



## What Are You Waiting For?

### Luke Series # 6

Luke 2:21-38

Dave DeHaan

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I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles to Luke 2:21-38. Listen to God's Word beginning at verse 21:

*<sup>21</sup> And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

*<sup>22</sup> 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 <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,*

*<sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;*

*<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation*

*<sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,*

*<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."*

*<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.*

*<sup>34</sup> 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 <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

*<sup>36</sup> 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, <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> 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.*

God, we are gathered as Your people, the temple that is being built for Your Spirit to dwell in with Jesus Christ as our Chief Cornerstone. Lord, we thank You that in Your name is steadfast love and faithfulness. We praise You that Your name and Your Word are exalted above all things. As we look at Your Word, we take great confidence in the truth that You want to be exalted through Your Word and that You want the name of Jesus Christ to be lifted high. So we pray that by Your Holy Spirit You would work the truths of Your Word into our lives as we look at this passage. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

For the last several weeks, we have been looking at these narratives in the book of Luke that talk about the birth and infancy of Jesus and John the Baptist. There's something endearing about these stories. Babies are being born. People are singing spontaneously. Angels are praising God. Shepherds are glorifying God. Mary is pondering things in her heart. Mary and Joseph like coming to church the first time with their infant Son. Elderly saints rejoicing over the Christ Child. This text has some very warm, endearing qualities to it.

There are several truths that, though they are not primary, we would do well to pay attention to. For example, obedient parents and faithful senior saints serving God vibrantly in their later years. There's the example of single-hearted devotion in the person of Anna, someone who is single well into the later stages of her life and devoted to God's service. Though these lessons are helpful to us, I believe they're secondary.

What Luke is most interested in communicating is the certainty of the things he has been taught. Remember that Luke is writing this book to Theophilus (God-lover) so that he may know these truths as well. Central to what he has been taught is the person of Jesus Christ. So I believe our text is telling us to focus on the Person of Jesus.

What is most important about Luke 2:21-38 is the identity of Jesus—that He is absolutely unique and that there has never been anyone like Him. He is incomparable. He is absolutely unique. That is the big, over-arching theme of this text. Luke is using this account of the infant Jesus being presented in the temple, I believe, to highlight four identities of Jesus that point to His uniqueness:

1. Jesus is **Royalty**
2. Jesus is **Radiant**
3. Jesus is the **Rock**
4. Jesus is our **Redeemer**

Jesus Christ is absolutely unique in that He is Royalty, He is Radiant, He is the Rock and He is our Redeemer.

## **Jesus is Royalty**

The actions of Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary, are truly to be commended. They are pious, God-fearing Jews. They give Jesus the name the angel had commanded each of them individually. We read in Luke of the angel commanding Mary to name Him Jesus, but we read in Matthew 1 that Joseph was also told by the angel to name the child Jesus.

We also see that they are obeying God's laws. Four times in this text it says something like "they did it according to the law of Moses," or "as it was written in the law of the Lord," or "according to the law of the Lord," or "as was the custom of the law." Jesus' parents were obedient to the law.

At this time, they probably were still living in Bethlehem which was not too far from Jerusalem, but they had to go up a quite an elevation to the temple courts in Jerusalem where two ceremonies are to take place. They come and circumcise Jesus first of all on the eighth day. Then after 40 days they come into the temple for a purification ceremony. According to the Old Testament law, a woman who had given birth to a son was ceremonially unclean for 40 days after the child was born. So in order to become ceremonially clean, she would have to make a burnt offering of a lamb and a sin offering of a turtle dove, or if she couldn't afford it, a pigeon. That is in fact what Mary and Joseph brought, which points again to the humble beginnings of our Savior here on earth.

Then there was the ceremony of the redemption of the firstborn. In the Old Testament God had commanded Moses in Exodus 13 and again in Numbers 18 that God had a claim to the firstborn—both firstborn human sons and also firstborn animals. As a result, each firstborn was sanctified—was set apart for the Lord—and had to be bought back. So a parent would come and pay five shekels, symbolically buying their son back. We understand that it wasn't even necessary for the child to be there but apparently Mary and Joseph went beyond the stipulation of the law by bringing Jesus, their infant Son, to the temple court. It is providential that they did so based on what happens next.

While they're in the temple court, Jesus' parents meet this older saint named Simeon. And though Simeon's name would have been very common in Israel, his devotion to God was extraordinary. We read that he was righteous, which speaks to his godly behavior toward others, and that he was devout, which talks about his devotion to God.

Simeon was a man of faith. His life speaks of the very definition of faith. Philip Ryken puts it this way, "This is what it means to be a believer: it means waiting in faith for God to do what He has promised." A believer is someone who waits in faith for God to do what He has promised.

This is exactly what Simeon is doing. He is waiting, the text says, "for the Lord's Christ." The promised Messiah. The great King. The royal Deliverer Who would sit on the throne of His father David forever and Who would put down the enemies of God's people. The One Who would reign in royalty and would be characterized by perfect righteousness and perfect justice. The One that the Old Testament prophets called "the consolation of Israel," because His coming would be a great comfort for the people of God in the midst of their anguish and distress.

Simeon knew well what Isaiah the prophet had said in Isaiah 40:1-2,

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.*

He also knew the words of Isaiah 61:1-2, that Jesus would speak just a couple chapters later as He began His ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19).

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor;  
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn...*

What is the comfort this royal Messiah brings? It is the comfort of the gospel, the good news that the Messiah is the anointed King to bring freedom to the poor, the brokenhearted and the captives; to let them know their sins have been paid for and that pardon is available. The royal Messiah has come. The era of grace is dawning. Jesus has come to be the guarantor of a new and lasting covenant, one that would overcome and supersede the covenant God had established for Moses, a covenant of grace in His blood.

This explains why all the attention to the details of the law in this story. We see why, even though Jesus was the fulfillment—the end of the law—Romans 10 tells us that He still submits Himself to the requirements of the law, such as circumcision. As God’s Son—the only sinless human being—He really truly was above the law. But He also came as a son of Abraham—truly human, fully human. It’s why the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 4:4-5, *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”*

Jesus is identifying with us—with sinful humanity—so He can shed His blood on our behalf as our Representative. His circumcision is the first time that His blood is shed and it points forward to His blood being shed on the cross. We often think of Jesus’ atoning death but we need to remember we are also saved because of His righteous life. Because Jesus lived a sinless life, He was a sinless sacrifice—a pure spotless Passover Lamb—able to completely atone for all the sins of all the world.

We see another pointer to the blessing of the New Covenant experience by Simeon, namely the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Luke—as we will see as we go through this series in the book of Luke—is very fond of pointing out the work of the Holy Spirit and His importance. Now in the Old Testament era the Holy Spirit’s ministry was limited. It seems only to be for certain individuals like prophets and priests and kings for a certain amount of time, often a limited amount of time.

But the Holy Spirit present in Simeon’s life points forward to the Holy Spirit’s full ministry in the lives of believers in the New Covenant. We read in verse 25 that the Holy Spirit was upon him, which seems to indicate a permanence. In verse 26 we read that the Holy Spirit was revealing God’s word to Simeon in such a way that it’s fulfilled in verse 29. In verse 27 we see that the Holy Spirit was leading Simeon and pointing him to Jesus Christ.

This word consolation—*“waiting for the consolation of Israel”*—is literally the word *paraclete*. In the New Testament it is typically a word used for the Holy Spirit. He is the *Paraclete*. Jesus called Him the Comforter. The greatest comfort the Spirit provides God’s children is pointing them to Jesus Who is the Consolation of His people.

A consolation in English might not be the most helpful word. We think of consolation like “consolation prize.” Bob Barker says, “Well, you didn’t win the new car but you got a lifetime supply of Turtle Wax” —as if that makes up for it.

But when we say Jesus is our Consolation, we're not saying that He's second best. No. Far, far from it. We are saying Jesus is the One Who consoles us, Who gives us comfort in the midst of our trouble and anxiety. The Heidelberg Catechism states it this way:

Question: What is your only comfort in life and death?

Answer: I'm not my own but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, Who has fully paid for all my sins and set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

What greater comfort? What greater consolation is there than that?

In about 36 hours we will turn our calendars once again and a new year will start: 2013. None of us knows what anxieties or what stresses 2013 will bring. We know it will bring some. For some of us they will be relatively minor; for others they will be major. What will bring you and me comfort and consolation in the midst of our stresses and anxieties? I am convinced that our greatest comfort, our only lasting and abiding comfort, will be in Jesus our Messiah, our great Deliverer. So patiently trust Him. He is Royalty. He brings comfort. We can trust Him patiently.

## Jesus is Radiant

Having seen Jesus, the consolation of God's people, Simeon lifts the infant Jesus up in his hands and also lifts his voice in a spontaneous, Spirit-led song of praise. The text says in verse 28 that Simeon blessed God. That is, he declared God's praiseworthiness to all those who were around him in the temple. Look again at the text, verses 29-32. He says,

*Lord, now [this moment] you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word [as You had promised me in Your Word, Lord];  
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.*

Now, Simeon—who we presume was probably an older man based on his desire to depart—could leave this world in peace. It seems that he had wanted to leave this fallen existence for quite some time but the Holy Spirit had made it clear to him that he would not leave until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. The way Simeon speaks of himself in verse 29 strikes me as almost being like a slave awaiting a word from his master. The word

Lord in verse 29 is literally the word ‘master.’ Or he’s like a soldier who is stationed as a sentry or as a lookout. Now that the night of waiting is over, a new day has dawned and he’s been dismissed from his post. What is the sign that the night is over? Seeing God’s salvation—the infant Jesus.

It’s amazing that in this text Jesus doesn’t say a word, yet everything comes back to Him—all the focus comes back to Him. Don’t miss that. To see Jesus here is to see God’s salvation. Jesus doesn’t just bring salvation—He IS salvation.

In verse 31, we ready yet another indication that mankind’s salvation is in the very Person of Jesus Christ. It says, this salvation is for “*all peoples*”—plural. In other words, God is not a regional deity or a deity just for one nation, on the side of certain groups but not others. He is light for all peoples—meaning all people groups, all ethnicities.

Even though many of Jesus’ fellow Jews misunderstood this universal nature of the Messiah’s salvation, the Old Testament prophets had clearly predicted it. Isaiah, speaking for God to God’s Servant, the Messiah, said in Isaiah 60:1-3

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will be seen upon you.  
And nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your rising.*

Gentiles (non-Jews)—not having the Scriptures—by definition need revelation from God to know that the Messiah is their salvation also. The Apostle Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 4 that all people need God to pull the veil away from their eyes—the veil that keeps His glory hidden—and to turn on the light of the gospel that reveals God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Only then will a person know what Simeon knew here—peace with God. Do you realize that Simeon is the first person to experience the peace on earth that the angels proclaimed at Jesus’ birth? Because he had received grace from God, he knew peace with God.

Do you know peace on earth? Not an end to human conflict—that awaits the Second Coming of Jesus—but peace with God; an end to the hostility He justly has toward each of us rebel sinners because of we seek our glory before His. Jesus came as the radiant light of the world, the Savior of all peoples—men and women, young and old, church and unchurched, people from every background and ethnicity. Have you

responded, repenting of your sin and embracing Jesus Christ by faith? He is the light of the world and wants to be your Savior.

He invites you to come to Him today and share in the joy of Simeon. Bible commentator Darrell Bock rightly describes Simeon as “a picture of redemption’s joy in that he senses the significance of Who Jesus is and rests in that knowledge.” Simeon rests in that knowledge—rest, peace on earth, peace with God available right now through the Person of Jesus Christ. That light, says Simeon, is Israel’s glory. What greater glory could there be for any nation on the face of the earth than to produce the Savior? He is radiant, the Light that brings salvation and gives peace with God.

## Jesus is the Rock

Jesus is Royalty, He is Radiant and thirdly, He is the Rock. Jesus is the Rock. In verse 33, Jesus’ parents share in Simeon’s joy in that they marvel at what is being said about their infant Son. Now they’ve already heard incredible things about their Child from the archangel Gabriel, from a Holy Spirit-inspired relative—Elizabeth— and from awe-struck shepherds. But the predictions just keep getting more and more amazing, so Joseph and Mary are marveling. And now Simeon blesses them both. They must have wondered, “Is this all real?”

What Simeon says next lets them know it is real but it is also realistic. Look again at Simeon’s words of blessing to Jesus’ mother in verse 34. Simeon blesses them “...*and said to Mary, His mother ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel...’*” Every new mother looks at her child and wonders what that child will become. Mary is told that her Child will have unparalleled greatness but not everyone will come into the light of that greatness; many would despise and reject Him. Some would rise—the word here is literally the word for resurrection. Some would know the resurrection of their soul as they turn to Him in faith. But others would stumble over the Person of Jesus and find Him an obstruction to their plans. The image here is of the stumbling stone that Isaiah writes about in Isaiah 8:28 and that the Apostle Peter talks about in 1 Peter 2. Some embrace Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone and are saved; others stumble over Him, reject Him and are lost forever.

For the first time in Luke’s Gospel, we learn that Jesus’ mission—to seek and save the lost—will not be embraced by all. In fact it will bring outright opposition but even this opposition will be a sign bearing witness to His unique identity. Mary is going to need to

understand this reality. She needs to know that her very soul will be deeply wounded. The picture here is of a broad two-edged sword. She is going to experience deep emotional anguish that only a mother can know as she watches her Son be wounded and die. But if she doesn't understand this now, she's not going to be able to follow Him later and ultimately will not be able to experience the cleansing of her Son's blood that she too is in need of, just like you and me.

His suffering will expose her thoughts as well. God's design is to expose the thoughts of every human heart. Philip Ryken puts it this way,

“This is the great question of life and death, because what God will do with us for all eternity depends on what we do with Jesus right now. He is the Great Divide.”

So I ask you this morning: who is Jesus to you? Is He the Rock of offense? Is He constantly getting in your way? Is He inconvenient? Is He ever an embarrassment for you? Or is He your Chief Cornerstone on Whom your life rests—chosen, precious, your greatest treasure?

Who is Jesus to your family? Who is Jesus to our church? As we begin another new year, what will be the defining characteristics of our lives, our homes and our church? May we be characterized by trusting in Jesus as our great Treasure, as our Chief Cornerstone.

## **Jesus is our Redeemer**

Jesus is our Redeemer—the One Who brings hope. In the final verses of this passage we meet a woman named Anna. She is an elderly woman whose faith and devotion to God is every bit as commendable as Simeon. We're not quite sure how old she is. According to the text, she's at least 84 and has been a widow for at least 60 years. She may be more like 104, having been a widow for 84 years. She has chosen to devote that time specifically to the worship of God. It says that she was a fixture there in the temple, worshipping in the form of *“fasting and prayer night and day.”* We would say she was in church every time the doors were open. We have many such senior saints in our midst.

We're also told that she was a prophetess. In other words, she was a conduit through which God was making Himself known to others. And she wasn't alone according to verse 38. Apparently she was part of a community of regular temple worshippers who were waiting for the redemption of Israel. Like Simeon, she was one of the remnant of

Israelites who understood the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah, eagerly and prayerfully anticipating His arrival.

Now God in His merciful providence saw fit to make sure that she was in the temple at just the right time. At the moment that Simeon is taking the infant Jesus in his arms and pronouncing a blessing on Him and His parents, Anna is there. And her response to Jesus as her Redeemer—as the Redeemer of all His people—is a wonderful model for us in three ways.

1) She waited with hopeful expectation. For her, waiting wasn't static. It wasn't being stuck. It was being active. It was pursuing God with all her heart and soul and mind and strength.

2) She gave thanks to God. Redemption led to thanksgiving for Anna. The whole idea of redemption is that of buying something back that was lost. Our sin has alienated us from our Creator and has placed us under the dominion of the devil. God's enemy has a rightful claim to us. But Jesus' death satisfies that claim and enables us to be freed from Satan's tyranny. It's why Jesus said of Himself that He came "*not to be served but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). Through faith in Jesus Christ we are no longer children of the devil but we are God's dearly loved children.

The immediate response of being redeemed—bought back—and receiving freedom is spontaneous thanks. You can imagine being a prisoner of war for many years and being released from your captor. Your immediate response would be to thank those who released you. And it wouldn't stop the first time, would it? Every memory of the person who had released you from your bondage would bring back memories of gratitude and thanks. It's why we come together every Sunday in songs focused on the Person of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross in redeeming us, in ransoming us, in saving us.

The other fitting response to being set free is to speak—to speak to others about our Redeemer. The heart that is set free wants others to know the joy of freedom and to know the hope of having a Redeemer. Freedom is what every heart longs for. We live in a world where everyone wants to experience freedom but most believe they will find it by pursuing their own individual aspirations and dreams.

This past week millions of people went to see the movie adaptation of the musical *Les Misérables*, which is among other themes, very much a story of redemption. Every person who watched that film, and every person who's seen the musical before it, resonates with the character of Fontaine as she sings about dreams—broken dreams,

dreams that life would be different than it is, in the sorrow and the anguish that “now life has killed the dream I dreamed.”

Into this mess of broken dreams God sent His Son—born of a woman, born under the law, meeting the requirements of the law in order to be our Savior. Into this mess Jesus comes and says, “Take heart. I have overcome the world and I have bought your soul with My blood.” We have the great privilege of sharing this joy with those around us, those who know shattered dreams and are looking for a Redeemer. It’s in Jesus’ name. It’s the name that His parents were told to give Him.

I love what J.C. Ryle says about Jesus’ name. God could have chosen many other names for His Son: King or Lawgiver or Prophet or Priest or Judge. All of these apply to Him. But He chose the name Jesus, the name that means ‘God saves,’ because, as Ryle says, “it is as a Deliverer and Redeemer that He desires principally to be known.”

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds.

It reminds us that there is no one like Him. He is our Royal Messiah Who brings comfort to those who trust in Him. He is our Radiant light Who brings salvation for all peoples by making peace with God. He is our Rock Who is our precious cornerstone, the One we treasure. And He is our Redeemer Who brings hope and Who alone is worthy of our worship and adoration. Amen.

Lord Jesus, we bow before You and declare that Your name is above all names, that Your name tells us You save, You are a Redeemer, You are a precious Cornerstone, You are our Treasure. Lord, we long to treasure You more and declare that You are all we have. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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## **New Covenant Bible Church**

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

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