

Let's go to Luke 2. I've got two things I want to talk about today, just two. If you're a guest with us here today, that does not mean quick, it just means there's just two things. One is going to be kind of the same old lesson that we've seen in this book since day one, and then I think the other one's pretty profound, but it's coming out of a really weird story. So Luke 2, we're going to pick it up in verse 22. Here's how it reads. "And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him [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')". So to catch you up, Jesus, the Son of God, is born basically in the alley behind the Hilton, and He is now being taken to the temple. It would have been a ritualistic act that all little boys would have gone through in this time period. Verse 24, "...and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, 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." And so, already we've got our first little picture of him maybe being a little crazy. Because he's the guy running around church telling everybody that he doesn't die until he sees the Messiah. For the record, it's been 400 years since we've heard from a prophet. But no, he's not even saying that he's a prophet; he's saying that the Messiah's coming before he dies, and we've already read that he's old. Verse 27, "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,...'" He's talking about death. Alright, so here's what just happened. Mary and Joseph show up on baby dedication Sunday and the old crazy dude at the temple runs up and snatches Jesus, spins around and starts saying, "Now I can die!" I mean, we've got security here, man. You come in here filled with the Holy Spirit and try that, you'll get tazered. Here we go, verse 30, "...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.' And his father and his 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..." We read that again. That means she's as good as dead. That's how old she is. That's what that means. I'm not making that up. Now listen to this, "...having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four." So she's made it to 84, she was married, seven years later her husband died and she never remarries. Not only that, but I think in these days and times, we would have thought she'd gone a little crazy. So let's read what happens next. "She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem." I mean, this is a crazy story.

It's a crazy story, but it's one that goes right along with this whole book so far. You've got this guy who filled with the Holy Spirit begins claiming for however long, we don't really know, that he is not going to die until the Messiah comes, the Messiah that had been prophesied about a thousand years prior. So to us, I don't know what to compare him to except the guy in Manhattan, he's there somewhere right now, holding up a sign that says Christ is coming back tomorrow. The "Wrath of God is coming" guy, that's him. I mean, I don't know who else to compare him to in our culture. He is the guy that's saying, "Behold, doom is at hand." So, he's been saying it, it's baby dedication temple time and he snatches one of the babies, spins around and says he can die now. And then as soon as that's over, this poor woman who has

never gotten over the death of her husband. In fact, she's kind of the wacko Charismatic lady with the tambourine. She never leaves the altar. I mean this is who she is, and she starts banging the tambourine and says, "It's here...It's done... He's here...It's happened." Okay, there's something else that I need to make you aware of in this scene that really is out of control. The temple priests, the educated, religious leaders and all the spectators cooing over babies that day see nothing but a baby boy, but Simeon and Anna, they hear the whisper of the Holy Spirit, they hear and see salvation. It's a profound moment.

And then I want to point this out also about this text. Since day one, we've been reading in Luke about how the lowly, about how the broken in spirit just tend to hear from God and God tends to be there in the middle of that. And the higher and the more exalted and the stronger you think you are, the more you're abandoned to your own devices, but the weaker you are, the more the Holy Spirit shows up and just moves in power. We've seen that through this whole book. But here's something else I want you to notice. When I was in college (for seven years) and I had to write a paper for one of my classes, it had to be a narrative and the assignment was to pretend that the flux capacitor existed and you could go back in time and go to a biblical event and then describe it. And guys picked all kinds of stories, they picked the resurrection. They would love to be there when the angels slammed down and the Roman guards fell over like dead men and they could just watch it all as if they wouldn't have wet themselves and fell out also. Some other guys were like, "No no no. The parting of the Red Sea." What I picked was a story in the Old Testament where Elijah's going up on the mountain to pray and these teenagers start making fun of him, so he curses them and bears come out of the woods and kill them. And honestly, I have the paper somewhere, that was the story I picked. I was like, "Their blood spewed over the trees like..." It was a great story and one of my favorites in the Scriptures. I was really torn between that and when God showed up to Isaiah and said, "Take off all your clothes and run through the streets of Israel naked for two years to show My people the desolation that's coming for them." I just can't tell you, I mean it took me months to decide which one to do. And so, I think there's this common belief...and I don't know where it came from, I think it's just human nature...there's this common belief that if we could go back in time and we could see some kind of miraculous event or some magical moment, then all of a sudden there would be no doubts, no fears. But one of the things I want to point to, specifically in this text, is Anna and Simeon are walking in the same kind of faith that's required of you and me. Which means they saw not the miracles, they saw not the resurrection, they did not see the crucifixion of Christ. By faith, they were spoken to by the Holy Spirit and they believed. They have the same faith as you and me. In fact, I would say they had more, because at least we've seen the full story; they have not seen the full story. All they know is that the Holy Spirit has told them, "This is it." But you and I, we get the life of Christ, we get the crucifixion, we get the resurrection, we get all this church history, but they get none of that.

In fact, I think they have to step out on this really scary limb. I don't know what you believe about God speaking to us. I believe that God still actively speaks through the Scriptures, even through things outside the Scriptures although they'll never be contrary. God doesn't say things that are contrary to Scripture, but He definitely speaks outside of the Scriptures. I know that's a really dangerous thing to say in the Bible Belt, but I think in the same way, here's what I would tell you. The Bible says that He speaks outside of the Bible. So I've never understood how we get into that kind of crazy spot where people will use the Bible and say, "This is the only He speaks." And I'm like, "Well, He said in there that that's not right." I mean, He's never going to go contrary, but definitely He speaks through creation, He speaks through nature, He speaks in dreams and visions. I didn't marry my wife Lauren because the Bible told me to. That's not how that worked. I didn't accept the pastorate here at the Village because the Bible told me to. I mean, "village" is in here like seven times, but I don't think it's talking about us. I don't think that's a reference to us. And there's no "Lauren" in there. So what's happened? Through prayer, through seeking of the Lord, through wisdom, there's impressions, He speaks to our hearts, we filter them through the Scriptures and then we move by faith. And sometimes we mess up and we hear wrong. That's why I'm always aggravated by people who say, "Thus sayeth the Lord." I'm like, "You're a little too confident in your abilities. How about 'maybe'? Pray through that. I just had a feeling. Don't trust my feelings." So, you've got this

God showing up and speaking to this man and woman who everybody thought were a little bit crazy and they were kind of the odd ones. You know, what we like down here in our part of the country is we want people to like Jesus but just not love Him too much. Because you'll be a little weird. And it's okay if you're broken, just don't be too broken. Like, if we can't fix you with a cool twelve step program and a book, please worship somewhere else. So these are these kind of outcast miscreant weirdos that the Holy Spirit is speaking to, revealing things to. And so, I say that and I want to point those things out just to show you that men and women have even biblically walked through the kind of faith that we've been required to walk in, in fact even more faith than the times we've been required to walk in, and that God is actively speaking to people who you wouldn't think He's actually speaking to. Now, I don't know what you're supposed to do with that; I'm just pointing it out.

Now, let's look because this is where I think it's really the major issue I want to tackle tonight. I want you to go back to verse 28. "[Simeon] took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,'" Now, I want to spend the rest of our time together on this idea because it's a strange one. And here's what he's saying here. When he's talking about departing in peace, he's not referencing leaving the temple or finally getting that kind of promise fulfilled, he's saying, "Okay, finally I get to die." And that's what made the thing so weird to begin with, but it's this word "depart" here that I think is profound. The word "depart" as it's being used here means to escape confinement. So he's saying in this moment, "Oh thank God I saw Him. I can finally leave the confinements of this body, and I can do it in peace" It's an interesting idea. He's echoing a biblical sentiment that the soul is too big for the body. Let me show you what I'm talking about here. Go to Matthew 26. I'm going to walk you through in order just three. There's dozens, but I'm just going to do three. I want to show you and I want to point out this idea that's all through Scripture, that we've been given this soul and the soul was designed for greater emotion, greater depth, greater freedom, greater worship, greater joy than the physical body the soul's been put in because of the fall than it can handle, than it can get to. So in almost in all areas, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, in almost all these areas in our body, we hit a ceiling where our soul still has greater capacity. And because of that, there's a little bit of torment that's a part of the human experience. Let me show you some of this.

Jesus is in the garden in Matthew 26, He has freaked His disciples out, He's just taken them to the supper and He says crazy things to them, "This is the blood of the new covenant...this is My body broken for you." And I know it kind of looks really surreal, but if you know the law and you know those things, they've got to be confused out of their minds. They're passing the bread, "This is His body? Here you go." They don't really know, so Jesus is like, "Come on, I'll show you." He takes them to the garden and Jesus, who to this point has almost been killed, has been stuck in a storm, has been challenged and took it all with great courage, takes the three closest a few steps away from the others and says, "I am overwhelmed to the point of death. Please keep watch with Me." And He goes away, He collapses on the ground and less than an hour later, He gets up and He walks back to the three. And look at what He's going to say to them. Verse 40, "And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter,..." He is just going to break that fool down. He's just going to break him down and break him down, Peter who walks with that swagger, Peter who's got so much pride. I mean, there's three of them there. He doesn't go, "Come on, guys." They're all asleep and He's like, "Peter, get up. You." Listen to what He says, "'So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" So this is Jesus saying, "Okay, that spirit that you've been sealed with, that spirit that I gave breath in your mother's womb, that spirit that's inside of you, it's willing, it wants to, it's longing to, but the body is slamming into the ceiling. You're exhausted." Now, keep in mind that this day starts very early for these men. They're told to go set up for the Lord's supper. I mean, these guys have been working all day long. Now we're getting into the late watches of the night after this very full day that kind of confused, kind of brain fried them. Have you ever been in one of those kind of situations where a ton's being taught and you're kind of listening, you're past the point of being able to grasp anything. And now He takes them to this really cool, quiet garden, throws this crazy, "I'm overwhelmed to the point of death," and then leaves them. I mean, they're scared and they want to pray, they want to cry

out, but the Scriptures say, "The flesh is weak, the flesh can't do it. Pray so that you might not be lead into temptation because you're able to do what I'm asking you to do right now. You've got to cling to Me. You've got to cling to the Father. You've got to cling in prayer."

Go over to Romans 8. If you have any history here, you know exactly where I'm going. Let's pick it up in verse 19. "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." A couple of things on that. All of creation has been cursed with, hard pressed, suppressed with decay. So decay is not originally a part of the plan of God. It's introduced into the world as sin entered the world. I don't pretend to understand this; I'm just telling you this is what the Scriptures say. At some level, creation understands that the children of God are going to be removed and removed from decay. And so they're eagerly longing, they're eagerly waiting, eagerly they want this. Now look at this. Verse 22, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." So what we've been told when the gospel penetrates our heart is there's going to be this day when there are no more tears, where everything is rhythmically returned to how God created it, and so now we're not there yet, are we? No. We're not there, and we know we're not there. We're in this process of sanctification that is unbelievably slower than anybody told us at the beginning. So we're trudging, we're fighting, we're falling, we're scuffing our knees, we're failing, we're having to rely on grace and there are these days where we're just like, "Come on. I'm so tired of this." Yeah, this is what happens, we groan because we know what's coming. Yeah, we inwardly groan.

Let me show you one more. I love this one. 2 Corinthians 5, I love the imagery. Starting in verse 1, "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed,..." So he's referencing our body. He just called our body a tent. "...we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked." I love the imagery here and I'll confess this to you. I know this will call into question my masculinity, especially in Texas. I love the idea of camping. I mean, I see "A River Runs Through It," and I'm just like, "Yes, I need to learn how to fly fish. I want to go up into the mountains." And when I get there, specifically that first night, when it's freezing and there's a rock in my back, and you're just like, "God, when's morning coming? I've been here for days. Am I in Alaska? What happened?" And the morning just can't get there soon enough and then you've just got that "I just want to go home" attitude. You know what's a really godly, spirit moving, God exalting moment for me? That sleep top mattress at the Hilton, hot water, a spa in the lobby. That's what I like. Don't judge me. So I get this text, because He's saying, "Hey, listen, when you're away from home, when you're in a tent, when you're out camping..." Even those of you who love it don't love it for life. There are seasons you love camping. I've got a great friend of mine, he loves it, and he would never go camping in Texas in June and July, ever. And this is what this is saying here. It's saying, "Hey listen, this body that we're in, it's not home and the spirit that's been sealed in there knows it." And so there's some discomfort and there are these times we want out and there are these ceilings that we hit that we know and we're frustrated. Listen, God didn't put that in us to mock us; He put it in us because He's going to fulfill it.

One of my favorite things about the Scriptures is when you really look at the whole of them, they're really difficult to argue with because they just set us into the rhythm of how God created things to be. There are these moments with our children where we say really corny things. It goes like this, "Oh, I just want to eat you up." I mean, you don't really want to eat your kids, do you, you freak? I don't think that's what we're saying. I think what we're saying is that we're hitting that ceiling. Why do you think there's music? Because there's this place of rage that we can't get to that for some reason Metallica can get us to it, or at least closer. There are these feelings of love and romance that can't just be verbally put out there. There have been these things, specifically spiritual eternal things, that we can almost get our head to. I mean,

we're almost there and then it's gone. Why? It's because the thing that Christ sealed in you when He created you was designed to feel so much more, to know so much more, to walk in so much more, but we're limited and we're limited by flesh and by bone. Listen to this quote by Charles Hayden Spurgeon. If you don't know who that is, he's an old preacher who was varsity. I don't know what else to call him. But listen to this quote by him. "The Christian man in his present state is like a bird in a cage: his body imprisons his soul. His spirit, it is true, ranges heaven and earth, and laughs at the limits of matter, space, and time; but for all of that laughter, the flesh is a poor scabbard unworthy of the glittering soul, a mean cottage unfit for a princely spirit, this body is a cog, a burden, a fetter." Now, let's breathe out real quick, alright. We're not passing out any Kool-Aid, we're not free in the spirit tonight. Everybody relax. I saw a couple of you going, "Oh gosh. I saw this on the History Channel. If we do communion, don't take it." Listen, there is an appointed time for man to live and a time for man to die, and we don't get to control that date. Even when we think we're controlling it, we're not. No, this is about living well and it's about dying well. Because death is this inescapable reality for all of us. It's coming, it's chasing us and it will eventually run us down. You're just not going to be fast enough. I think we joke all the time, I know we're learning all these new things, there's exercises and certain foods to eat and certain foods to not eat. You can go obey all those rules and still, I don't know how many of you looked at the news today, you can still be an elite marathon runner that drops dead at mile 5. So this is about living in peace and then dying there.

And I think we're afraid of death for a couple of reasons. By the way, we just have a terrible tenacity in hanging on to this world. We just really do. And even those who say, "Oh, I'm ready," I think that's kind of a surface deal. I've people say that before and then get into some bad turbulence, then all of a sudden we're not so confident. But that might have something to do with the method rather than the means. But I think there are some fears around death and around dying that come back to the same issue, and here's what I think it is. In the end, we need the faith to believe that Jesus is who He says He is and that He did what He said He did. Because I think what's happened to us is a lot of us think that when we die, all of our secrets are going to come out. So when you feel that way, when you feel like in that moment when you die, you're going stand before God, all your secrets are going to be out in front of Him. I think the mistake that you're making is that they already are. Like, it's not that moment that you die and stand in front of Him that He's like, "Whoa! You kind of caught Me off guard, because I thought you were a preacher. I was not expecting these issues of the soul." No, can I tell you this? He already knows. Now this is going to take us back to the essence of the gospel. Those secrets that you have, the thoughts, the actions, the doubts, the fears, those things that you did so long ago that still haunt you and fill you with shame...because those things will haunt you. You can cheat on your wife 20 years ago and you know today that you're an adulterer every time you touch her hand. You don't get to get away from that. Every time you try to make yourself forget, it just keeps coming up. There are things that we all did when we were young and dumb. Sometimes we did it when we weren't young or dumb. And what we did was we just hid them. I mean, nobody knows and we carry that around. And when that happens, you don't really get to live in peace. You're living in hiding. It's like this never ending game of hide-n-go-seek, and it's exhausting. And then I think the game that we're playing here is that somehow we think we've hidden that from God. And we even kind of put on the cloaks of righteousness, we put on church attendance and we put on this, "I don't cuss...unless I'm by myself or with people who walk in freedom" and we put on those cloaks and we play the part. And the whole time we're pretending that God doesn't know. And so we don't ever let shame kick in, we don't ever let those things click in, but in reality, those things are coming in, God's jabbing at us and trying to reveal those things, stirring those things up so that we might live in peace. And the man who understands that God knows all our shortcomings and He knows all our failures and He knows all our secrets, even those emotions and those doubts that we don't want to tell anybody, He already knows those things and the cross is still there, that's the man that gets to walk in peace. And when you have no secrets before God or man, it's a lot easier trusting in His salvation and in the peace of openness and honesty, the level of life goes up because you've got a shot at real community, you've got a shot at real intimacy. And then upon death, we know that we've got no secrets from God and He loved us in life and won't abandon us in death. But we've got to have the faith to believe that. Listen, if the ransom has been paid, then the quarrel is over. There's no more fight between us and God. If the cross of Christ is the

ransom for sin, then there is no more wrath of God toward those of us who are under it. This is the essence of the gospel, this is why Paul says, "Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O death, is your victory? Come on, kill me. Kill me. I will be like a bird set free. Kill me. I'll be like a bird let out of its cage. You have nothing anymore." It's pretty profound and it helps us to die well. It even helps us suffer well. Because we're not suffering going, "Oh man, what did I do to make God do this to me?" And I'll have to be careful over these next few months. Dell Steele, our chairman of elders, found out this past week that he has an inoperable, really aggressive cancer, and more than likely he's going to go home with the Lord sooner rather than later. He found that out on Tuesday, and on Tuesday night he's up here praying with his men. So on the day you find out you've got a year or two tops and those year or two are going to be difficult, you do what? "Alright. I've got to go pray with my boys." Why? Because he knows. That's who I want to be when I grow up.

And then here's the other fear that befalls us. I think we constantly have an elevated view of who we are and our importance in the great picture. Like, I love my daughter and I love my son very much, and I want to see my daughter grow up and turn down the proposal of a man...no, I want to see her get married and love God deeply. And I want to see my boy turn into a godly man. I'm going to surround him with all the godly dudes I can, all kinds of different godly guys, godly guys that love sports, godly guys that love music, godly guys that love the arts. I just want him to see those different kind of things. I want to see those things. I want to sit with Lauren when we're really old and drink coffee...I want to be with her for 50 years. That would be awesome. And I think the thing we start doing when we start thinking of death is, we're like, "Oh man, what would happen to my family? What would happen to my children?" And listen, I know this might be difficult for us, but in the end God loves my wife monumentally more than I'll ever be able to love her. And my children? I'm a huge fan of strong male presence in the home, gentle, strong, loving male presence in the home. And I don't know how your children are, but if I'm gone for four or five days, my children start to want someone to beat them for some reason. Seriously, they just go to that one thing that they know they shouldn't do and are like, "Somebody's going to spank me up in here. Someone is going to show me they love me. I need boundaries." And my kids will start doing that. But listen, Christ is a better father than I'll ever be able to be. It's just the truth. And then sometimes I'm like, "Oh, what would happen at the Village? What would happen..." and God's like, "Please. You might be thinking a little bit too much of yourself...EIGHT DAYS IN ASIA!!!!" And stuff like that happens. How'd you like to lose 20 pounds? Excellent! And in the end here's the truth. My role is one of a pawn whether I like it or not. And if my young death furthers the kingdom and furthers the name and renown of the king, if that's what He so desires to do, to call me home early, then please don't cry for me. I'm not going to be crying for you. I'm going to be home drinking the new wine, without the Baptists getting so angry at me.

And so in the end, it's an understanding of the gospel that helps us live well, that helps us suffer well and in the end, helps us die well. And these are important things because let me assure you of some things. Your body's going to break down sooner or later. Very, very, very few people get out of this place without suffering physically, without the body reminding you that all of creation has been subjected to futility. But our boy here says, "With peace I go into the night. With peace I've lived; with peace I've died. Free me. Open my cage. Let me fly." And then he finally gets to feel those emotions that we don't get to feel because we slam into that ceiling. He finally gets to worship in that place, face to face with the king of the universe. He finally gets to have his mind filled with those places, with those things God wanted us to know until sin corrupted. What a great story. What a great God. Praise His name that it's not smart, educated people alone that get to know Him. Praise His name that we can live well and suffer well and die well because we believe He knows us now. Praise Him that one day, in His time, this fragile body of ours will give up and like a bird let out of its cage, we'll be able to soar. Until then, we groan and until then, we strive. Until then, we pray. Until then, we seek. Until then, we stumble and fall and rely on grace and get back up and by grace keep on walking and lay under the waterfall of grace at all times.

Let's pray. Why don't we just take a quick second here. I don't know what the Lord's speaking to you about or dealing with you on. Maybe it's just in that first bit of the story. Maybe there's some pride in our hearts. Maybe there's some haughtiness. Maybe we are, like Paul says, thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to. Maybe we're too busy to hear and listen. Maybe we've bought into what I would consider some perverted doctrines that would say that God's mouth has somehow been sewn up here. Why don't we take a minute here and humble ourselves before God? Maybe tonight we don't want the thought of death or dying to be anywhere near our minds and anywhere near our hearts because we live in such an unrest about who we are, about what's in our soul, about what we've been a part of, about what we've been capable of historically. Death is a horrifying idea for us because the thought of standing before God is just mortifying for us. And so maybe for the first time in our lives, we can be honest before a God who already knows. I mean, no shock, no awe, no shrug of disbelief, He knows. There's a freedom in you confessing that He knows. And then that next step is to confess to one another. Maybe we need more faith. We should ask for it. "Jesus, thank You for tonight, thank You for the gospel, thank You for Your voice, thank You for Your power and thank You for Your great glory loving us, hopelessly broken. I pray that by faith and grace we might live well at peace, that we might suffer well at peace and when it comes time, we might die well. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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