

# Luke 2:22-38

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## “A Full Life”

March 17, 2024

1. If someone were to ask you, “What is the secret to living a full life?”, how would you answer them?
  - a. Does “living a full life” look like working hard for forty years, then retiring so you can travel the world and see all sorts of amazing sights?
  - b. Does “living a full life” look like having kids, and raising them in the Lord, and then enjoying your grandkids and even great-grandkids?
  - c. Maybe “living a full life” looks like earning lots of money, and living a life of comfort and ease and security, as you enjoy all the spoils of your hard work?
    - i. As I thought about this question this week, I decided to go to that trustworthy social media page where so many Americans get their counsel and theology on life’s tough questions, oprahdaily.com
      1. According to one of Oprah’s associate editors on the site, here are some of the secrets she has found to living a “full life...”
        - a. The first thing she suggested was that we ought to listen to our inner being
          - i. We need to “learn to trust and listen to that spirit inside of us that wants nothing more than to direct you closer to the person you are meant to be and the life you are meant to live”
            1. As we listen to our inner being, we should “accept, and even celebrate, the discoveries that show up”
            2. I don’t really know what all that means, so apparently, I need to do some work on listening to my inner being!
          - b. Another piece of advice was to make sure we are always our true, “authentic” self
            - i. When we do this, we will allow ourselves to follow our passions, rather than being held back by the expectations of others and our society
              1. So, living a full life means following your passions and being true to yourself
              2. Hopefully that sets off some warning alarms in our heads as we hear that counsel
          - c. One of the more interesting things this person advised was to visualize your future self
            - i. The article says, in our minds, “we need to meet ourselves 20 years into the future, as we gain the wisdom of our older, experienced, and wiser inner selves”
              1. The greatest wisdom is right there inside of us, we just need to go hang out with our future self to learn it
              2. Once we do that, we can give ourselves “permission” to live the full lives we are meant to live
          - d. And then the article closes with these two profound words of encouragement
            - i. If you want to live a full life, make sure you feel all the feelings, and hold no regrets
              1. Friends, this is a Facebook site with over 1.5 million followers
              2. Over 1.5 million followers who are being told that the secret to living a full life is all about listening to the desires of your own

heart, being true to yourself, chasing after your own wisdom, and living with zero regrets about any of your choices

e. I would argue that the Scriptures give us a VERY different idea of what a “full life” looks like

d. After Jesus is born in Bethlehem, and after he was circumcised at the end of eight days, we are introduced to two individuals in Jerusalem

i. In Luke 2:22-35, we hear from an old man named Simeon, and in verses 36-38, we read of an 84-year-old prophetess named Anna

1. These are the only encounters we have with Simeon and Anna in the Scriptures, but I believe that in these few short verses, we can learn MUCH from them about what it means to live a full life

e. Let’s start with Simeon in verses 22-35

2. Luke 2:22-35

a. *22And 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.”*

i. So let’s start with what we read in this passage about Mary and Joseph and Jesus

1. Luke begins in verse 22 saying that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem when the time of their purification had come

a. This is a reference back to Leviticus 12, which basically says that when a woman conceives a male child, she is unclean for seven days

i. On the eighth day, the baby is circumcised

ii. And then the mother continues for another 33 days in her purifying

1. So basically, this time period lasts 41 days

2. During that 41 days, she cannot touch anything holy, or come into the sanctuary

iii. On the 42 day, she is to bring the baby to the priest, along with a sacrifice

1. The priest offers the sacrifice before the Lord to make atonement for her, and she is now considered clean from the flow of her blood

b. There are a few things we infer from these first few verses

i. The first thing we should observe is that Mary and Joseph were diligent in keeping the Law of the Lord

1. Think about how easy it would have been for them to skip out on all of this

a. They were far from their hometown of Nazareth...

b. They were basically by themselves...

- c. It had been pronounced to them nine months earlier that this Son of theirs was the Messiah, the very Son of God, and we saw this message confirmed last week in the words from the shepherds
  - i. If any young couple had an excuse to skip out on these ceremonial observances due to “unforeseen circumstances,” it would certainly be Mary and Joseph!
- 2. But that’s not what they did
  - a. This young mother and her young husband chose to follow the Law of God, exactly how He had prescribed it to Moses nearly 1300 years earlier
    - i. This tells us something about Mary and Joseph, doesn’t it?
    - ii. God the Father had put His Son in GOOD hands, humanly speaking!
- ii. The second thing we can observe from these verses might be something that bursts our bubble when it comes to the Christmas story and how we normally perceive it
  - 1. If you’re paying attention to the narrative from the past few weeks, you’ll notice that there is a pretty big omission from Luke’s Christmas story... where are the wise men?!
    - a. We get Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary
    - b. We get the story of the shepherds in the field, and the angels’ *Gloria*
    - c. But what about the three wise men from the east?
  - 2. To find the story of these wise men, we have to go to Matthew’s Gospel, in chapter 2
    - a. Just to be clear, there is no mention anywhere that there are three wise men... it could’ve been two, or it could have been 10!
    - b. We won’t read the story of these wise men, but basically Matthew tells us that they first go to Jerusalem, where they meet with King Herod to talk to him about the star and the prophecies
      - i. They leave Herod and go to Bethlehem, where Matthew says that they find the child with his mother, Mary, in a house
      - ii. When they see him, they give him their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and then they go back home, avoiding Herod and Jerusalem
      - iii. Right after the wise men leave, the angel comes and warns Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt to escape Herod
        - 1. They follow the instructions
        - 2. They flee to Egypt
        - 3. And Herod orders that all the male children in Bethlehem, two years and younger, were to be slaughtered, according to the time he had ascertained from the wise men
- c. So, let’s put all these things together
  - i. Mary goes through her time of purification of 41 days, and THEN goes to Jerusalem
  - ii. If we combine this with the story of the wise men in Matthew 2, we see that there was no way that the wise men were there on the night of Jesus’ birth
    - 1. After the time of Mary’s purification, she and Joseph apparently returned to Bethlehem, where they were staying in someone’s house
    - 2. So at the minimum, the wise men don’t arrive until a month and a half after Jesus’ birth

- iii. But if we incorporate the part about Herod killing all the babies in Bethlehem that were at least two years old, according to what he had learned from the wise men, it's likely that Jesus himself was around two years old when the wise men came
        - 1. This messes with all of our perfect little nativity scenes, doesn't it?!
    - d. Now, does getting the number and timing of the wise men right affect our salvation?
      - i. NO. But we have to remember that this is the Holy Word of God
        - 1. And we want to strive to be as precise as we possibly can when it comes to handling His Scriptures
          - a. So you don't have to go home and throw out the 3 wise men from your nativity set, but just remember, that's not QUITE how things went down!
- iii. So, we learn from these verses that Mary and Joseph were devout in following the Law, we learn that the wise men likely didn't show up for many months after Jesus' birth
  - 1. And the third thing we learn is that Mary and Joseph were relatively poor
    - a. If we were to go back to the passage in Leviticus 12 about the woman's purification, we would see that the preferred offering that they were to bring was a one-year-old lamb
      - i. But in verse 8, God makes an allowance for those who cannot afford a lamb, and tells them to bring two turtledoves or pigeons instead
        - 1. We see in Luke 2:24 that Mary and Joseph had to choose the birds, instead of the lamb
          - a. So Mary and Joseph clearly did not have much money
          - b. This isn't much of a surprise, is it?
            - i. Again, Mary is just a teenage girl from Nazareth
            - ii. Joseph is just a carpenter... a fairly menial trade in those days
            - iii. These young newlyweds likely had very little on which to survive
            - iv. But from the little they had, they still managed to come up with the money to buy the doves or the pigeons for the sacrifice
  - b. Now, there is a line of thinking that says that Mary and Joseph instantly became extremely wealthy through the kingly gifts from the wise men, and that Jesus grew up in wealth and prosperity
    - i. The gifts from the wise men were certainly lavish and extravagant
    - ii. But don't forget what happened to Mary and Joseph after these gifts were given
      - 1. They immediately had to flee all the way down to Egypt, where they lived for many months, maybe even years
        - a. So instead of assuming that Jesus lived a prosperous childhood because of the gifts of the wise men, it is much more reasonable to assume that their gifts were God's gracious provision to Mary and Joseph, allowing them to live as refugees in a foreign land for a lengthy season

- c. There is nothing in the Scriptures that supports the idea that Jesus grew up in a wealthy home
      - i. In fact, there is much that points to the very opposite of this idea
- c. OK, so we learn a lot from these three verses don't we?
  - i. And then, in verse 25, we get to Simeon
    - 1. Simeon, a righteous and devout man in Jerusalem, who was waiting for the consolation of Israel
      - a. This word for consolation has many different meanings, but in the context of this passage, it means comfort
        - i. According to Thayer's Greek lexicon, this comfort and consolation is directly tied to the Messianic salvation that Israel had been longing for
      - b. So Simeon was anxiously longing for the promised Messiah
    - 2. And Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit was upon him
      - a. We have to remember that this was pre-Pentecost... this was BEFORE God poured the Holy Spirit out upon His Church
        - i. So when the Holy Spirit came upon people prior to the book of Acts, it was typically for a very unique purpose
        - ii. In the case of Simeon, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not see death until he himself had seen the Messiah!
          - 1. Isn't that incredible?!
            - a. I think all of us would like to have some kind of insight into when the time of our death is going to be, but that simply is not the way that God does things
            - b. But in the case of Simeon, it was revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ
              - i. That is a pretty amazing promise!
          - iii. So the Spirit comes upon Simeon, and he enters into the Temple, PRECISELY when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus for the time of purification
        - b. And when Simeon sees Jesus, he takes him up in his arms and blesses God, and he sings the fourth, and last, of Luke's four Christmas Hymns, the Nunc Dimittis
          - i. The translation of this title is "Now, you let depart..."
          - ii. And Simeon sings...
            - 1. *<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>32a</sup>light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."*
        - c. We don't know from the text how old Simeon was, but it's not a stretch to infer from his words that he was an old man, ready to go home
          - i. You can almost hear the sigh of relief in his voice, as he proclaims, "NOW, you are letting your servant depart in peace..."
    - 3. But this song wasn't just about Simeon finally being allowed to depart from this life – it was ALSO very much about the fact that the consolation of Israel was finally here!
      - a. He was looking upon him with his own eyes!
      - b. He was holding him in his own arms!
        - i. Simeon's eyes had finally seen in this little baby the salvation of God, a salvation that GOD had prepared in the presence of ALL peoples

1. This is a HUGE piece of the puzzle that Simeon completes for us when it comes to Luke's Christmas hymns!
  - a. You can look back at Mary's hymn and Zechariah's hymn in your own time
    - i. But as you study these hymns, you'll see that they are both very much centered around what God has done FOR ISRAEL
  - b. In the angels' Gloria, we get a more generic blessing, as they sing about the peace of God coming to all those with whom He is pleased
  - c. But here in Simeon's song, we hear that God has prepared this salvation in Jesus in the presence of ALL peoples, and then even more specifically...
    - i. A light for revelation to the Gentiles
    - ii. And a light for glory to your people Israel
4. Friends, this was a massive statement for Simeon to sing of at the Temple in Jerusalem
  - a. For in these days, the Israelites had forgotten their calling
    - i. They had forgotten that they were supposed to have been a blessing to the nations
    - ii. They had forgotten that they had been called to cover the earth with the glory of the Lord
    - iii. They had forgotten SO MANY of the prophecies Israel had been given through Isaiah
      1. Prophecies such as Isaiah 42:6-7, which said,
        - a. *"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 for the people, a light for THE GENTILES, <sup>7</sup>to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."*
      2. Or Isaiah 49:6, which said,
        - a. *"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for THE GENTILES, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*
      3. Or Isaiah 60:1-3,
        - a. *<sup>1</sup>Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And THE GENTILES shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*
  - b. The people of Israel had forgotten these great and glorious promises about the Gentiles
    - i. How do we know this?
      1. Because when Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth as an adult...
        - a. And when he read from the prophecies of Isaiah 61

- b. And he made specific reference to God working amongst THE GENTILES in certain passages of the Old Testament...
              - i. Luke 4 tells us that the people drove him out of the town and tried to throw him off of a cliff
            - 2. They had forgotten that God had blessed them to be a blessing
              - a. They had forgotten that they had been called to be a light to THE GENTILES
- ii. But Simeon, in the Spirit of the Lord, REMEMBERED!
  - 1. And he realized that the salvation that God had prepared through this child was not just for Israel, but that he would also be a light for revelation to the Gentiles
    - a. This child would open the door of salvation to US
    - b. He would shine the light upon the darkness of OUR sin
    - c. He would be a light of revelation for you and for me, all who are OUTSIDE of Israel, and through him, we would be adopted into the family of God!
      - i. This was a HUGE theological statement that Simeon would sing of in this moment!
  - 2. But this child would not just be a light for revelation to the Gentiles, would he?
    - a. No, he would ALSO be a light for glory for God's people Israel
      - i. We must never lose sight of this my friends
        - 1. In Romans 8-11, Paul speaks of the mystery of God's dealing with His people
          - a. And he reminds us that God has placed a partial hardening upon Israel, in order that the fullness of the Gentiles will be brought into His Kingdom
          - b. But once the fullness of Gentiles have been brought in, Paul tells us that that hardness will be lifted, and all Israel will be saved!
            - i. The glory of Israel WILL return on the day that their eyes are finally opened to see that Jesus has truly been their long-awaited Messiah, this entire time!!
      - ii. The message of the Scriptures is not an either/or message, friends
        - 1. The message is NOT that God gave Israel their shot at the Kingdom, and they blew it, so now its our turn
          - a. The way things are unfolding today is EXACTLY how God has purposed it
            - i. In Christ, a light for revelation to the Gentiles has been given
            - ii. AND a light for GLORY to God's people Israel
            - iii. We will ALL be brothers and sisters IN CHRIST – there will be no Jew or Gentile, nor slave or free
            - iv. For we will all be ONE in Christ Jesus!
- iii. This is the amazing song that Simeon sang in Luke 2, and Mary and Joseph marveled at Simeon's words
  - 1. But then Simeon tempers the excitement of the moment, doesn't he?
    - a. You can almost feel the sadness in his voice as he hands Jesus back to Mary, and he says to her,

- i. <sup>34</sup>“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.”
  - 1. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Simeon prophesied the very same thing Jesus himself would say thirty years later in Matthew 10:34,
    - a. <sup>34</sup>“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
    - b. No, not a sword to use against Rome and all of Israel’s political enemies
      - i. But a sword that would pierce the hearts of many, dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow
      - ii. Jesus would be a sign that was opposed by many, because he would expose the darkness of their own hearts
      - iii. And they would ultimately hang him upon the cross for his message
      - iv. A sword would indeed pierce through Mary’s soul on that day
- d. But Simeon’s words were not the final words that Mary would hear on that day
  - i. For at the Temple at that very same time was an 84-year-old woman named Anna
    - 1. A prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher
      - a. Anna was an incredible woman
        - i. Luke tells us that she had been married to her husband for seven years from when she was a virgin
          - 1. As we talked about with Mary a few weeks ago, it’s highly likely that Anna would have only been 15 or 16 or 17 years old when she got married
          - 2. So she was married until she was maybe 24 years old, and then her husband died
            - a. And, for the next SIXTY years, she devoted her life to the Lord, serving at the Temple, and worshiping with fasting and prayer both night and day
              - i. SIXTY years!!
              - ii. We talk often about the “prayer warriors” within our churches, and how absolutely essential they are to the health and well-being and vitality of our church...
              - iii. Anna was the model prayer-warrior, wasn’t she?!
      - b. And Luke tells us that at that very hour when Simeon was singing his song, and speaking to Mary about what was to come, Anna came forth
        - i. And she began to give thanks to God
        - ii. And she began to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem
      - c. And this is ultimately the Good News, right?



- i. For Jesus's death upon the cross would indeed pierce Mary soul... in a way that only a mother could experience
    - ii. But Jesus would not stay upon the cross
      - 1. For he was placed in a tomb, and on the third day, God would raise Jesus from the dead
        - a. And in the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus, our redemption has been secured!
  - ii. This is not a redemption of a geopolitical city in the Middle East run by a bunch of men who have rejected God's King
  - iii. This is about the NEW Jerusalem... the Jerusalem that John saw in Revelation 21:1-5, when he said,
    - 1. *<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." <sup>5</sup>And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making ALL things new!"*
    - 2. We don't know what kinds of visions Anna the prophetess had been given
      - a. But she knew something about the redemption of Jerusalem that was to come through the Lord's Christ
      - b. And she spoke to all who were waiting for that day, and she gave thanks to God
        - i. We can only imagine what must have been going on in Joseph and Mary's heart during this time
        - ii. They had simply come to Jerusalem to follow the purification laws given to Moses
          - 1. But for Simeon and Anna, this was the day they had been waiting for almost their entire life!!
- e. Which brings us back to our question from the beginning of the sermon...
  - i. What is the secret to a FULL life?
    - 1. Friends, it has NOTHING to do with listening to your inner being and following the desires of your heart
    - 2. The secret to living a full life is to live the life that Simeon and Anna lived
      - a. Live a life of unceasing looking ahead to OUR consolation, the return of Christ
      - b. Live a life of relentless yearning for OUR redemption, when the Lord makes all things new in the New Jerusalem
        - i. There is a saying that some people say about Christians that we are so heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good
          - 1. I think that is an absolutely FALSE statement
          - 2. I believe that the reason why most Christians aren't much earthly good is because we are not heavenly-minded enough!!
            - a. Sure, we say we are longing for the return of Christ, but are we truly longing for his coming the way Simeon was?
            - b. Are we truly yearning for the redemption he will bring the way that Anna was?

- ii. Simeon, righteous and devout... for DECADES
- iii. Anna, incredibly devoted and faithful... for DECADES
  - 1. These two saints show us that a full life isn't about nice houses, or fancy vacations
  - 2. A full life isn't about receiving rewards and recognition out in the corporate world
  - 3. A full life isn't even about getting to grow old alongside those we love
    - a. A full life is about living like Abraham, who Hebrews 11:10 says was "looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."
    - b. A full life is about living like Moses, who Hebrews 11:26 says "considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward."
    - c. A full life is about living like all the saints of Hebrews 11, of whom it was written, "They desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city!"
- iv. My friends, the secret to living a full life in THIS life, is to fix your eyes upon the life to come
  - 1. Like Simeon, fix your gaze upon the consolation that will be ours in the second coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ
  - 2. Like Anna, fix your thoughts upon the redemption that he will bring about in the New Jerusalem
    - a. Be so heavenly-minded that it will be said of you: "The world was not worthy of them!"