeon.
He lived in Jerusalem, before Jesus was born.
And the Bible tells us he was a faithful man. He was righteous and devout.
Four hundred years had passed and Israel was still waiting for the promised Messiah.

But Simeon had not given up hope.
Luke tells us that he was waiting for the “consolation of Israel”
but just like people of faith today Simeon wasn’t alone.
Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit was with him.

In fact, Simeon was so attentive to God’s Spirit
that God chose to reveal to him that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah.

And here’s the part of the story that I love.
Simeon in his old age, still had not given up hope. He hadn’t become jaded.
His friends might have laughed at him, if he had told them that after four hundred years of
waiting, God would allow *him* to see the promised Messiah.
You can just picture his friends making fun of him behind his back.

So just imagine that day, when Simeon was spending time in prayer, just like he did every day.
But that day he sensed a prompting from the Holy Spirit to go to the temple.
He didn’t know why but he was obedient and he went.

And then it happened.
As he was waiting in the temple courts, a young couple passed by with their baby boy.
And at that moment God let Simeon know, that this baby, was the Messiah.

And Simeon took him in his arms, praising God, saying:
“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

That same day there was a prophet named Anna, praying at the temple.
We know very little about Anna, but we do know that she was uncommonly old for that time in
history. She was eighty-four years old and had been a widow for over sixty years.
And like Simeon, she was faithful in prayer and attentive to the Holy Spirit.

So that day at the temple, when she saw this young couple with the baby boy,
and when she heard Simeon’s prophecy, she went right over to them and gave thanks to God,

and Luke tells us that she spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel.

Can you imagine Simeon and Anna's joy?

Can you imagine what it was like to be waiting your whole life
and generations and generations before you, waiting in darkness
waiting with no word of hope,
with no sign,
nothing but endless waiting.

I ask you to imagine that this morning because sometimes I think we aren't waiting and
expecting Jesus to show up in our daily lives. We often take Jesus for granted.

Sometimes we go for days, or weeks, just going through the motions of our lives.
Going to school, going to work, going to our various activities
Sometimes our prayer life, takes a back seat to everything else
Sometimes the spark of our faith, gets weak.

Like when Paul wrote to young Timothy,
whose grandmother Lois, and mother Eunice were believers,
but Timothy's faith had become copy of a copy of a copy
It had started to fade.

It didn't have the boldness, and vitality of his mom's faith, or his grandma's faith.
The story of Jesus was something he had heard about ever since he was a child.
He never knew anything else.
And maybe he had started to take Jesus for granted.
Maybe at that point in his life what Jesus had done for him hadn't quite settled in.

So let me ask you this:

What would your life be like today if Jesus had never come?

Imagine your life without Jesus.

What would that be like?

How would your life be different?

How would the joys of your life be different?

How would the hurts and the sorrows of your life be different?

What about the areas of your life that need redemption and forgiveness?

What would your life be like with God's mercy and grace?

The reality is: everything in history hinges on this truth:

"That God made his dwelling among us,

and we have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son

who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹
Full of grace and truth!

That’s one of my favorite descriptions of Jesus.

Most of what we mess up in our lives happens when we follow our hearts without first lining up our hearts with God’s truth.

Or we get it mixed up the other way when we are so sure that we know God’s truth... and yet we are lacking the love and mercy of Christ.

Pastor Timothy Keller puts it this way:

“Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws.

Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. Christ is truth and Christ is love. These things are not in conflict.”

Christ is truth. Christ is love.

Think about that for a moment.

We’ve been reading through the Old Testament for the last twenty-one weeks and time again and again we read the story of how God blessed the people of Israel called them into relationship and yet they took God and God’s blessings for granted and did whatever they thought was right in their own eyes.

God spoke truth into their lives through the prophets but His covenant with them was based on the Law a law they could not keep.

In our second reading this morning we heard:

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”²

If it was up to us, we would still be trying to please God and justify ourselves by doing what Jesus calls polishing the outside of our cup by trying hard to look good, and impress people with the image we present.

That’s our human nature.

We pretend we have it all together and we minimize or hide our flaws.

Unfortunately that’s what the law brings out in us.

We have an infinite capacity to rationalize our sins.

And the more we depend on ourselves the more we leave God out of the picture.

This week I had to take our car in for some service and while I was waiting I happened to glance to my right, and saw a picture of Martin Luther on the laptop next to me. Naturally that led to a conversation, and as it turns out, the man was doing some research for a book he is writing.

But he wasn't writing a book in favor of Martin Luther or Christianity. Instead he is firmly convinced that God doesn't exist.

We had a very friendly conversation and I asked him a number of questions and the more we talked, the more I realized I don't think I've met anyone more convinced of their own righteousness than this man.

And I'm not just talking about his ideas or his philosophy. I'm talking about his lack of awareness of his own sin.

He was so dependent on his own sense of righteousness that there was absolutely no room for God, no room for the idea that truth is not self-generated and no room for a humble dependence on God's mercy and grace.

Last week as we read from Malachi at the end of the Old Testament two things had become clear:

1. People either disregarded God's covenant laws altogether
2. or the laws themselves had become a stumbling block, just one more way that people tried to justify themselves

And so finally the time had come, for God to send a mediator of a new covenant. In Hebrews chapter 8, it says:

"The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah;
not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors,
on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt;
for they did not continue in my covenant..."

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people..."

they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.”³

The mediator of this new covenant is Jesus.

Jesus came that we might have life.

He is the King who came not to be served, but to serve.

He is the Lord of love.

He is the Light of the whole world.

In Jesus the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...
and we have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son
who came from the Father full of grace and truth.”

May the life death, and resurrection of Jesus
may the grace and truth of Jesus make all the difference in your life. Amen.

¹ John 1:14

² Hebrews 1:1-2a

³ Hebrews 8:8-12