

“WISDOM AND GRACE FOR 2024.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

January 7, 2024, 10:30am

Text for the Sermon: Luke 2:21-40

Introduction:

Do you ever think about your soul? Do you ever think about how different you are from all the rest of creation around you, that you are a living, eternal soul?

Have you considered how eternally valuable your soul really is? There are two ways to know how valuable your soul is? First, because Satan is relentlessly, tirelessly pursuing your soul to destroy it forever in hell. And second, because the Son of God came down to earth to lay down His own life to save your soul for eternal life in heaven.

Think about the things you give the most attention to in your life, the things that consume most of our time and thoughts and interest. Think about this in the light of a new year. Think about it in light of our text this morning when heaven came down and invaded our history and engaged the enemy on enemy territory. The battle is on.

This text stands on the very threshold of history, not just the changing of a year, but the changing of BC to AD, from old covenant to new covenant. The salvation of God that is for all peoples, for every living soul, has come; the consolation of Israel, the redemption of Jerusalem, the Savior of our sins, has come.

Let's look at the lives of the first people touched by this new reality. First, Joseph and Mary and then Simeon and Anna.

First, Joseph and Mary.

On the eighth day after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary took their son from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to the temple to have Jesus circumcised according to the Law of Moses and they gave him the name Jesus according to the word of the Lord given through the angel of the Lord.

Then on the fortieth day after the time of purification had passed according to the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord because it was written in the Law of the Lord “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord.” And while they were there they offered a “sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons’” (Luke 2:23-24; Leviticus 12:6-8).

Actually, the law says they were to sacrifice a lamb, but if they were poor then a pair of doves.

This young, poor couple, newly married, they just had a baby, they don't have a clue about what is ahead. But this much they know, they know the Word of God and they set their hearts on obeying God's Word, and they did what God told them.

Let me pause right here. Let me ask you, do you think it was easy for them to obey or difficult? We think it is easy for others, but hard for us. Let me tell you, it is always hard to obey, our sin nature makes it hard for all of us. You teenagers think is it hard to do what God says, you think it will be easier when you are older, but I have news for you. It is always hard. We all have our excuses, our reasons for saying what God says is too hard or too old fashion.

Joseph and Mary didn't despise the things of God, they didn't dismiss the old things of God's Word, they didn't despise going to church, to sacrificing, or keeping God's laws, doing what God required. They were humble and godly.

When you face an uncertain future the best path is the Word of the Lord. They knew the Scriptures and wanted to live by it. They ordered their days and ways by what God said. As some wise old soul once said, the one thing harder than following God is wishing you had.

If you don't know the Scriptures you will become a fragile, weak Christian. You will be in danger of being easily deceived. You will become anxious and fearful more quickly. It will not go well for you. If life is not going well for you the first place to look is are you doing what God says.

Psalm 1:1, 3 Blessed is the man who...delight(s) is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

This is the path of life. God speaks and we listen. God leads and we follow. God commands and we obey. Joseph and Mary followed this path and they were richly rewarded that day in the temple.

Chief among the blessings, they heard prophecies concerning their son. And chief among the prophecies was Jesus was the glory of Israel, the Savior of the world, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Joseph and Mary marveled at what they heard.

Do you want to know a little secret to growing in wisdom and grace in 2024? Never cease to marvel at what God has done in Christ. As often as you read the Bible, as often as you hear it taught and preached, never cease to be filled with wonder and amazement over Jesus.

For Joseph and Mary and for us, God's Word truly is lamp unto our feet and light for our path in this new year (Psalm 119:105). Do you want this year to go well for you? Listen to God's Word, obey God's ways. Fear God and love His Word.

Second, Simeon and Anna.

Let's consider now these two senior saints, Simeon and Anna.

For 400 years there had been no Word of the Lord by any prophet of the Lord. There had been countless messiahs, self-proclaimed messiahs, political, economic and military saviors. Just like in our day. Olympia and Washington DC are filled with saviors, people promising to make our lives better, and we believe some of them, the ones who agree with us.

In the words of Samuel Johnson, schemes of political improvement are laughable things.

Imagine being told by the Holy Spirit that before you die you would see the Lord's Christ, the Lord's anointed true Messiah. Imagine that promise fulfilled and Simeon saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation."

What was he seeing, what was he holding? A baby. What kind of salvation was that? He was living in a country ruled by the Roman Empire and under the oppression of godless religious authorities. What kind of consolation of Israel is this?

The only kind we need. As His name says, He will save us from our sins. In this election year do what the righteous do, keep your eye on Jesus, He is our only hope and salvation.

Scripture says, by the mouth of two witnesses is a matter established. These two senior saints are God's witnesses establishing this baby is the one and only true Messiah and Savior.

Simeon is righteous and devout, a man under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Anna is an 84-year-old widow who was constantly in the temple worshipping and praying and fasting.

They were two eternal souls captivated by the Word of God, filled with the Spirit of God. They took seriously the means of grace. You have heard that phrase, the means of grace,

the gifts given us by God that open and extend His grace and goodness in our lives. What are those means? Scripture, prayer, worship, sacraments, doing good works, serving, giving.

Do you know any people like Simeon and Anna? Do you have any influences in your life like them? These are people who don't talk about Scripture or prayer or obeying, they just do it. They are defined by what they do and how they act, not by what they say.

They knew the Scriptures and they prayed. That's what waiting is for a saint. Scripture and prayer. In His Word God fills our minds and hearts with the great truths concerning Himself and His purposes and plans on earth. He fills us with knowledge and wisdom concerning things to come. This leads to hope and hope leads to desire and desire gives birth to prayer, to earnest calling out to God to bring to pass what He has promised.

Simeon and Anna knew the Word and loved it. They delighted in God's promises and the evidence for this is seen in their great faith and confidence. They prayerfully believed and waited for the consolation of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem. Those who know and follow God's Word will prosper, this is your hope for a prosperous new year.

This is why Scripture says, "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he *rewards* those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

This is the reward I seek and the reward I earnestly desire for everyone of you.

Where are they today who long for and wait for the final consolation of Israel, of the world?

Where are men and women like these two, self-denying, prayerful, devout, full of faith, anxiously awaiting the coming of Jesus? Where are those who long for Jesus more than who our next president will be? Who think more about moving closer to God, rather than moving to some other state? Who hunger and thirst for righteousness more than politics?

Implications and Application:

The single most important person in the universe is God. The single most important thing you can do every week is worship God. There is nothing else in life you do more important than this. Every Sunday morning when you wake up, there should be no question, no decision, no hesitation about what you are going to do. You are not going to go to church and tell your kids you are not going to church. Tell them you are going to worship, to worship the one and only living God of the universe and Jesus Christ, His one and only Son, our one and only Savior.

Two Spirit-filled worshippers, an old man named Simeon and an old woman named Anna, forever honored by God are held up to us as examples to imitate. (More on Anna tonight)

Would you like a revelation from God (Eph. 1:17-20)? Would you like to see Jesus before you die? With the eyes of your heart enlightened, the eyes of faith?

Joseph and Mary had a plan, they knew the time and the place to be for God's blessings. It's that simple, have a time and a place and a plan for time with God in worship, Scripture and prayer.

Get a time. What time would work best for you?

Get a place. What place is quiet and free from interruptions?

Get a plan. Where are you going to start? What book of the Bible? Consider making a plan to read through the Bible this year or at least the New Testament. If that doesn't work for you then just start with the Gospel of John keep going. Download the app and read or listen.

Consider memorizing 12 short passages this year. I put one in the bulletin each month. I invite you to memorize these for yourself. Consider doing it as a family, maybe at mealtimes. Do this as a Life Group or in your Bible Study. Our first text will be Isaiah 51.

You can't do this if you just live life on the run, if you are always on the go. If you give all your time to the things of this life it will grow thin and less satisfying. Is what you read and do feeding your soul or deleting it? YouTube, TikTok, video games?

Wear your Bibles out. Use them to the point you have to replace them every ten years. Cultivate a hunger and thirst for God's Word for the sake of your eternal soul.

In the words of **Jude 20-21**, Dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. 21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

If we take God's Word to heart He will bless it. Those who put their hope and trust in the promises of God's Word will never be put to shame. This is the very best hope that I can hold out for you and I wish for you nothing but the very best.

In an uncertain and dark and unsettled world, in a world where your heart can be pierced, this is the sure and certain light and hope for a year full of wisdom and grace.

Let's stretch and grow toward holiness and grow strong and increase in wisdom and grace.

Let's dig deeper so we might grow stronger.

Lay hold of God. Be a Jacob in this and wrestle with God for His blessing. Ask, seek, knock. Persevere, devote yourself to this. Go hard after God. Press in and press on. Further up and further in

Pray for this for me and all your spiritual leaders here, for the staff and Council. This is the great need in our leadership today. We need men and women with a great hunger and thirst for God, for His Word and for prayer. What's the point of leadership if it isn't God-centered, God-seeking, Biblically-grounded, prayer-soaked? Who wants to follow leaders who aren't leading in that direction?

God wants us to know Him, to have the eyes of our hearts enlightened to see truly great things this year, the hope of our calling, the riches of our inheritance and greatness of His power working for us.

Give yourself to God, give yourself to His Word and prayer, give yourself to seeking and seeing the salvation of your soul in the forgiveness of your sin. In this there will be great reward.

Prayer: Our Holy Father in Heaven, we ask you this morning to bless our seeking of you. Bless us with a deeper hunger and thirst for righteousness, fan the flame of our zeal for the truth of your Word, and a great love for it. Grant in our brokenness and imperfection we would desire the fullness of Christ. Help our unbelief, forgive our wandering affections. Deliver us from our small desires and our foolish pursuits. Help us parents and grandparents instill a love for your Word and a hunger for it in our kids hearts. I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Make us faithful and fruitful for your glory, in Jesus name, Amen.