

The Psalm After Christmas

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- [0 : 0 0] Thank you, men. Well, as Matthew takes a little bit of time off, word on the street is he's coming up to a big responsibility soon.
- So he's taking a little bit of time off and seeing family. And because we are Presbyterian, we believe that we're all ordained men who can bring the word of God.
- So it fell to me this morning. So I have a question for you this morning.
- What did you get for Christmas? Was it something good? Was it something that you're really planning on enjoying?
- Or is it something that you just can't wait to re-gift? And as I was thinking about this, this will kind of give you a little bit of an insight into my brain and how I work, and y'all can pray for my wife.
- [1 : 0 7] As I was thinking about gifts and good gifts, I started thinking about exercise equipment. And one of the reasons that I started thinking about exercise equipment is I've never been to a Goodwill or to a used sports store that didn't have a plethora of used treadmills, elliptical machines.
- And I just happened to be watching TV, and I saw this commercial for this exercise bike. And this woman goes into the storeroom and sees the exercise bike that her husband has bought for her.
- And she starts sneaking around behind his back to go use it before Christmas morning. And at one point, wakes up at 2 o'clock in the morning, puts on her exercise clothes, runs out, exercises on it, and then comes and gets back in bed.
- And on Christmas morning is just so surprised that she has gotten this exercise bike. So I don't understand if that's the case for these exercise bikes, why do so many of them end up at Goodwill, used sports stores, in basements holding hanging clothes.
- Don't raise your hands. What is it about a good gift that we love on Christmas morning, but by February is holding boxes in dirty clothes?
- [2 : 3 7] Our passage this morning, and it is from the New Testament, not the Old Testament, is Luke chapter 2, verses 22 through 38.
- So turn in or turn on your Bible and follow along with me or follow in your worship guide. This is Luke chapter 2, verses 22 through 38.
- 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, as it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.
- And to offer a sacrifice, according to what it is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons. 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. 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.

[3 : 52] 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.

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.

Verse 33. And his father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 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 to be opposed.

And a sword will pierce your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. 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 and then as a widow until she was 84. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

[5 : 21] And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to all. Father, we thank you for the gift of your word as we study it corporately this morning.

I pray that you would remove me from the equation so that as we read and study, the only thing that we see is your son, Jesus Christ, revealed to us through the Holy Spirit.

Father, open our hearts and renew our minds this morning as we read and study your word. Amen. So we see three different responses to Jesus' appearance at the temple.

We see Mary and Joseph's devotion to the law. We see Simeon's reaction as he is waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And we're presented with Anna's overflowing praise. So if you're keeping score, we're going to look at Jesus and Mary's piety, Simeon's prophecy, and Anna's praise.

[6 : 29] So first let's look at Mary and Joseph's piety. Mary and Joseph were indeed richly blessed. And it is vital that we understand their devotion to the law of God.

And how it fits. Because if you get this wrong, you end up on a treadmill headed for hell. And some of you may think that's hyperbole, but it's not.

We have to understand this rightly. When you look at verse 22, Mary and Joseph brought up to Jerusalem according to the law of Moses.

Verse 24, they were obedient to the law of the Lord. Verse 39, which is outside of our reading. They did not depart until they had completed everything according to the law.

Their obedience looks a lot like the Pharisees. But it's different. And the difference is, Mary and Joseph's obedience is rooted in humility and in gratitude.

[7 : 47] We know this because if you flip back to the previous chapter in what's called The Magnificent, when Mary prays, she says, verse 46 through 49, My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

These are not the words of someone who is trying to be obedient to earn something from God. You see, the Pharisees had taken the Ten Commandments and they had set them up to ensure that no one ever broke them.

And then they went a step further and they said, we need rules around the Ten Commandments to make sure that we don't break the Ten Commandments. So, for example, you shall not work on the Sabbath.

That became, you cannot wear shoes that have nails in them because if you are walking with shoes with nails in them, you're carrying nails and that's doing work.

[9 : 09] If you spit on the ground on the Sabbath, normally common courtesy is you cover it up, but you can't do that on the Sabbath because you would be moving dirt and that would be tantamount to plowing on the Sabbath.

But wait, there's 613 do's and do not's in the Old Testament. That's more rules. Let's set up some rules around them.

So now you have so many rules, you have to have one thing more because nobody can track all these rules. You need referees that you can go ask.

If you're about to break one of these rules, whether or not it's okay. And we're going to call these referees lawyers. And that way you can go and ask a lawyer.

And what they did was they created a system where people just went around and looked for loopholes.

[10 : 11] How do I get around this? So the majority of the questions to the lawyers were, how do I get around this? How do I get past this? It reminds me of W.C. Fields was an actor in the old-timey Hollywood in black and white films and he led a life of great excess.

And at the end of his life, one of his friends saw him in the garden reading his Bible. And the friend said to him, what are you doing? And his response was, I'm looking for loopholes.

A modern example of this is a man by the name of Smokey Yunk. Now, many of us have never heard of this man, but during the 60s, he was the leading crew chief in NASCAR.

And the NASCAR officials hated Smokey because his cars would go so much further than anybody else's cars.

And they would test his cars and they would fill them up with fuel and they would hold exactly the right amount of fuel. Well, the reason is because Smokey would inflate basketballs in the gas tank.

[11 : 28] And that way they would hold the exact amount of gas and then he would deflate the basketballs and pour more gas into them. So they wrote a rule called the Smokey Rule that you could not have anything else in the gas tank.

But his cars were still going so much further than everybody else's cars. So they wanted to inspect the car. They brought it in. They removed the gas tank.

And in my favorite Smokey story, Smokey gets in and starts up the car and drives off even though it has no gas tank. Because Smokey had discovered if you put enough fuel line from the gas tank to the engine, you could hold an extra five gallons of fuel.

He was so prolific at working around and finding loopholes if you drove to church this morning, there is a good chance you used one of his loopholes.

He had 12 patents when he finally retired from NASCAR. I tell you this because this is how the Pharisees thought about the law of God, not the rules of NASCAR.

[12 : 50] How do we get around? Mary and Joseph were humble. The Pharisees prayed to be admired.

This is the difference. You see, if you are trying to manipulate God through obedience to get better kids, a better marriage, a better job.

What do you do when the wheels come off? And the wheels will come off because we live in a fallen world. Some false prophets will say, well, you just need to do more.

You just need to give more. You just need to sacrifice more. That is a lie from the pit of hell. You can't sacrifice enough to earn God's favor.

What are you going to give God that He doesn't already have? What are you going to do for God that He can't do for Himself? Joseph and Mary were pious.

[14 : 08] And they were devoted to the law. But it was not to earn God's favor. It was because what God had already done for them. C.S. Lewis says it this way, and he has a way of saying things very clearly and succinctly.

God does not love you because you are good. God makes you good because He loves you. You understand the distinctive there?

They followed God's law because God's word said to. And He is a loving Father who wants what's best for them. God's love for you. God's love for you. God's love for you.

God's love for you. So that's Mary and Joseph's piety. Simeon's prophecy is the next thing I'd like to look at. We're told that He was a man of Jerusalem, that He was righteous, that He was devout.

We're also told that He was waiting on the consolation of Israel. Or another way of saying this, He was looking for the salvation of Israel.

[15 : 22] I think sometimes when we picture this scene of Simeon waiting for Mary and Joseph, we tend to think these are the only two people in the temple.

And that's not accurate. I think a better way to think of it is a busy market, or even better, a mall at Christmas. And there's no crowd control devices.

People are just a sea of humanity going back and forth and back and forth. And Simeon, over years of waiting, has a good vantage point.

And he's watching. And the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, has said, Simeon, today's the day. Something good is going to happen.

You're going to see the second member of the Trinity. The salvation of Israel. So Simeon, at a good vantage point, head on a swivel, looking back and forth across the crowd and looking around and waiting as he's waited for so long.

[16 : 31] And finally, he sees Mary and Joseph. Joseph more than likely has now secured the two birds and he's clutching them. Because if they get away, he's got to go buy more and he doesn't have enough money for more birds.

Mary is clutching Jesus. And Simeon is making his way through the crowd. The sea of humanity. And he approaches Mary and probably just holds out his hands.

And Mary, Joseph, unable to let the birds go, really can't step in front and say no. Mary now seeing, she's seen the shepherds appear.

She's had Gabriel come in. She's just, just miraculous things are happening. And she just hands Simeon her baby. And Simeon, what does Simeon do?

He says, now I can die. Now I can go. Old Testament prophets have been, this is not the first Old Testament prophet to ask to die.

[17 : 45] Elijah asked to die because he wanted to escape his pursuers. Moses wanted to die because he wanted to escape his responsibilities. Simeon is the first one that says, I have seen the salvation of Israel.

I can go now. I am complete. I am full. And then, he sings.

As Matthew told us last week, singing is the thing that, the one thing that connects your heart and your head and your soul. And Simeon sings and praises the Lord with these words, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for the revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

Now this is a radical song. I mean, if this had been playing over the loudspeakers at the temple, it would have been banned. And that's the reason why we know it's from the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 57] This is not something that he picked up at the temple. Salvation was for the Jews, not the Gentiles. He then turns and prophesies to Mary.

We're told in verse 33 that Mary marveled at these words. Mary has been witnessing miraculous event after miraculous event.

And when she recounts these words to the beloved Dr. Luke, who is writing this down for us, she recalls these words, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed.

A sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Simeon tells her that not only is your son going to be opposed, but some of this opposition is going to spill over onto you.

Simeon's prophecy is as true today as it was when Simeon uttered it. As I drive around Colorado Springs, I see lots of the little fishes on the back of cars.

[20 : 24] I also see the little fish with the feet coming out of it with Darwin written in the middle of it. I've seen the little fish taken away on UFOs.

I saw one fish in the mouth of a Tyrannosaurus Rex with Evolution written on the side of it. I don't see the Muslim or the Islamic scales treated that way.

It's because Simeon's prophecy is Christ will be opposed, not Muhammad. And if you don't think that Christ is oppressed even today, please see me after the sermon so I can inform you of what's going on in China.

Christ is opposed even today. And as Mary is thinking as she's telling Luke and Luke is writing this down and she's remembering these words that Simeon has told her about how Christ is going to be opposed and it's even going to pierce her soul.

At the time it would have been like taking your infant child to the doctor and the doctor saying, yes, there's something wrong. We'll just have to wait and see. And the anxiety that that carries with it.

[21 : 50] But don't you think as she is relating this to Luke after the resurrection, the twinkle in her eye as she has been comforted by her resurrected son, the Savior of the world, don't you think that she had a little bit of a grin as she is recounting this to Luke?

So, we've looked at Mary and Joseph's obedience. We've looked at Simeon's prophecy and his psalm. Anna. So, now we turn our attention to the fifth character of this story, Anna.

In these three verses, we're told about Anna's lineage. We're told that she was the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. We're told that she was old.

Not that it matters, but I tend to side with I.H. Marshall on this that the 84 years means that she was a widow for 84.

It's not important other than she's between 84 and 103 years old. She's old. And at this time, that's not unheard of, but not common.

[23 : 22] So, if you and I were walking down the streets of Jerusalem and I said the old woman at the temple, more than likely, we both knew who we were talking about. And you have to ask yourself, why are all these details in here?

And the reason that, because they don't move the narrative forward, they don't move the story forward, why are these details here? And the answer is, Luke doesn't want to entertain us, he wants to be accurate with the information.

When you see details like this in here, it's proof that the Bible is true. So, Anna, confronted with the Christ child, the Savior, the Messiah, her response is different.

Her response is, the same response that we all have when we encounter something that moves us. We want to tell people about it.

If you eat a meal at a good restaurant downtown, some of us take a picture of it and post it on Facebook. If you hear a song that just moves you, you download it and email it to people.

[24 : 44] When you take a picture that just excites you, you put it on Instagram, Anna is not any different. The only thing different is the technology. She immediately rushes out to those people that are waiting on the redemption of Jerusalem and says, guess what?

He's here. her. She's excited. So here we are, five days after Christmas.

Presents have been unwrapped. You're hopefully enjoying them. But did Christmas this year live up to the hype? Was it everything that you thought it would be?

You see, when we get angry or we get frustrated or we're sad, it's because of unrealized expectations.

We set up in our minds how the event or the activity or the holiday is going to go. And if things don't go exactly the way that we have them laid out in our mind, we tend to go, yeah, it was great.

[26 : 01] It just didn't go the way I thought it would. Anna and Simeon were waiting with expectation for the Messiah. They were waiting on the Savior and they were open to God's provision.

Anna and Simeon placed their hope in God. Those that had gathered at the temple looking for the Redeemer of Jerusalem were putting their hope into a warrior, not a five-week-old infant.

The people gathered there at the temple were paying attention. They were waiting expectantly, just like Anna and Simeon. But they put their hope in the wrong thing.

They missed it because Jesus wasn't what they were expecting. Anna and Simeon point to the one thing that you can put your hope in that will not disappoint.

There is someone who will not let you down. He is the gift of the world. Christmas is the holiday that marks when he came in the flesh.

[27 : 15] As we sing at Christmas, incarnate. He came to this earth as a real person because it takes a real person to save real people.

He lived the perfect sinless life that we cannot. He died on a cross to pay for all of our sins. Let that sink in. He paid for every sin that you ever committed and every sin that you are ever going to commit.

Everything that you're going to do wrong or that you should have done right died with Christ on that cross. If you are in Christ Jesus, your account is now marked paid in full.

And the reason we know that the check cleared is because on the third day he set aside the grave clothes, moved the rock, and stepped out of the tomb.

This is the Messiah Simeon and Anna were waiting on. This is the Messiah they had placed their hope in. gift. This is why when they encountered Christ they sang and they rejoiced.

[28 : 41] This is the gift that they could not wait to share with others. Christmas is over and we have received the greatest gift ever.

And I implore you, I beg you, enjoy him. Let's pray. Father, we thank you, especially during this season, for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ.

Your son, the servant who appeared not in power or as a warrior or as a conqueror. He came in the form of a helpless babe, born in humility to proclaim peace.

The servant who set aside the honor due him in his name, came to redeem us. Not because of anything we had done, no, while we were still sinners and even worse, enemies of God.

Christ suffered and went to the cross for us. Such was the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's love for us. This is the true story of Christmas that we love to hear season after season.

[29 : 57] That the Father loved us so much, he sent his son in human form to do what Adam could not, to live a perfect life, to die on our behalf, and to say on the cross, it is finished.

Amen.