

The one thing you must see before you die

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[0 : 00] We're going to read together this morning, Andy Ridsen is preaching to us from Luke's Gospel, Chapter 2, a final foray into the Christmas narratives.

And we're going to read together from Luke, Chapter 2, at verse 22, this last little story that Luke gives of the events surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's page 857 in the Blue Visitor's Bibles. Luke, Chapter 2, at verse 22. When the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought the infant Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what 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 devoid. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. 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.

[1 : 18] And he came in the Spirit to 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 in his arms and he 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've prepared in the presence of all peoples. A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

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 opposed.

And a sword will pierce through 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.

[2 : 36] Coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who are waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, please do have Luke chapter 2 open in front of you and let me pray for us as you open that up.

Father God, we have just sung for the branch of Jesse to come and to release us from Satan's tyranny.

And we pray now as we look at him in your word that you do that in our lives also. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Bucket lists have become a big thing in the last 10 years or so.

Log on to any social media website and you will be inundated with articles telling you what you must do before you die.

[3 : 42] 101 places to visit before you die. The 50 best films you must see before you die. Just to name a couple I've come across this week.

Our culture is obsessed with getting the most out of life. We really do not want to miss a trick. And as a result, well, we get anxious, don't we?

We get anxious that we could miss out on experiences that life could offer us and become jealous of others who seem to live more appealing and exciting lives than our own. My family felt this quite acutely this Christmas time.

The Ritson household was hit hard with sickness over the Christmas period. If you had looked in on our Christmas day, you might well have shed a tear for us. It was bleak.

Kara only managed to get out of bed for a couple of hours of the day. And all she managed for her Christmas dinner was a measly digestive biscuit with not even a dollop of cranberry sauce on top to ignite some festive cheer.

[4 : 47] And I, well, I was sick with cold, developed sinusitis, and poor little Lucy had picked up a sickness bug just a couple of days earlier when we were on holiday and ended the day in her own vomit.

It was tragic. But what made matters worse was that all we could manage to do from our sickbeds was turn on our phones, look on Instagram and Facebook and see the perfect little Christmases that everybody else seemed to be having.

Full of festive cheer, merriment and joy, stockings lined up across the fireplace. And what the result was, well, we felt that we'd been robbed of ours.

We felt bitterly disappointed of our Christmas experience. And that's what bucket lists and social media comparisons do inevitably in the end.

They leave you feeling desperately dissatisfied. For most people cannot experience all that there is to experience in this life. It just cannot be done.

[5 : 54] Most people lack the commodities to make their dreams their reality. When you're young, when you're a student perhaps, you have all the time in the world.

Yes, you don't believe it, but you do. But you have no money to do anything with that time. And when you hit your 30s and middle age, well, you finally come into money.

Unless, of course, your children have devoured it all. But you have so many commitments with family life and church that just hopping on a plane and traveling the world for a year just seems a bit unrealistic.

And when you finally retire and you finally have that expendable income and the time on your hands, well, you're lumbered with your grandchildren, aren't you?

You're expected to do daycare. Or if that isn't you, then perhaps ill health just makes traveling the world and making your dreams come true just slightly unrealistic.

[6 : 56] So most of us are left feeling deflated with life. We feel we've missed out. We die feeling incomplete. So what is the answer to FOMO, this fear of missing out?

How do we lose ourselves from the oppression of feeling like we've let life pass us by? In this passage, we meet a man who can confidently say, I can now depart in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation.

He doesn't need to see anything more. Not the great wall, not the Taj Mahal. No, he has seen all that he needs to see in life in order to live, to die a content and happy man.

Now that is a staggering claim, isn't it? He claims that what he saw on that day, that day in the temple, trumps everything else and makes everything else seem obsolete.

So what is it that he saw? Simeon says he can die in peace because he has seen that King Jesus brings salvation.

[8 : 09] That is what he is so excited and thrilled about. And that's our first point for today. King Jesus brings salvation. Mary and Joseph arrive in Jerusalem with Jesus for two reasons.

Firstly, they need to make a sacrifice for Mary because she was considered ceremonially unclean after childbirth. And secondly, to present Jesus to the Lord in keeping with the law.

That is, God's people were instructed to make sacrifice for every firstborn son that was born in remembrance of what God had done for them in Israel, that they had spared Israel's firstborn sons when the Egyptian firstborn sons were killed.

Now Luke has many reasons for including these details about the family keeping the law. It shows that even from birth, Jesus kept the law completely, which was essential if he was to become our perfect substitute.

But we're not going to focus on that today. Rather, we're going to focus on the next part. We're going to focus on the encounter that this sets up with this remarkable man, Simeon.

[9 : 24] Simeon is a genuine believer. Notice the details we get about him in verse 25. He's righteous, he's devout, and he's waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Simeon is one of the faithful Jews, that faithful remnant, who hadn't given up on hope on God's promises, despite living in very, very bleak times.

The last time anything exciting had happened in Israel, from a Jewish perspective, was during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. And that was now 500 years ago, when it looked like the Jews might

rebuild Jerusalem and make Israel a great nation again.

But that project had collapsed spectacularly because of Israel's rank apostasy. And since then, there had been no words from God, no king in Israel, no presence of God in the temple.

And Israel had been subjugated by superpower after superpower for generations. The promises that God had made to Israel in the Old Testament about being a light to the nations, living under a good and righteous king who would defeat all their enemies and expand the kingdom to the far reaches of the earth.

[10:46] Well, they just seemed deeply unrealistic and almost snuffed out completely now. But not for Simeon. He was a man who, despite his miserable and hopeless surroundings, hadn't stopped waiting, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

For Israel finally to be comforted. For those promises to finally come true and God's kingdom to come here on earth like it is in heaven. That's what he was waiting for.

And the only hope of that happening was if a true son of David took the throne. That's what the prophecies about Israel's restoration in the Old Testament stated.

And that's what Simeon had been told he would see before he died. Verse 26. Now there had been many kings in David's line come and go, some better than others, but none had managed to usher in this perfect kingdom that Simeon and many others had been waiting for.

But despite the failure of other kings, Simeon was still waiting for his king. Verse 26. The Christ. For God had revealed to him that this king, this king that he saw before his eyes, was going to be different.

[12:09] He was waiting for the one who would do what none of the other kings had managed to do before him. Finally, bring in this kingdom that he'd been longing for.

And that is why when Simeon sees this child, he scoops him up in his arms, blesses the Lord, and exclaims this amazing song of praise in verses 29 to 30.

He is absolutely ecstatic about this encounter. This king, like none other before him, was going to bring salvation.

Verse 30. He was going to bring about a great rescue that wasn't going to be done behind closed doors, but be seen in the light of day by everyone. Verse 31.

Now, there's a lot of language about things being seen and being revealed in this song. Notice, firstly, firstly, Simeon's eyes see God's salvation.

[13:08] And secondly, this salvation will be performed in the presence of all peoples, and it will be a light and a revelation. This song of praise is all about Simeon seeing something then and there that will one day be seen by absolutely everyone the world over.

Simeon knew that the salvation this child would achieve would be known everywhere, not just in Israel, and not just bring glory to Israel, but to the whole world too.

Verse 32. Now, we think we know what salvation means. We're Christians, after all. Jesus dealing with my personal sin and getting me into heaven.

And to a degree, that's true. But that isn't how the Bible uses the word salvation. Simeon is alluding to something bigger than just dealing with our personal sin.

Salvation means a rescue from slavery, to live under a new king who will defeat all your enemies and usher in a perfect kingdom. That's what salvation means. That is what Simeon has in mind, just like what happened in a smaller version in the Exodus.

[14:24] And that great rescue and defeat of Egypt in the Exodus was heard of by all, wasn't it? Everybody saw it. Can you remember what Rahab said at the start of Joshua when the spies come to her?

She says that the people of Jericho have heard about what the Lord did at the Red Sea. They had heard about the salvation that the Lord had brought to Israel, and they'd heard about the great defeat of the Egyptians, and their hearts melted.

Everyone in the ancient world knew about that great act of salvation. And Simeon says that this salvation coming through Jesus was going to be similar, but on a much larger scale.

Everyone was going to know about the events that were going to unfold in this child's life. But what did they expect this salvation to look like in Simeon's day?

The faithful remnant at the time, I imagine, looked forward to someone in David's line taking the throne of Israel, taking care of their enemies, the Romans, and slowly growing the empire to the far reaches of the earth.

[15 : 42] It was a huge vision, and it's what Jesus did achieve, but not as they may have expected it. Jesus is indeed the king that they had been waiting for, but he didn't target the Romans.

No, Jesus went straight for the jugular instead and attacked Israel's ultimate enemy. Jesus took on sin and death, the devil's ultimate weapons, and dealt with them once and for all.

Once he had dealt the death blow to Satan and brought him to his knees, he would then offer people the world over the opportunity to join him, to join his victorious kingdom before he returns again to mop up all those who still oppose him.

The success and expansion of his kingdom is therefore inevitable, for he has achieved ultimate victory already. Therefore, we can have absolute certainty that one day his kingdom will indeed cover the face of this earth because his opponent cannot resist him any longer.

One day, everything on earth will be like it is in heaven. There will be no more warfare, no more sin, no heartache, no famine, no earthquakes, no drought, no death, no evil, no strife.

[17 : 06] The whole world will be glorious, verse 32. That is what we're looking forward to. And that is what Simeon was looking forward to that made him so ecstatic that day in the temple.

That is why he says, I can now depart in peace, verse 29. His eyes have seen all that they have to. He has seen God's salvation in embryo.

He has seen in this infant child what will lead to a restored world where God's people enjoy him forever in glory and where evil is no more. And that is, isn't that not what our hearts desire to?

Can we not get thrilled about that too? For when you've caught a glimpse of what Simeon saw, seeing the Niagara Falls in this lifetime just pales in comparison, does it not?

When you've grasped what Simeon did, all your dreams, however good, however well-intentioned, surely have to become subservient to that greater vision.

[18 : 13] So when my mum said to Cara and I through tears at Christmas time when we were leaving, that she just felt awful because she felt that we'd missed out on everything Christmas had to offer, what I should have said to her was, don't weep for me.

No. Yes, I love spending Christmas with my family. Yes, I really, really love Christmas dinner. And I really, really, really love presents.

But I haven't missed out on anything in comparison to what I have found. In the Lord Jesus who Christmas is all about. For my eyes have seen salvation just like Simeon's and I could die tomorrow a happy man.

I need to see nothing else in this world for all things pale in comparison to knowing Jesus Christ who is renewing the cosmos and allowing me of all people to enjoy being part of it together with him under his good rule.

That's what it's all about. To steal Matthew's words, I have found that feel with the buried treasure in and I've sold everything for it.

[19 : 27] I found that pearl of great price and I'd give up anything for it. All the Christmases this life has to offer. I have missed out on nothing substantial this Christmas for I know the one who has revealed God's salvation plan and is in the process of making it a reality.

What is tragic, however, what is worth weeping tears for is for all those who go from one small joy to the next, trying to get the most out of life and yet miss out on the greatest gift that life has to offer.

They miss out on the greatest treasure because they are preoccupied with lesser things. Listen to these words from C.S. Lewis. If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who goes on making mud pies in the slums because he cannot imagine what a holiday at sea would be like.

We are far too easily pleased. Our families and our friends miss out on infinite joy living in Jesus' restored and perfect world because they'd rather make mud pies in the slums.

[21 : 03] Fool around with lesser joys rather than being wrapped up in the greatest story. And that, that is a tragedy. Well you might ask how on earth do people miss this?

Simeon says that what Jesus is doing is being prepared in the presence of all peoples. Verse 30. Jesus hasn't started rolling out his salvation plan behind closed doors.

It's happening in open view. So why do people miss out on what's on offer? Why don't all my rational friends and family arrive at the truth and put their trust in King Jesus and enjoy being part of

his kingdom?

Well the answer comes in verse 34 and 35. Joseph and Mary are left in wonder. They can't comprehend how Simeon knew all this about their son from this chance encounter. But Simeon has something cutting to tell them. Simeon tells them that Jesus will divide humanity. And that's our second point for today.

[22 : 12] Jesus brings division. And that division doesn't come because the events of Jesus' life are unbelievable or without evidence but rather because of the state of the human heart.

Simeon says that Jesus is coming and the working out of his salvation plan is going to lead to the fall of some in Israel and the rising of others. Verse 34. This sign, this activity of God in sending Jesus into the world to rescue it is going to be opposed.

And that is exactly what the prophets told us to expect. Isaiah said that the Christ will become a sanctuary to some and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to others.

In other words, when this rescue plan starts to roll out, Simeon tells us that many people are going to be offended by it rather than react to it in the same way that he himself did.

They're going to reject Jesus and his kingdom not because it's impossible to believe, not because God is not revealing it to the world, but because it exposes their human hearts.

[23 : 25] And that's uncomfortable, isn't it? Verse 35. John 3 reminds us that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. Some people would rather ignore this amazing revelation and the chance of living in a wonderful kingdom, a perfect world, under Jesus' good rule so that they can carry on as they are.

They don't want the thoughts of their hearts to be revealed. Verse 35. They don't want to be exposed. They would rather sink back into the shadows and be the king of their own little empires destined for destruction rather than bend the knee to our good King Jesus and become part of his enduring kingdom.

But what is also offensive about God's salvation plan is what Simeon leads to in verse 35-2 when he says, a sword will pierce through Mary's soul.

He's alluding to the fact that this great act of salvation is only going to come through heartbreak, through the cross. Most of the people at the time probably weren't expecting that.

[24 : 49] They were expecting joy. They were expecting the Christ to come and to wipe away their enemies, the Romans. The strategy of the cross, now that's unthinkable.

Why on earth would you let your promised king die? A dead king on a cross does not look like salvation, does it? And so many carried on living in opposition to his kingdom.

And people do the same today. In the words of Paul, we preach Christ crucified. But that's a stumbling block to Jews and a folly to Gentiles today, just like it was in their day.

So what people make of the cross and what it reveals of their hearts that they're sinful will ultimately decide whether they jump up and down with Simeon and need to see nothing more in this life or sink back into the shadows and go from one thing to the next trying to find something that will bring them satisfaction.

And that's important for us to know, isn't it? Luke doesn't want us to be rocked by other people's failure to believe. Rather, he wants us to take courage in the fact that God said it would be this way.

[26 : 09] As well as bringing a great salvation, Jesus would bring division and it had to be this way for his kingdom to come in its fullness. For only by making a clear distinction between God's people, those who trust and submit to King Jesus' rule, and those who rebel against him and stay emperors of their own little empires, can the kingdom be ushered in in its fullness.

Division is the precursor to judgment. For Jesus' kingdom to cover the face of the earth and God's glory to fill the earth, all these opposing empires must be exposed and dealt with.

For knowingly or not, all those who think that they're living in their own little empires and doing their own thing are actually part of a greater one. They're part of Satan's empire, whether they know it or not.

So to rid the world of evil, God must expose those who are against him and divide humanity so that all those on the side of evil can be judged.

And those on his side can live in a perfect world where there are no more enemies, where evil can threaten them no more. So although we perhaps don't like the idea of division, we can learn to

rejoice in it.

[27 : 32] because the vision is a step God makes before judgment. And only through judgment will Christ's kingdom come in its fullness.

So we shouldn't be surprised by the fact that many still reject the Lord Jesus and the offer of being in his kingdom. And we can't let the fact that many reject Jesus' kingdom rob us of the joy of being part of it.

rather we must see humanity's divided response to Jesus as an encouragement that the kingdom is indeed coming and expanding as we speak.

Well, what must we do with this? Do we just wait for a new day to dawn or is the work to be done?

Well, our final point for today is King Jesus must be proclaimed.

The narrative moves on now and there's a scene shift, the camera shifts from Simeon onto his female counterpart Anna. And God wants us to learn from her how to react to what Simeon has just revealed to us.

[28 : 44] Anna, like Simeon, is depicted as a devout woman, part of the faithful remnant who are waiting for the Christ. Verse 37 tells us that she didn't depart from the temple, worshipping and fasting and praying there night and day.

And as she arrives in the temple, or as verse 28 puts it, as she comes up at that very hour and hears of what has been prophesied about this boy, she gives thanks to the Lord and she speaks to all those who will listen about the redemption of Jerusalem.

That is her response. Her response to what she has heard, which is exactly the same as what we have heard this morning is to give thanks to God and tell everyone she knows about him.

She, like Simeon, had come across the one who had put all wrongs to right and was thrilled about it.

She'd come across the good king who would do away with all her enemies once and for all.

She'd come across the one who would ensure that one day she would live in a perfect world full of God's glory where evil is no more and she just could not keep it to herself.

[29 : 57] She recognized that nothing in life was as important as the news that she had just heard. And rather than drawing her pension, putting her feet up, enjoying her retirement years, she got going, didn't she?

And the challenge to us is will we do the same? We too have heard all that Anna heard. We know that Jesus is the king.

We know that his kingdom will one day fill the earth and that people can become part of it now and that all those who resist him will one day will not stand. But will we just sit back because we know it will inevitably come?

Will we allow our friends to carry on with their bucket lists? desperately seeking all that life has to offer and yet miss out on the one thing that eclipses everything, the one thing that truly matters.

For they can have absolutely everything, everything forever, if they just throw their lot in with Jesus now. That is what we have to offer them.

[31 : 03] We must get moving like Anna did. But we should also allow this great message to console us too like it did Simeon.

Like I said earlier, all of us to some degree feel like we have missed out on life. Maybe you desperately wanted to get married but it just never happened.

Maybe you always wanted to travel the world, see everything the world had to offer, but are now tied down. maybe you have been wrestling with ill health for a long time and you think what could have been if I had been well all my life.

Maybe you have made mistakes and big mistakes at that and your life has gone in a very different direction to what you expected.

Or perhaps you're just a bit dissatisfied with your seemingly mundane life when everybody else seems to be living wonderful lives when you turn on social media. You ask yourself what could have been if my circumstances were just a little bit different.

[32 : 19] Well the glorious message of Simeon and Anna is this. If you have seen Jesus rightly and become part of his kingdom then you have done all that you need to do before you die.

You are destined to be part of a kingdom. Where regret, fear and disappointment are no more. Your what could have been can be swallowed up by the what will be.

It doesn't negate your experience now. Life can be harsh and painful but it does give you perspective. I may have missed out on much in this life but not the one thing that really matters and

I can spend an eternity in a perfect world doing all that I have missed out on in this broken one. There is only one thing on God's bucket list and that is to become part of Jesus' kingdom and to enjoy him forever. That is the great treasure available in this life.

So if you have done that then be comforted. You have seen all that you need to in this life. you can depart in peace just like Simeon for you have seen salvation.

[33 : 35] You have missed out on absolutely nothing and you have found absolutely everything. Let me pray for us. Father God help us to believe your words we pray.

We know these words to be true. We know that Jesus is everything. We know that he is ushering in a perfect world which we will enjoy forever.

But yet every day we struggle to truly believe it. Every day we find ourselves derailed thinking that we have missed out on things.

Failing to bring our lives in line with this great vision of your kingdom covering the earth. So we pray that you would change us this morning.

Give us enthusiasm. Thrill our hearts for this great vision of yours to fill the earth with your glory. That we might act upon it this week. That we might tell our friends and family about Jesus.

[34 : 49] That we might invite people along last minute to Christianity Explored. And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.