

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Testimony of Anna

Luke 2:36-38

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Scripture

We are studying the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke in a sermon series I am calling, "To Seek and To Save the Lost."

Luke described the birth of Jesus, which took place in a stable in Bethlehem (2:1-7). Then he told us about the shepherds visiting Jesus on the night of his birth (2:8-20).

Joseph and Mary continued to stay in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus. Eight days after his birth, Jesus was circumcised and named "Jesus," in accordance with the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb (2:21). Forty days after his birth, Mary, along with Joseph and Jesus, went to the temple for her purification and Jesus' presentation to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of the Lord (2:22-24).

While they were in the temple precincts, Joseph and Mary and Jesus met two very godly people who gave an astounding testimony regarding Jesus. Last time we examined Simeon's testimony, and today we will examine the testimony of Anna.

Let's read about the testimony of Anna in Luke 2:36-38:

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, worshiping 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. (Luke 2:36-38)

Introduction

One of the great missionaries of the 19th century was Da-

vid Livingstone. He spent several decades in south and central Africa. Although he is known as a great explorer, and was the first known white person to travel across Africa, he was also a dedicated medical missionary and slave abolitionist.

David Livingstone died in present-day Zambia on May 1, 1873 from malaria and internal bleeding caused by dysentery. He took his final breaths while kneeling in prayer at his bedside. Britain wanted the body to give it a proper burial, but the African tribe, who loved Livingstone dearly, would not give his body to them. Finally they relented, but cut Livingstone's heart out and put a note on the body that said, "You can have his body, but his heart belongs in Africa!" Livingstone's heart was buried under an Mvula tree near the spot where he died, which is now the site of the Livingstone Memorial. His embalmed body together with his journal was carried over a thousand miles to the coast, where it was returned to Britain for burial at Westminster Abbey.¹

You may recall the story of when Henry Morton Stanley was sent by the *New York Herald* to find Livingstone. He eventually did find him, and we remember the memorable greeting, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" By that time Livingstone had spent thirty years in Africa, and Stanley wanted Livingstone to go to England with him. But Livingstone refused to go.

Two days later Livingstone wrote in his diary: "March 19, my birthday. My Jesus, my King, my Life, my all, I again dedicate my whole self to Thee. Accept me, and grant, O gracious Father, that ere the year is gone I may finish my work. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen." It was a year later that his servants found him dead on his knees.²

On every page of Bible and church history we read about

¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Livingstone.

² Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX:

² Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

remarkably dedicated followers of God. One such dedicated follower of God is Anna. Luke wrote about her when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple for Mary's purification and Jesus' presentation to the Lord.

While Joseph and Mary and Jesus were in the temple precincts they first met Simeon. We read about that encounter in Luke 2:25-35, immediately prior to the encounter with Anna in Luke 2:36-38.

Last time I mentioned that Luke did a masterful job of presenting many eyewitnesses who testified about Jesus so that the truth may be established. Luke wanted his readers—and us—to learn about Jesus' true identity and mission. And so he introduced two witnesses—Simeon and Anna—who both testified to the true identity and mission of Jesus.

Now, the evidence of two witnesses was very important in the Bible. Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of *two witnesses* or of *three witnesses* shall a charge be established." In that culture a person could not be convicted of a crime on the basis of the testimony of only one person. There had to be at least two witnesses in order to establish a charge.

So, mindful of the necessity of two witnesses to establish the veracity of a truth claim, Luke presented two witnesses: Simeon and Anna. Simeon affirmed that Jesus was indeed "the Lord's Christ" (2:26), and Anna similarly affirmed that Jesus was "the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38).

Therefore the main point (or big idea, or proposition) of these two narratives involving Simeon and Anna is to testify to the true identity and mission of Jesus. I focused your attention on that big idea when we looked at the testimony of Simeon.

Today, however, as we analyze the testimony of Anna I do not want to focus on her role in pointing to the true identity

and mission of Jesus. Instead, I would like to focus our attention on how God works in the life of a dedicated follower.

So, let us analyze the testimony of Anna in Luke 2:36-38.

Lesson

An analysis of the testimony of Anna as set forth in Luke 2:36-38 will enable us to see how God works in the life of a dedicated follower. In Luke 2:36-38 we learn about:

1. The Person of Anna (2:36-37a)
2. The Piety of Anna (2:37b-d)
3. The Praise of Anna (2:38a)
4. The Proclamation of Anna (2:38b-d)

I. The Person of Anna (2:36-37a)

First, we learn about the person of Anna.

Luke gives several significant details about the person of Anna.

A. *Her Calling (2:36a)*

First, Luke tells us about her calling.

He said that Anna **was a prophetess** (2:36a).

The Old Testament mentions five women who are called prophetesses. They are: Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15:20); Deborah, the judge (Judges 4:4); Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3); Huldah, who was consulted by King Josiah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22); and Noadiah, a false prophetess who opposed Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:14).

In the New Testament the term **prophetess** appears only twice. Once it refers to Anna (2:36a), and in the other instance it refers to the temptress Jezebel, "who calls herself a prophetess" (Revelation 2:20). The four daughters of Philip are said to

have prophesied (Acts 21:9).³

Anna was called a **prophetess** not because she predicted the future, but rather because God used her to speak his truth (as we shall see in a short while).

B. Her Name (2:36b)

Second, Luke tells us about her name.

He said that her name was **Anna** (2:36b).

Anna is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Hannah, which means, “grace.” Like the Old Testament Hannah, **Anna** was characterized by prayer and fasting (cf. 1 Samuel 1:7, 10-16).

C. Her Heritage (2:36c)

Third, Luke tells us about her heritage.

He said that Anna was **the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher** (2:36c).

It is interesting that Luke mentioned that Anna was **of the tribe of Asher**. **Asher** was one of the ten tribes of Israel that formed the northern kingdom and was taken captive by Assyria in 722 BC. We often hear about “the ten lost tribes of Israel.” However, they were not all lost. Before the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BC, in response to letters from King Hezekiah of the southern kingdom of Judah who pleaded with the ten northern tribes to repent and return to the Lord (2 Chronicles 30:6), we learn that “some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 30:11). So, Anna’s heritage included men who were humble before the Lord.

³ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., vol. 3, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 1004.

D. *Her Marriage (2:36e)*

Fourth, Luke tells us about her marriage.

He said that Anna **lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin** (2:36e).

It seems that Luke wanted to emphasize her purity prior to marriage: **she was a virgin**. And second, he wanted to note that she was only married for **seven years** before her husband died. And although it is possible that she had children, Luke does not mention anything about children.

E. *Her Age (2:36d, 37a)*

And fifth, Luke tells us about her age.

He said that **she was advanced in years** (2:36d), and then after her husband died, she lived **then as a widow until she was eighty-four** (2:37a).

It is not entirely clear whether Anna lived as widow **until she was eighty-four** years old, or if she lived “as a widow for eighty-four years.”⁴ The Greek text could be translated either way. If the latter translation is correct, she would have been around 105 years old. Her wedding would have been when she about fourteen years old (which was the normal age for girls to get married in that culture at that time), she would have been married for seven years, and a widow for eighty-four years.

Regardless of which view is correct, the point is that she was a very old woman.

II. **The Piety of Anna (2:37b-d)**

Second, we learn about the piety of Anna.

Luke makes three comments about the piety of Anna.

⁴ See footnote in *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Luke 2:36-37.

A. *Her Dedication (2:37b)*

First, Luke comments about her dedication.

Luke said that **she did not depart from the temple** (2:37b).

It is possible that Anna lived in the temple complex, perhaps in one of the rooms in the outer court normally occupied by the priests during their two weeks of annual service.

Or, it is possible that she simply spent the vast majority of her time at **the temple**. We sometimes say of people who spend all their time in their offices at work, “Oh, he lives at the office.” We don’t mean that literally; we simply mean that he spends the vast majority of his time at the office. And it is possible that it is in that sense that Luke meant that **she did not depart from the temple**.

The reason Anna spent so much time at the temple is because she was totally dedicated to God.

Pastor A. T. Pierson once gave the following illustration:

Suppose you had a thousand-acre farm and someone offered to buy it. You agree to sell the land except for one acre right in the center, which you want to keep for yourself. Did you know that in some areas the law would allow you to have access to that one lone spot? And that you would have the right to build a road across the surrounding property in order to get to it?

So it is with us as Christians if we make less than 100-percent surrender to God. We can be sure that the devil will take advantage of any inroad to reach that uncommitted area of our lives.⁵

I don’t want to imply that 100-percent surrender to God

⁵ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

means that you have to spend all your time at church. No. But it does mean that you orient your entire life, thoughts, words, and actions to God and his word. You determine to live every moment of every day in entire submission to the word of God.

B. Her Fasting (2:37c)

Second, Luke comments about her fasting.

He said that Anna was **worshipping with fasting** (2:37c).

Pastor John MacArthur says that “fasting is the self-denial that accompanies passionate prayer.”⁶ The purpose of fasting is not to lose weight. Rather, the purpose of fasting is to forego the time normally spent eating in order to worship and pray to the Lord.

C. Her Prayer (2:37d)

And third, Luke comments about her prayer.

He said that Anna was **worshipping with . . . prayer night and day** (2:37d).

Most of spend just a few minutes a day in prayer, if that. We may pray here and there throughout the day, but this is not how Anna prayed. She spent hours and hours in focused, attentive, worshipful prayer.

One reason why our spiritual lives are so anemic is because we do not invest time in developing spiritual disciplines. Do you and I spend even one hour a day—every day—in prayer and reading God’s word? But you and I can easily find one hour a day—every day—watching TV and surfing the Internet.

Is it any wonder then why God is not more visibly at work in our lives?

⁶ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 185.

III. The Praise of Anna (2:38a)

Third, we learn about the praise of Anna.

Luke said that Anna was **coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God** (2:38a).

Anna was walking in the temple precincts. Her eye caught Simeon with Joseph and Mary and Jesus. So she walked over to them, and heard Simeon sing his song of praise about Jesus. Immediately she knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the promised Christ, and the promised Deliverer! And so **she began to give thanks to God**.

IV. The Proclamation of Anna (2:38b-d)

And finally, we learn about the proclamation of Anna.

A. *The Subject of Her Proclamation (2:38b)*

First, note the subject of her proclamation.

Luke said that Anna began **to speak of him** (2:38b), that is, of Jesus.

Jesus was the subject of her proclamation. Notice that she did not talk about her experience. She did not speak about the blessing that she received by seeing Jesus face-to-face. No. She spoke about Jesus.

You see, the gospel is not about us. It is about Jesus. It is what God has done in the person and work of Jesus.

B. *The Audience for Her Proclamation (2:38c)*

Second, note the audience for her proclamation.

Luke said that Anna spoke of Jesus **to all** (2:38c).

Anna did not keep the message to herself. She told others about Jesus.

And that is what Christians do. They are eager to share the good news of the gospel with others.

C. The Message of Her Proclamation (2:38d)

And third, note the message of her proclamation.

Luke said that Anna spoke about Jesus to all **who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem** (2:38d).

Anna believed that God was going to send a Deliverer, someone who would redeem his people from their sins. Having seen Jesus she knew that God was doing exactly what he had promised centuries before.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the testimony of Anna in Luke 2:36-38, we should dedicate ourselves to serving God.

Soon after graduating from college, Jim Elliot wrote in his diary: “God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life that I may burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life but a full one like You, Lord Jesus.”

God answered that prayer, and in the flower of young manhood Jim Elliot’s life was cut short by the spear of an Auca Indian as he and several other young men sought to take the gospel deep into the jungles of Ecuador.⁷

Jim understood the lines of the poet, who said, “Only one life; ’twill soon be past—Only what’s done for Christ will last.”⁸

God sent Jesus into this world to redeem us. His life now gives meaning to our lives. Let us then, like Anna, dedicate ourselves to serving God. Amen.

⁷ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Matthew*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985).

⁸ Samuel G. Hardman and Dwight Lyman Moody, *Thoughts for the Quiet Hour* (Willow Grove, PA: Woodlawn Electronic Publishing, 1997).

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for the testimony of Anna. Thank you for the person, piety, praise, and proclamation of Anna. We learn so much about Anna from this brief description given to us by Luke.

Help each one of us to dedicate ourselves to serving you wholeheartedly.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!