

HOPES AND FEARS OF THE YEARS

READING Luke 2: 21-35

INTRO: One of our Christmas Carols include **"the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."** That hymn had a strange origin. It all began when Phillips Brooks spent Christmas Eve in Bethlehem in 1865. He had traveled that afternoon by horseback from Jerusalem. It must have been a strong horse! He was 6 feet, 6 inches tall and weighed 300 pounds. Philip Brooks was pastor of a church in Philadelphia. That Christmas Eve in Bethlehem had a powerful influence on him, and he never forgot the five-hour service he attended at the Church of the Nativity. Two years later, as he prepared for the Christmas season of 1867, he wanted to compose a Christmas carol for the Sunday School children to sing at their annual pageant. Remembering that night in Bethlehem, he wrote a poem and handed it to his organist, Lewis Redner, to put a melody to it.

I) MEET A MAN WHO EXPERIENCED "THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS"

A) Simeon was likely one of the "quiet in the land." Cf Psa. 35:20

- 1) **Times Were Hard:** Rome ruled the land as seen in v.1- Caesar Augustus ordered a census be taken- a blatant reminder of Israel's in-house exile. Long gone were the days of David's kingdom. At the birth of Jesus soldiers policed the streets of the "city of David." Even their current temple had been built by a foreigner. Herod the Great was a descendant of Edom, a rival nation. Political darkness reigned.
- 2) **Many Worried About Their Future** based on the present circumstance. Has God forsaken His people? Will we ever be His "**chosen ones**" again? Will He keep his promises or does he not even exist?
- 3) **The "Quiet In The Land" Faithfully "Waited Upon The Lord." Simeon was one of these calm men**
 - (a) **Described as:** Righteous, Devout, Moved under Holy Spirit's guidance, Had received the promise he would see Messiah!
 - (b) **He believed this** and was neither surprised nor fearful when he saw Messiah.

B) When This God-Fearing Man Held The Baby His Life Was Complete.

- 1) Waiting for the "**consolation of Israel**" was such an obsessive and singular focus, that once the Christ child was taken into his arms, his life was fulfilled. If he had died in that moment, he would have died a complete person. We read in v. 26, "*It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Messiah).*" Then he breaks out in song in v. 29, 30: "*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people...*"
- 2) Simeon's heart ached for only this one thing. Have you ever longed for something so much that an unfulfilled hope would leave a hole in your heart? On the other hand, if you did get your wish, you could say, "*Now my life is complete, let me die in peace.*" Where I suspect all of us can relate to this is as parents with our children. As long as our children are wandering in the far country apart from a safe and secure relationship with Christ, there is a perpetual groan in our spirit, and when they return to the compassionate arms of their heavenly Father, we might say, "*Now Lord, my life is fulfilled.*"

3) **ILLUST:** Father and Son

II) WHAT MATTERS IS HOW WE MEET THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS

A) Everybody Does Not Live Day By Day With Calm Assurance

- 1) They have all the fears without the hopes
- 2) If a bomb goes off in Europe, it must be some sign of the end
- 3) These persons often think with their emotions.

4) **ILLUST:** The One You Feed

5) **ILLUST:** Ready To Go

B) Not All Have Their Focus On The Things Of God

1) Perhaps worldliness, secularism or spiritual immaturity leads their way

2) Without God or Scripture, thoughts and decisions come from *"I think....."*

3) **ILLUST:** It Is No Secret What God Can Do

C) Christmas Time. This time of year we sing *"Christmas songs,"* and celebrate the birth of Jesus. There is no record of what time of year he was born but when the early church sought out an appropriate time, they choose the darkest time of the year to emphasize the fact that Jesus is the light that came into the darkness.

ILLUSTRATIONS USED IN THIS LESSON

FATHER AND SON [a man said] I want to share with you the cry of a father's heart that speaks to these deep, and unfulfilled longings. A family in our church introduced Lily and me to an organization serving those who have the unique challenge of being parents of an autistic child. Just this week we received the year end mailer from the founder of this organization, who wrote eloquently and with tender yearning for his son, Dov. Dov is about to turn 13, and yet cannot speak and only communicates by pointing to letters. Hear these longings of a father for his son: *"It is very late at night, everyone is finally in bed for the duration and the house is quiet at last. This moment of solitude in a very noisy season is a small but very sweet pleasure."* He speaks of his son as the brave one who has to deal with the challenges of his condition. Then the father continues, *"And yet I will say one thing about the experience of parents: It is strange and somewhat painful to love so much, to want something so very, very much and not quite get it. Imagine whatever you want with every fiber of your being—a job, a home, a little peace of mind, a soul-mate. Then multiply that by a thousand and add forever."*

IT IS NOT SECRET WHAT GOD CAN DO

Charles Colson tells the story of the astonishing rehabilitation record of the Humaita prison in Brazil. There is only a 4% recidivism rate in this prison compared to 75% in the rest of Brazil and the United States. On a tour of the Humaita prison an inmate showed him the reason why they were so successful. He took him to the cell block that had been known for its torture but now only housed a single inmate. As they reached the end of the cell block and he put the key in the door, the inmate said to Colson, "Are you sure you want to go in?" Colson said, "Sure. I have been in isolation cells all over the world." The inmate slowly swung the massive doors open and Colson saw the prisoner in that cell; it was a crucifix—the prisoner Jesus, hanging on the cross. His guide said, "He is doing time for all the rest of us."

READY TO GO

I have had the awesome privilege of praying for several people to die, to go home. On every occasion it was someone who felt he or she had lived faithfully in God's sight. No death bed repentance, no arguing with God....or me, just "please pray for me to go where He has promised." That is powerful!! This person knows by faith that God is real and will give him or her a reward. He keeps His word the person in question has been faithful. Living with God was now more important than spending time on earth.

CONCLUSION: Jesus was born to fulfill God's word. He came a messenger but more, He IS the MESSAGE! Jesus makes good things happen and if it seems like this is not your case, you might have to be faithful till the end to receive your victory crown.

Every generation has known fear. In 1943, when war was raging in Europe, the Saturday Evening Post published Norman Rockwell's painting entitled "*Freedom from Fear.*" It depicted children resting safely in their beds, unaware of the perils of this world. Their mother is tucking them in, while their father is holding a newspaper describing the horrors of war. The painting became a poster, and later it appeared on a postage stamp. It expressed the fears of every age. The hopes and all the fears of all the years are brought together in the carol we sing, and they converge. Which will be the stronger? The hopes or the fears? Which will win out in the world? Which of the two will win out in our lives? Hopes or fears?

Simeon Knew About *The "Hopes and Fears..."* Coming Together That Night

- 1) But he was a believer in God and His Word
- 2) He never doubted this moment would come
- 3) He lived each day as if God were in it.
- 4) What God promised, Simeon now sees fulfilled.
- 5) We should develop that kind of mentality.

An Old Cherokee told his grandson,
'My son, there is battle between two
wolves inside us all.

One is Evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed,
resentment, inferiority, lies and ego. The
other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope,
humility, kindness, empathy and truth.'

The boy thought about it and asked,
'Grandfather, which wolf wins?'

The old man quietly replied,
'The one you feed.'