

The Testimony of a Senior Saint

Luke 2:36-38

January 31, 2016

The section that we're finishing today, looking at the character and the testimony of Simeon and then Anna. It's provided an opportunity I've longed desired. It should not escape our notice, if you've read the narrative, if you've been with us, that Simeon and Anna just like Zechariah and Elizabeth back in Chapter 1, they were, as the Bible so delicately puts it, they were "advanced in years." That is to say they were old people.

In Anna's case, as we're going to see in a moment, it's very likely that she was really old. She's probably more than 100 years old. I hope it doesn't offend any of you that I have referred to these dear godly saints as old people, that I feel compelled to say that is an indication of how far we've fallen as a culture in our neglect of the Biblical mandate to honor the

aged. Job rightly said in Job 12:12, "Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days."

And that's why the Law of Moses prescribed in Leviticus 19:32, "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God, I am the Lord." And that's based on the foundational building block of society called the family. God designed it; he established it as the institution for the socialization and teaching of our children.

The power of the family, that is a male father and a female mother, seems silly that I have to say that, but the days we live in demand it. The family, a male father, female mother, the family is a powerful, powerful institution for instilling the principles of dignity and honor into every single citizen. We find it in this basic fundamental command of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, "Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." This establishes the principle of showing honor to everyone.

Basically, if you can learn to show honor to your parents, then you have the framework for honoring others as well. Based on that principle of honor Peter has prescribed, 1 Peter 5:5, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to your elders." That is, obey them, submit yourselves to them, seek and follow their counsel, do what they say. Many young people today find that ludicrous, absolutely laughable. Listen to what some old person has to say? Obey them? Are you kidding me?

That kind of an attitude marginalizing the elderly, that's been going on in our country now for about a century. The young have become accustomed to older people seeking them out, catering to their preferences, their schedules, their desires. We can see evidence of that attitude everywhere from media to marketing, from the marketplace to the church. Society now favors the young and society stigmatizes old age.

Now is not the time to list all the supporting evidence of that fact. We definitely don't have time to analyze the effect on today's culture, how profoundly it has shaped attitudes and worldview, but it has. One common example will suffice to make

the point. I find it sad how so many older people express either mild offense, sometimes even annoyance, simply when they're referred to as old people. While that's not an insult in our culture, it certainly seems to be. Old people are portrayed as being pretty much borderline senile. You can't really trust them; they're old and foolish. What do they have to contribute?

Don't you find that sad? I certainly do. It's tragic, absolutely tragic. And further, it's, it's an indictment against our culture. It's a mark of our shame, not our progress. Not only that, but it's a clear sign that our culture is in decline, steep decline. It's a certain indication of our inevitable downfall because God opposes the proud and he puts a curse on those who do not honor the aged.

The picture is inverted in Scripture. It's precisely the opposite. The Bible actually commends the aged and it admonished the young. It's the young who are naïve, simple, who have a lot to learn. Youth is marked by folly. The process of maturation, growing up is really the escape from foolishness, by following the counsel of the godly, by following those who are older,

wiser, more godly, more mature in the faith. In fact, when you look at the many who are set before us in Scripture as examples of faith and godliness, they're old people.

Enoch was a 365 year old man and he "walked with God," it says in Genesis 5:24, "And he was not, for God took him." I'd love to know what that looked like. Wouldn't you like to spend an afternoon with Enoch, tapping his brain, just downloading everything of his wisdom and his counsel? Noah, he was 500 years old when he fathered Shem and Ham and Japheth. Incredible to think about sitting on the lap of your 500 year old dad. He had half of a millennium, half of a millennium of experience to pass on to those boys.

By contrast, you can compare or contrast Enoch and Noah with Abraham, the father of those who are righteous by faith. Abraham was about 100 years old when Isaac was born, and he died at the age of 175. Then Moses, he was 80 years old when he led Israel out of Egypt. Pretty robust. Abraham and Moses, though, were mere teenagers when it comes to those older saints, their forefathers. When we think about others commended to us in



Scripture, prophet Samuel, King David, the prophets Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah, they were all most effective in the Lord's service as older men.

In fact, it's not overstating the case at all to say that the Bible testifies that the best days of God's saints are in their later years, their golden years, their latter days. It's not youthful energy that accomplishes the will of God. It's a heart that's devoted to righteousness and truth. It's a heart that is devoted to meekness and wisdom, right? That's Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." And the Lord's Spirit is not hindered by a lack of energy.

Those who are older, those who've spent their lives investing in godly pursuits like Enoch, they've learned what it means to walk with God. They are the ones we should honor, seeking their opinions, listening to their wisdom, obeying their godly counsel. Now just as a caveat here, it's true what they say: there's no fool like an old fool, is there? Old age alone, years on the calendar, whatever, does not make someone wise.

There were plenty of old foolish Pharisees and Sadducees in, in Jesus' day and there are plenty today, plenty of aging hippies making a mess of our country right now.

One of our presidents smoked, but he didn't inhale. Our current one, though, nevertheless, we're still called to honor, right? We're still called to honor. As they say in the military, "Salute the rank even if you can't salute the man." Romans 13:7 says, "Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed." Peter said, while Nero was on the throne, mind you, "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

So honoring those of high rank, high status, that's appropriate and fitting as Christians. In fact, it's commanded of us. Those who've attained old age, you know what? They're entitled to our honor based on the principle of honoring father and mother. Depending on the person's character, sometimes that's a challenge, but it's never an option. But those senior saints, those who've devoted themselves to God, those who have

navigated a sin-cursed world in a sin-cursed body for many, many years, that's a joy to show honor to people like that. Isn't it?

The older, wiser saints, they've learned to distrust self and trust only in God. They've clarified that the only source of true joy and lasting happiness is in Christ and Christ alone. They have longed ceased to be deceived by youthful lusts, to be led astray by frivolous pursuits. Instead, they've devoted themselves to godliness. Older people are up very early in the morning to read their Bibles, to pray, to devote themselves to him.

Eternal realities increasingly outshine temporal, earthly pursuits as Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 4:16 and following. He said, "Though our outer self is wasting away," can I get an Amen? Yeah. "Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are

transient," they're passing, "but the things that are unseen are eternal."

The subject of our study this morning, Anna, the prophetess, she could have written those words of Paul. The light momentary affliction that God brought into her life, it produced in her an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison and if she were here today before us, she'd love to tell you all about it. So, we're going to take a look at her testimony. See here in Luke Chapter 2 what produced such wisdom.

Let's just read the short section there. It says, "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. 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."

Once again, as we mentioned with the story of Simeon, the setting is the temple complex, probably the court of the women, where Mary and Joseph had come to present their offerings and to present baby Jesus. Simeon has just finished speaking when Anna shows up. The focus is on the testimony of these two senior saints. We also get a glimpse of those who received their ministry, who heard their ministry. It wasn't everyone who was thronging at the temple courts that day or even day after day, there were just a select few.

Those who were watching and waiting for the Lord's redemption, they were the ones privileged when the Lord came suddenly, unexpectedly without herald or announcement into the temple, according to Malachi 3:1. They were the ones there to witness it, to receive that ministry. Simeon and Anna, Joseph and Mary, they're all representatives of a faithful remnant, small in number, but the special objects of God's care and affection. And the Holy Spirit wants us to hear this early testimony from these saints, this remnant.

Listen, folks, it is very, very important that we listen to this godly woman, Anna, that we see this testimony. This is the faithful testimony of yet another senior saint. And it's interesting, we actually don't hear her speak. There are no words recorded, but we do see the testimony of her life, and it shouts at us. We learn from the fact that her testimony is here recorded in Scripture. We learn from the fact that her testimony is here, that this is something we need to heed.

What I want to do today is explain the text. I also want to draw out some implications that highlight the essential ministry of you senior saints here in our church. God intends to use those of you in our midst who've lived a little bit longer than most. Saints like Simeon and Anna, they're examples to you. They're examples to all of us. They're models of a godly paradigm. And those of us who are younger, so much to learn as we seek to honor, and learn from godly examples that are in our midst. That includes you.

So let's start by finding out who Anna is. first point, you can see there in your outline I believe: The identity of a

senior saint, the identity of a senior saint. Verse 36, "There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher." Her name is actually Hannah with an H. The Greek text actually uses a rough breathing mark before the, A, so we should pronounce her name Hannah with the H. And if we did pronounce her name as Hannah instead of just Anna, it might help us make that Biblical connection with her namesake back in 1 Samuel 1 and 2.

Several parallels between the Hannah of the Old Testament and the Anna of the New Testament, both women mourned for different reasons, but both mourned. They experienced a deep sorrow in their heart. Both women responded to their sadness not through anger, depression, self-pity, but through humble prayer, through fasting and bowing before God and that meant that the focus of their devotion was in the symbolic presence of God on earth. For Hannah that was the tabernacle. For Anna it was the temple.

And that's where the parallel ends because the very next word in the Greek text receives the emphasis of Anna's identity,

which is what Luke wants us to see about her. Anna was a prophetess. Even before Luke tells us about her family and her tribe, he tells us about her role. He tells us about the special gifting of the Lord on her life. Prophets are those chosen by God, those called by God, set apart from others to receive special revelation from God. That is to say, God spoke through them. And it wasn't a constant stream of unending revelation that they were just walking down the street speaking God's word all the time, but you know in some cases, it was actually quite seldom.

But nonetheless, God used the prophets as a conduit of his word, his revelation to people. Luke doesn't tell us when Anna became known as a prophetess, but it's likely that God activated her right around the time of Jesus' birth. That aligned with the activity of the Holy Spirit in other people we've met in this text: Mary, Zechariah, Simeon. These, after all, are the days of light. The day when the, the sunrise from on high is shining, when God broke the 400 years of prophetic silence and it all started right here.

According to Luke 1:67, Zechariah prophesied, he joined the ranks of "the holy prophets of old" that he mentioned in verse

70. His son John was called, "the prophet of the Most High," verse 76. And now, Luke, he's added Anna's name to the rank of prophets, an exclusive honor indeed. And especially for women. Jewish tradition named seven women as prophetesses: Sarah, Miriam, Debra, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther. Of those, though, the Bible names just three of them as prophetesses: Miriam in Exodus 15:20, also a passage in Numbers and Micah; Debra is named in Judges 4:14; and then Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14 and following. Isaiah's wife might be put in there as well, depending on how one interprets Isaiah 8:3.

In the New Testament, you see a couple of times there in Acts 21:8 and 9, that names the daughters of Philip as prophetesses. 1 Corinthians 11:5, it acknowledges, but it doesn't identify, it does acknowledge women who are prophesying with uncovered heads in the Corinthian Church. Again, not many were prophets, male or female, and just a few women in Scripture were called prophetesses.

The unique situation after Anna's time in the early church, after Acts Chapter 2, there's miraculous sign gifts, there's

wide distribution of the gift of prophesy. It signaled a unique New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit. God had promised to restore the nation Israel and in so doing, according to Joel 2:28, "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."

Now we see evidence of that here in this text. We saw evidence of some of that in, in the early part of Acts. But you know what? It fades. It fades over time. The complete fulfillment of Joel 2:28 and following, it awaits Israel's full repentance as a nation.

But it was telegraphed by the Spirit of prophesy, some that fell on some of the saints of the early church. That started here even with Anna the prophetess. Her gift of prophesy was ordained by God, it came by agency of the Holy Spirit and it was on par with the male prophets, same gift, often different expressions, different roles, different roles in the church, but

she was a vessel nonetheless. She was a conduit; she was a mouthpiece of divine revelation just like her male counterparts.

Now, notice not much is said here of Anna's ministry. Luke doesn't even record any of her words. And that's typical of the Bible's treatment of women who had a legitimate gift of prophecy. Of all the legitimate prophetess's named in Scripture, none of their ministries are featured in any significant detail. There are no female authors of Scripture. Prophetesses were atypical, very uncommon because God most often assigned the prophetic role to men.

So what's with Anna? Why her? What is the significance of her being named a prophetess, especially when Luke doesn't even record any of her prophetic words or tell us much more about her ministry? Excellent question. Thanks for asking. I appreciate it. I believe that this draws attention, once again, to God's intent and his designs in restoring the nation of Israel. Anna is proof positive that the 400 years of prophetic silence have been broken. For Anna to receive the gift of prophecy as a woman, that indicates God is giving the Spirit freely and

widely. He's reminding the nation of Joel 2:28 and calling for the repentance, calling for their faith.

Anna is also identified there in verse 36 as a daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. Why? Same reason. Same reason, to signal God's desire to redeem Israel. There's no knowledge today of this man Phanuel, but his name helps identify and distinguish which Anna we're talking about. Evidently, she was a woman in that day of some notoriety. We're going to find out in a moment why. The name Phanuel, though, comes from the Hebrew word *Penuel* or *Peniel*. That was the name that Jacob gave to the place where he wrestled with God. It says in Genesis 32:30, Jacob named that place Peniel, for he said "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

So after seeing God face to face, God changed his name from Jacob, deceiver, to Israel, which means having power with God. So the name Phanuel means face of God, reminds of all that history. And then Luke identifies their tribe, Phanuel and his daughter, Anna, were of Asher. Asher, that's the name, literally means happy. Asher was Jacob's eighth son and that birth brought

about happiness. The tribe of Asher was one of the ten northern tribes of Israel that are known as the lost tribes of Israel after their deportation to Assyria. They seemed to have been lost in the record. Well, lost no longer. Here they are. The search is over. We found two members of the lost tribe of Asher. Phaniel and Anna are alive and well.

The families of Israel, they've been keeping genealogical records. That's what this indicates and they knew their lineages, where they'd come from, which just as an aside, it's an embarrassing fact for proponents of what used to be called British Israelism. Have you heard that? Or Anglo Israelism? That's this idea that the lost tribes of Israel showed up conquering Britain and the British royal family is all related to King David. That's the idea.

The same idea showed up here in America. It was the basis of Mormon theology, also the old world-wide Church of God cult and other splinter groups. A lot of damage has been done by myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather

than the stewardship from God that is by faith, right? A lot of damage.

So, Anna, though, daughter of Phanuel, tribe of Asher, she represents in so many ways how God has preserved the faithful remnant of Israel and how he intended to redeem the faithful of Israel. Anna's presence here in Scripture is clear and certain indication that God is concerned about women, not just men. And God will pour out his Spirit on women, too, not just men.

Not only that, but God doesn't intend to restore only certain tribes of Israel, not just the priestly tribe of Levi indicated by Zechariah and Elizabeth, not just the ruling tribe of Judah indicated by Joseph and Mary, God intended to rescue and redeem his people from the unfaithful northern tribes as well, like Asher, indicated by Anna's presence here in the faithful remnant.

As Jesus said, John 10:16, "There will be one flock, one shepherd." One flock, one shepherd. A reminder of Ezekiel 34:23, Ezekiel 37:24 that God "will set over his people one shepherd,

my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd." So Anna's presence here in Scripture unpacks all of that.

A couple more significant aspects of Anna's identity we want to note here. Anna was, as we said, she's quite old. She was a widow; she was childless. But Luke uses all those facts as he presses this forward to establish her godly character. Let's move ahead with a second point: The character of a senior saint, the character of a senior saint.

Verses 36 and 37, it says, "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." Advanced in years, that's basically the same description of Zechariah and Elizabeth, but Luke has added a word here that sets Anna apart from them. He adds a comparative adjective "advanced in many years," separating her out.

This woman was old, folks, very old and as I mentioned earlier, that is not an insult. It is a mark of high esteem, of great, great honor. Anna's age distinguished her. It indicated her credibility among the people, which gave significant weight to her testimony here in Scripture and there on the scene in the temple.

After the general remark about Anna's great age, Luke gets more specific here. He says that she lived with her husband seven years from when she was a, a virgin and, young women, virgins in those days married around 14 or 15 years old. This means that she became a widow around 22 years of age. That's pretty young for a tragedy to strike, isn't it? She experienced enough of marriage to appreciate the intimacy of relationship with a husband and then her joy is cut off in the very prime of life.

This is a woman who had endured profound sadness during her lifetime, and it started at a very young age. Anna had every right to remarry; most young widows did. That was fine, but she didn't. She lived on as a widow, devoting herself to God.

There's a question at this point in the grammar about her actual age, which Luke seems to want us to know. He spent a good deal of the text in writing to indicate her age. The grammar he uses could indicate that Anna lived as a widow until she was 84 years old, that is, in the text she's 84 years old. The ESV seems to indicate and take that position.

Or, it could mean, the way it's written, that she lived another 84 years after she became a widow. That's 22 years old, widow, and then 84 years after that until this point right here in the temple. That would put her at 106 years old. So which is it? For several contextual reasons, I believe Anna was 106 years old, not 84. It's true that whether 84 or 106, it does put Anna in the category of advanced in years, but Zechariah and Elizabeth were advanced in years, as well, they're likely in their sixties or seventies. Anna was advanced in many years. It seems to separate her by a generation from them. She's distinguished here as much older. It also explains why Luke would spend so much time.

And we have to keep in mind the author's intent here. Why does Luke want us to see the length of her widowhood? Well, he's establishing here beyond the shadow of any doubt at all the validity and the credibility of Anna's testimony. It wasn't just her age that established her testimony. Anna was a woman of uncommon character and Luke wants us to see that, not just the length of her widowhood, but the character of her widowhood.

Turn over just quickly in your Bibles, going to the right just turn over to 1 Corinthians Chapter 7, 1 Corinthians chapter 7 because I want to show you something there that Paul taught about widows. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives some very practical instruction on marriage, divorce, remarriage, he counsels the married, the widowed, those who were engaged to be married, it's very, very practical stuff.

And in 1 Corinthians 7:8 and 9, this is what he says, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am." How do we know Paul was unmarried? Right there. He was unmarried; he was single. Probably married before; perhaps his wife died, perhaps his wife left him when he became

a Christian, we're not sure. But he says, "It is good that they remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, then they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

As we've said, Anna was young when she became a widow and she had every right to remarry. She knew the joys of intimacy in marriage, intimacy with a husband. She had the hope of raising children. God hadn't given her any children to raise, so she decided instead to exercise self-control, to restrain her passions, to devote herself wholly and completely to the Lord.

Now this is not a prescription for anyone else. It's just a fact. We're not trying to start a new convent here at all, okay. Do not misunderstand me. Anna is unique. She's held up as unique. And she decided to forego marriage to embrace a life of self-restraint and sacrifice, to devote herself to the service of the Lord at the temple. She didn't leave, "She didn't depart from the temple, worshiping," there, "with fasting and prayer night and day." She had perfect attendance. She never missed a service.

Scan down in 1 Corinthians 7 to verse 34, verse 34. 1 Corinthians 7:34, "The unmarried or betrothed woman," she, "is anxious about," what? "The things of the Lord," right? "How to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband." I don't really like the association of husbands with worldly things. I don't know why that's there, but God wrote it. Paul's words there in 1 Corinthians 7:34, they just express a fact of life, don't they? We get that.

Whether it's a husband dealing with his situation with a wife in verses 32 and 33, or a wife here in verse 34, married people are distracted people, right? Their minds are not completely clear and undistracted. Responsibilities and roles to fulfil, there are bills to pay, there are kids to raise, husbands and wives want and need one another's attention. That is the normal stuff of life. The normal stuff of the intimacy of marriage, which is God's good design. That's his plan for most people. But those who are unmarried, those who are in that condition, they're free to devote all of their attention, undivided, undistracted, singly focused on the Lord and the Lord alone.

And that's why Paul encouraged those who are widowed to stay single. Look at verse 35, "I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." Very pastoral, right? He's very concerned as the shepherd to secure their undivided devotion to the Lord.

Listen, marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship to the church, Ephesians 5, right? Note that because it's not the other way around. The higher significance and the higher priority is the church, the body of Christ, not marriage, not family. We're not disparaging marriage and family by putting it in the right order, the right priority; we're actually elevating it because it's a picture of Christ and the church. That's a high and holy thing. You know Jesus said the same thing about the priority. He said, God's people are closer to him than his own flesh and blood.

Anna certainly saw it that way. In fact, turn, while you're there in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians, go over to 1

Timothy. 1 Timothy. Paul wrote that, too, and let me show you a passage, it's, I think, far too neglected today. This is a passage that I actually like to use in talking to young ladies before they're married, to talk to them about the kind of character they should cultivate in order to, I don't know, to put together a good retirement plan.

Just in case everything goes wrong, how are they going to, if they are left destitute and alone, how do they make sure, well, that the church becomes responsible for them? Well, it's right there in 1 Timothy 5. According to 1 Timothy 5:3, Anna was someone that we might call a widow indeed. In fact verse 5 parallels what Luke has recorded. It says, "She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers," what? "Night and day," right?

Just like Anna in the temple, night and day, fastings and prayers, right . Anna hoped in God. She continued in fasting and prayers night and day, never leaving the temple. Take look, though, at verse 9, 1 Timothy 5:9, "Let a widow be enrolled," that is put on a list. Yes, the early church kept lists, lists

of members, lists of widows. Lists, it's okay to keep lists.
Just want to mention that, just want to say that.

"Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works, if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality," these are evidences of good works, right? She's brought up children, she's shown hospitality, she's "washed the feet of the saints, she has cared for the afflicted, she has devoted herself to every good work." Women like that, put them on the list.

Except for the raising of children, that right there describes Anna. And the fact that Anna had no children, that's what allowed her to devote herself so completely, so totally to God at the temple after losing her husband. No children, no responsibilities, no commitments. So she said, "I know, I'll devote myself, dedicate myself completely to the Lord."

Listen, folks, don't miss this. Anna was bereft of her husband. She was kept from having children. Those are painful things, painful, painful realities. But instead of being overcome and laden with grief over all of her losses, she gave her time and her energy to the Lord's service. She didn't retreat into bitterness, and selfish, sinful self-pity; she gave herself to God. She read the providence of God in her life and she embraced it and she pursued it and she went with it.

You can go back now to Luke 2:37. She didn't depart from the temple. She stayed there as much as she could worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. Service at the temple was her constant concern. Her habit of fasting, the sign of mourning, really, is an indication of the intensity and the fervor of her prayer life. She didn't fast over her own temporal condition like being childless and a widow. Her concern was over the spiritual condition of her nation. Her people, Israel, they became her children.

And so she prayed fervently for them. She longed for God to intervene, to redeem them. Like an anxious parent, she was

praying earnestly, constantly for her people. Anna was a woman of impeccable moral integrity, unassailable character. She was a pious woman, she was a godly saint. She provides and unimpeachable testimony to the Messiah here in the temple courts that day. And we see the mark of God's wisdom here, don't we? As he brings together these two witnesses to testify to the identity of Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah. "The truthfulness of a matter is established on the basis of two or three witnesses," right, Deuteronomy?

We also see God's concern here not just for the validity of the testimony, we also see God's concern here for equity, that is the equal status of men and women because one witness is a man and the other is a woman. That is not by accident. That's not just some coincidence. God designed that.

We also see God's concern here for people of all ages because Simeon and Anna are old; Joseph and Mary, on the other end of the spectrum, young, just starting their life. Wisdom and equity, perfect knowledge, absolute righteousness, it's all

bound together here in this testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Notice, also, Anna's testimony is here put in the text as a confirming testimony of Simeon's testimony. Simeon spoke by the Holy Spirit so his testimony actually needed no confirmation or affirmation. But he wasn't as well known, it would seem, in the temple vicinity as Anna. It was her notoriety, it was her righteous reputation that really backed up what Simeon had to say and that's a big, big deal because God continues to defy human social convention.

In the first century, the testimony of a woman would be scorned by the religious elite who frequented the temple in those days. Really? You're going to give me the testimony of a woman, some Pharisee would come scrolling through. Sadducees, would say, you kidding me? Listen to her? What's gotten into your head? She can't testify in court. She's got no authority, no power here. God is so utterly uninterested in carnal opinions. He doesn't care about that. God used a man and a woman, both on equal footing, each playing a vital role. God's

concern is righteous character, that was Simeon and that was Anna.

So we've looked at the identity of this senior saint, we've seen the character of this senior saint. Let's consider a final point, point three for your notes: The ministry of a senior saint, the ministry of a senior saint, verses 37 and 38, "She didn't 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."

This whole thing is a picture of a life well spent, isn't it? But notice how these verses, they picture a before and after in Anna's ministry. Anna has one ministry before Christ, another ministry after Christ. You see that? Anna's ministry before Christ was one of fasting, that is one of lament, fervent prayer and she grieved and lamented, but not without hope. She hoped in God. She hoped in God.

But the very day she saw the child Christ, she saw the very embodiment of all the answer to all her prayers. Right there, and her ministry changed forever. Anna had lived 106 years before seeing Christ. Make no mistake, this woman was very robust, very much alive, good genetics, probably ate all organic. But notice how after she sees Christ, she really becomes alive, doesn't she? As Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life," it's bearing fruit. The first aspect of her ministry was in giving thanks. It was a ministry here that's directed toward God, and I love that.

Anna had been praying fervently for more years than most of us have been alive. Think about that. Every year you've been alive, Anna was praying. You know she's a woman of tremendous faith. You want to see people who truly believe, who have a strong faith in God, look at their prayer life. Strong prayer life, prayer life is an indication of a strong, strong faith. Anna modeled what taught us that we ought always to pray and not lose heart.

And as a woman of faith, expressing her faith in a ministry of prayer, she was more connected to God than with people. Her

most intimate relationship was with God, not other people, not other human beings. Truly, she was a woman not of this world. Now that the Lord had answered her prayer, she turned immediately back to him in gratitude.

And the verb tense indicates here that she started giving thanks and then she continued giving thanks. This became a regular part of her life. One day she's fasting in prayer, the habit of her life for more than 80 years, next day she's rejoicing in prayer. She's giving thanks, which continued for the rest of her life and I can tell you without any fear of contradiction, it continues to this very moment.

There may be some of you who are widowed, bereft of your beloved, your life-long partner. There may be some of you who mourn the fact that God hasn't given you children yet. Many other reasons for sadness and sorrow besides these, things we all face in this life, different trials, fears, temptations, anxieties, worries, heaviness of heart. For all of us, no matter what our station, no matter what our challenge, we're living on this side of the cross.

Like Anna, age, marital status, family relations, lack of family of relations, sorrows, trials, all of this happens in the context of Christ. We're not dismayed. We're not put down. None of what we face, if we belong to him, none of it happens outside the sphere of his loving care, his concern, his guidance. No matter where you are, no matter what your situation, you can give yourself, just like Anna did, to the ministry of prayer because we're those who pray. We don't lose heart.

All our prayers, all our cares, all our concern, we pour out to God in prayer, but we do it in the context of thanksgiving. We have a new situation in life. We belong to Christ because of the Gospel. All our sins are forgiven, we're covered in his righteousness and so we pray in deep, deep gratitude, don't we? We are of all people most significantly, profoundly, eternally blessed and like Anna, we should be ever devoted to the ministry of prayer.

But Anna's ministry wasn't only toward God in prayer, she did minister to her own kind, as well. Look again at verse 38,

it says, "Coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him." Again, the verb tense there indicates that Anna was speaking repeatedly, continually. Simeon,

he's ready to go to heaven after seeing Jesus, but not Anna. Typical, isn't it? The man is ready for a nap, the woman wants to get to work. Anna is like the lion, right? You ever see the National Geographic thing where the king lion, big huge mane, powerful sleeping every time you go to the zoo, he's sleeping. The woman, the female lion, she's out there devouring food and bringing it back. What's up with that? I don't know what's up with that. I don't like it, though, I don't like that.

Where was I? Anna. Anna does not want to go anywhere. She's just getting started. She's been reinvigorated and she's ready to start teaching to her people, but notice, she didn't direct her teaching ministry to just anybody. You see that? Just a select few. Verse 38, "To all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem." Anna's teaching was targeted to her people, not just Jews. Not even people from the tribe of Asher.

Her people were all those who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna didn't bother here trying to convince the self-righteous. She didn't bother going after the scribes and the Pharisees who were in love with their own fastidiousness about the things of the law. She didn't go after the proud who were in, in love with their own opinions. She didn't bother trying to persuade the liberals like the Sadducees, those who were devoted to money and politics, those who ran the profit generating enterprise of the temple complex. She left those behind, she focused on her people.

As Frédéric Godet said, "The Pharisees expected an outward triumph from the Messiah. The Sadducees expected nothing. Between them were the true faithful, who expected the consolation, that is deliverance, and it was these last who, according to Ezekiel's expression cried for all the abominations of Jerusalem. It was among these that Anna devoted herself to the ministry of an evangelist." End Quote.

Anna's ministry was to those who put their hope in God. She preached and proclaimed and taught to those who drew near. She didn't go after everybody. She taught those who came near, those who responded to this message of the Gospel. It's a ministry that began that very day and it continued long after Joseph and Mary departed.

Speaking of Mary, take another look at the beginning of verse 38. It says there, "Coming up at that very hour she began to minister." Other translations say, "Coming up at that very moment," or "at that very instant." That's more the idea. Anna arrived, if you just look back in the context, she arrived at the very moment that Simeon delivered some very difficult truth to Mary. Remember that? That whole thing about Jesus being a polarizing figure, a sign that would provoke opposition that would result, frankly, in her own soul being pierced through with a, with a sword.

And the text doesn't state this directly, but it's implicit here, we have to notice that God sent Mary a devout older woman at the very moment she needed such a woman. Mary is a younger

devout woman and she would be immensely benefitted from the ministry of this older saint. A woman who had herself lived through so much pain, so much sorrow, she stayed the faithful course. That is just like our God, isn't it? The very moment of Mary's trial, God delivers comfort.

Anna arrived. She's childless and widowed, she's forsaken and lonely, she's only got these cold rocks, temple rocks around her, faithful remnant. Mary, she'd lose Joseph before Jesus was of age. She'd watch as her dear son Jesus, he'd be cut down the prime of his life, as well. You know what? Anna could identify, at least to some degree. She could lead Mary out of depression into profound joy.

Anna here could provide great hope and encouragement especially as her ministry of gratitude put Mary's future sorrow into an eternal perspective. Anna's teaching ministry would help Mary understand the redemptive significance of her son, his perfect life, his death for sins. Wow. Would that all of our sorrows be eclipsed by an eternal perspective like that, right?



We all look forward to a day when death is swallowed up in victory.

Well, that's Anna's identity and character and ministry. She's quite a woman, wasn't she? Unique as a prophetess, uncommon in her character, her godly devotion. At the same time, Anna is here put before us as an exemplary saint. She's not out of reach. She's set forth as model of a life well spent. She shows us how to live in light of Christ, in light of the Gospel.

Look, we're not prophets. We're not all called to live a life like she did of undistracted devotion to God in a temple, okay? But we can devote ourselves to the ministry of prayer and thanksgiving, right? We can devote ourselves to teaching and encouraging others. Like Anna, we can find those who respond to the Gospel, that's evangelism. And then once they respond, we can teach them to live accordingly, right? That's discipleship. Those of you who are senior saints, old people, it puts it into a new ring, doesn't it? We honor you. I'm standing before you right now. I stand just like Leviticus tells me to, to stand to

honor you. Why isn't everybody else standing? No, I'm just kidding.

You need to know, if you're a senior saint, if you're widowed, you need to know the church depends on you. God has much for you to do. He's calling you into his service right now. As sure as we will render an account of the stewardship of our lives, that account will include the record of our older age as well.

So we need to invest wisely, not in the typical America lie about retirement, live for yourself, spend off the kids' inheritance, they won't mind. They live on credit, anyway. Indulge yourself with vacations, travel, experiences, but forget all of that. We need to invest wisely, devoting ourselves to the things of God because, listen, the time is so short.

Senior saints, the church of tomorrow depends on your ministry today. Will you give yourselves sacrificially to the next generation? Will you pray and teach? Will you model thanksgiving and speak always and only about Jesus Christ, your

Savior? You're passing the baton to others, to those who will receive the faith and then take that and deliver it to the next generation behind them. What are you passing on?

As your pastor, God commands me in Titus 2 to teach what accords with sound doctrine. That is, "Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." Older men, older women, those are your marching orders. And the next generation depends on you.

Perhaps you feel like you haven't lived the exemplary life of Simeon or Anna. If you haven't, you wish you would've been more diligent, more devout with the time God gave you, right? Look all of us can say that. We're all in the same boat. So that's your message to the next generation, isn't it? Command those young people, "Fear God, keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man." If you know that's worthwhile, tell them



the truth about it and be aggressive. We need you to be aggressive.

Think back on your life. Reflect on God's faithfulness to you. Reflect on the significance of knowing Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Devote yourself to the private ministry of prayer, giving thanks to God and then emerge from that private ministry and go public, just like Anna did. Tell those of good character, those who share your same hope about what's really important in life. Encourage their faith. Let's not lose another generation to temporal distraction. Let's draw the line in the sand with this generation and reverse the flow and take back ground for Christ.

Listen, you who are younger, humble yourselves. Have the wisdom to seek out older, wiser, godlier saints. Watch their lives, mark their conduct and behavior, listen to their speech, listen to their attitudes and opinions, as well. Measure what you see against the pattern of Scripture and God will lead you to the ones you need to listen to. Spend time with those godly, older senior saints. You, pursue them, don't wait for them to



come to you. Accommodate yourself to their needs. Accommodate yourself to their schedules.

Ask good questions and then be quiet. Listen. You know what they say? You know God gave your two ears and one mouth; use them in that proportion, right? Drink deeply from the well of their wisdom. Learn from a life well lived. We have a number of dear saints here in our own church. And even though they don't feel well physically, not all the parts are working right anymore and they mark time by the daily regimen of pills and they mark the weeks by doctor appointments and such.

These dear saints are devoted to God with their remaining time and energy. They study the word of God with remaining energy, little compared to young people, but they devote it to him. They pray fervently for the health and the growth of his church. Boy, shouldn't we all? They teach others to follow what they've learned through God's word, applied practically over many years of experience.



Listen, senior saints who are doing that right there, we, we thank God for you. We so depend on you. I cannot, this is coming from the heart. You're absolutely essential for the vitality and health and the growth of this church. May God use you like he did Simeon and Anna. And may God turn the hearts of the young to the wisdom of the just to bring honor to his son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let's pray.