

The Glory Returns

Luke 2:21-52

It is interesting in Luke's careful investigation into the radical disruption that Jesus Christ and the gospel had in the first century that he traces the glorious story of the life and ministry of Jesus not just back to two couples, Joseph and Mary, and Zechariah and Elizabeth, but also back to two elderly saints, two older people that we would have no knowledge about if it wasn't for Luke. Like many other historians who have investigated revivals and awakenings, you can almost find that every profound movement of God begins with prayer. And often, it's the passionate, persistent praying of some virtual unknown person that God chooses to use to advance His kingdom. Here in this passage of Scripture, we are introduced to two people, Simeon and Anna who are elderly, unknown, but faithfully seeking the promise that God has made to return and to redeem the nation of Israel.

They are very old but they haven't become disillusioned. They have waited a long time for their prayers to be answered, but God hears and answers their prayers. They kept praying for God to return and to do that new thing that He had promised throughout Scriptures. And if you were to ask Luke, why did Jesus Christ come at this moment in history, these unique stories of the childhood of Jesus, which we have nowhere else in the Bible, are meant to tell us, Jesus came at this time in response to the tenacious prayers and deep longings, and genuine faith of Simeon and Anna. That is, why Luke will later in chapter 18 remind us of the teaching of Jesus about the persistent widow who kept pleading with the unjust judge to hear and respond to her case. She never stopped pleading.

In November 1904, there was a famous revival that broke out in the country of Wales. Without any intentional effort to pursue revival itself by special meetings or services, 70 000 people came to faith in Christ in the first two months and 100 000 over the course of the revival. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London went to personally investigate what he was hearing and found it to be factual. People were repenting and rejoicing and giving their lives to Christ. As he asked how and when it began, people told them that it began with the prayers of just a few people and those prayers beginning to spread without others knowing this was happening. G. Campbell Morgan wrote:

"If you and I could stand above Wales, looking at it, you would see fire breaking out here, and there, and yonder, and somewhere else, without any collusion or prearrangement. It is a Divine visitation in which God – let me say this reverently – in which God is saying to us: See what I can do without the things you are depending on; see what I can do in answer to a praying people; see what I can do through the simplest, who are ready to fall in line, and depend wholly and absolutely upon Me."

Sam Storms writes about this event:

“One thing is clear: the revival was not the product of someone’s personality or of another person’s preaching or of anyone’s planning, but of God’s gracious response to the prayers of his people!”

Again Storms writes:

*The principal human agent used by God in the Welsh revival was Evan Roberts. Roberts was born on June 8, 1878, and died in 1951. He began working in the coal mines when he was 12, but soon felt the call to study for the ministry. He immersed himself in the study of the Bible. Roberts was 26 years old when revival broke out. **He had been praying for it every day for 13 years.***

David Thomas in a Christianity Today article in February 2018 describes going to Scotland to interview witnesses to a revival that broke out on the Isle of Lewis between 1949-1952 called the Hebridian Revival, he writes,

When I came across a book detailing the Hebridian Revival, I wanted to know how a community was transformed from spiritual freefall to stunning renewal. So I booked a flight to Scotland, hoping to meet anyone who might remember what happened in those days. To my amazement, I met 11 eyewitnesses—in their 80s now—who agreed to interviews in the sanctuary of the very church where the awakening began.

Bundled against the wintry barrenness outside, my new friends warmed with memories as tears flowed freely. While they admitted strong preaching and other measures had played a role in the revival, to a person they described something more essential when God moved: a kind of spiritual posture among those at the core of the awakening.

*They told of the attitude of brokenness and desperation that stirred Christians in that day, a spirit of necessity and audacity, a manner of prayer that could be daring and agonizing. They called it “**travailing prayer**,” from how Paul described his prayers for the Galatians “of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (4:19 KJV).*

This revival began with hundreds of young people coming to Christ. They were disillusioned with church and had drifted away. I used to listen to a woman whose family came from the Isle of Lewis recount the event to me as a young man. It began in 1949, when “two elderly sisters, Peggy and Christine Smith, one nearly blind and the other bent over by stenosis, began to pray the Lord would bring revival. They prayed three times a week for revival.”

In Luke's gospel, Luke is recording for us a climactic event in which God comes and begins the new and great work of the gospel of the kingdom through Jesus Christ. His point in this text is to show that two elderly people, who believe the promise of God in the Scriptures that He would return to Israel and not just restore Israel but do a new and glorious thing, pray and God comes as promised to the temple in the person of Jesus Christ and begins the glorious work of establishing a new kingdom, under a new King, Jesus Christ.

Here is the request that I want to simply make to you today. As we read this passage of Scripture, **will you simply pray** – God you have promised to do a new and glorious work through Jesus Christ and bring the nations to your Son... will you do it and will you use me?

So many people are filled with disappointment with the world, disillusionment with the church, depression over their own spiritual condition and state. But here in this text, we have two elderly saints praying in hope and with faith. Anna, for example, has been a widow for eighty-four years and yet, *"She did not depart from the temple, worshipping and fasting with prayers night and day"* (Luke 2:37).

Jesus Christ is the Game Changer.

Three Prayers to Tenaciously Pray:

I. Change Me Deeply.

Christ Has come to Change Hearts of Stone Into Hearts of Flesh

"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."

Luke 2:21

*"Why did God ordain through angels that this name would be given to his incarnate Son?... Etymologically, the name 'Jesus' or 'Joshua' derives from Hebrew roots meaning 'the Lord is salvation.' The Scriptures couple God's name and salvation to communicate **that the Lord, and he alone, saves his people from evil by his sovereign grace.**" J. Beeke & P. Smalley*

"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature."

Hebrews 1:3

" 'They say Aslan is on the move- perhaps has already landed.'

And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don't understand but in the dream it feels as if it has some enormous meaning- either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again. It was like that now. At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in its inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer."

CS Lewis, The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe

In Ezekiel 10 – the glory of God leaves the temple.

In Ezekiel 11 – God promises to return and to bring the people back Himself.

"Therefore say, 'Thus says the **Lord God**: Though I removed them far off among the nations and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: **I will** gather from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.' And when they come there, they will remove the detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. **I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them.** And they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Ezekiel 11:16-20

The promise of old was that God Himself would return and bring His people back to Himself and give them new hearts and new names.

This child who is circumcised and named Jesus is the Lord of salvation coming to circumcise our hearts and give us new names.

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and **you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.** You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of God."

Isaiah 62:1-3

II. Bring Us the Broken. Widen our Witness. Christ Has come to Blow the Walls Off The Temple.

Two Prayer Warriors: One glorious new hope.

Simeon waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Anna waiting for the redemption of Israel.

Jesus is the direct answer to their longings and prayers.

“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.**”

Luke 2:29-32

“He says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Isaiah 49:6

“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant to the people, **a light for the nations**, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.. Behold the former things have come to pass, and **new things I now declare; before they spring forth I will tell you of them.**”

Isaiah 42:6-9

“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from His people; and let not the eunuch say, ‘Behold I am a dry tree.’ For thus says the Lord; ‘The eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. **I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.** And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the lord and to be his servants... these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer ... **for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.**”

Isaiah 56:3-7

The glory of this temple is not like the disappointment of the second temple (Ezra 3) because it lacked the glory of Solomon’s temple.

It is a temple that is far more glorious because it brings in the broken, the unclean, the outcast, the stranger, the foreigner.

“Behold this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and a sign that is opposed...” (Luke 2:38)

“Rejoice not over my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him until he pleads by cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light. I shall look upon my vindication.” (Micah 7:8-9)

For Simeon, Jesus is God coming to bring the outcast and the sinner, the foreigner into His house.

For Anna, this is her kinsman redeemer, come to be the husband to her and all who are “forsaken” by God.

Here is the great news:

Jesus is the greater glory, the greater temple, and the greater husband. He is a house of prayer for the foreigners and a redeeming husband for the forsaken.

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and **you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give**. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of God. You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, and you land shall no longer be called Desolate, but you shall be called ‘My Delight is in her’, and your land ‘Married’ for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”

Isaiah 62:1-5

This is the precursor to Pentecost – where the coming of the Holy Spirit makes a new people, a new temple from every tribe and tongue and sends them out to testify.

It’s a mobile temple.

Pray – Bring us the Broken. Widen our witness.

**Poem “New Colossus” – Sonnet for Statue of Liberty
Emma Lazarus**

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
**“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!**

III. Bless Your Work. Show Us Your Glory. (before we die)

Christ Has come to Bring His Blessing “far as the Curse Is Found”

“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.”

Luke 2:29-32

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

Habakkuk 2:14

“After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at this understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished.”

Luke 2:47,48

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”

Luke 2:52

“The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

Matthew 12:42

The Mission is Guaranteed:

Jesus is the greater Solomon who absolutely guarantees God’s blessing/favor on His people forever.

“And the Lord said to Solomon, ‘I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me, As David your father walked, with the integrity of heart and uprightness,... then I will establish your royal throne forever... But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children... then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight...”

1 Kings 9:3-7

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah

that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us;
let all the ends of the earth fear him!