

What You're Looking For - Luke 2:21-39

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

As you think back over the past week and how you spent your time and energy and what you tried to accomplish, what would you say you were looking for in all of it? What was your focus? What were some of the desires you were hoping to fulfill or goals you were hoping to achieve in the way you spent your time and energy? And did you fulfill those desires or achieve those goals and were they everything you'd hoped for? Whether we consciously realize it or not, we're all looking for something in life and we spend a lot of time and energy and resources in pursuit of whatever we're looking for.

Again I ask: what are you looking for when you get up in the morning each day? Are you just looking for some alone time to do what you want? Are you hoping your spouse will finally appreciate and love you as they should? If you're not married, are you hoping to find that special person who you think will finally complete you and add meaning to your life? Are you just looking to have some fun and enjoy life a little bit? Are you looking to finally get your to-do list completed and feel productive and useful? Are you looking for that next big promotion at work and to be recognized for the valuable employee that you are? Are you looking to get enough money to buy that new toy that's sure to satisfy and keep you entertained? Are you looking to escape into a great movie or TV show that seems so much more appealing and meaningful than your own life?

Like it or not, we're all looking for something in our day-to-day lives and we expend lots of time, money and energy in the search. If you want to uncover what you're looking for, a great place to start is an examination of how you spend your time and energy and money. Then ask yourself, what am I hoping to find and get out of these things I'm spending most of my time, energy and money on? And is it something worth getting? When and if I find it, will it satisfy my deepest needs and provide true and lasting joy, peace and fulfillment?

This constant searching for something that never seems to satisfy us has been poetically expressed in a powerful way by a song that some of us older folk will be very familiar with. The lyrics go like this:

*I have climbed the highest mountains
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you.*

*I have run, I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you.*

*But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.*

*I have kissed honey lips
Felt the healing in her finger tips
It burned like fire
(I was) burning inside her.*

*I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was warm in the night
I was cold as a stone.*

*But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.*

Can't you sense the energy, the intense pursuit, the willingness to try anything and everything in the search, and yet the continuous, haunting words: "*But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.*" Do these lyrics from an old U2 song describe

your life in any way? If we're honest, we can all relate to this constant and continuous search for satisfaction and meaning in life that ends up feeling like a search for the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow...always moving a little further away and eluding our grasp.

Well today in our study of Scripture, we're going to learn about several people who were also looking for something constantly and continuously and with great energy and focus. But the beauty of their search is that these people found what they were looking for and what they found brought great joy, peace, gratefulness and amazement to them. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Luke, chapter 2, where we'll be taking a look at verses 21 through 39 today.

As most of you know, on the first Sunday of each month we're working our way through a harmony of the 4 gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Some of the historical events we've already covered in our study include Mary, Joseph, and Zacharias' encounters with angels announcing the coming miraculous births of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist. We've spent some time with Mary and her relative Elizabeth as they rejoiced in their miraculous pregnancies and spoke words of prophecy and praised God for his great mercy, power and faithfulness. And we've walked with Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus Christ and witnessed a multitude of angels appearing to an unlikely group of shepherds and leading them to the obscure stable where Jesus was born. Today we pick up these miraculous events 8 days after the birth of Jesus, as his parents took him to be circumcised and officially called him, "Jesus," for the first time...the name Mary had been given by the angel before Jesus was even conceived.

II. THE OBEDIENCE OF JOSEPH AND MARY (vs. 21-24)

Let's begin by reading verses 21 through 24, of Luke chapter 2:

21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED

HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS."

As we consider these first 4 verses, one thing immediately stands out to me and you probably noticed it as well. Mary and Joseph were walking in full obedience to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant the Lord had made with the Jewish people through Moses at the mountain of the Lord.

As you may know, the Mosaic Covenant was an agreement the Lord made with the Jewish people stating that if they would follow his law and commandments, they would be experience great blessing. But if they didn't keep his law and commandments, they would be cursed and suffer disciplinary consequences. If you read the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, you'll get a full picture of this covenant the Lord made with the Jewish people for the purpose of setting them apart from the other nations as God's chosen people through whom God's character and power would be communicated to the world. This is not the covenant you and I are under today by the way. We're under the new covenant of grace that was ushered in by Jesus Christ and that we're watching unfold in our study of the gospels. Nonetheless, Mary and Joseph, and all other followers of God at this point in history were operating under the Mosaic Covenant.

An important clarification here is that salvation under the Mosaic covenant was still through faith (as it is today) and not by works. Like Abraham, people under the Mosaic Covenant were saved through faith in God and trust in his mercy made possible by the future work of Jesus Christ on the cross. But to be pleasing to God and experience his blessings people at this time needed to be keeping the specific laws, commandments and stipulations that had been given by God through Moses. These included the 10 commandments, but also all the other rules and rituals and feasts and temple practices outlined in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Through keeping these commandments they weren't earning their salvation, but were instead living life God's way as his holy people. And what we see here in verses 21 through 24 of Luke chapter 2, is that Mary and Joseph were faithfully keeping the terms of the covenant, looking to God and walking in his ways.

This does not mean that Joseph and Mary were sinless, because Scripture tells us that no one is, and keeping a list of rules does not make a person sinless. However, it does mean that Joseph and Mary were trusting in God and walking in obedience to his commands and regulations. Consider the following facts: Circumcision on the 8th day was a rule found in the Law. Thirty-three additional days of purification for a woman after having a son was a requirement of the Law. Bringing the firstborn male son to the temple to be presented to the Lord as holy to him was a direct command from the Law. Offering a sacrifice for the child was required as well, and one acceptable offering was a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. And interestingly, knowing that Mary offered turtle doves or pigeons tells us that she and Joseph were poor, because, as outlined in Leviticus 12:8, turtle doves or pigeons were only allowed as an offering if a woman couldn't afford a lamb. But what is definitely clear in all of this is that Mary and Joseph knew the terms of the Mosaic Covenant and were following it fully in the birth of their Son. And as they walked in his ways, God was bringing great blessing to them as promised.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF SIMEON (vs. 25-35)

So as Joseph and Mary arrived at the temple to present Jesus as holy to the Lord and offer a sacrifice for him, God was on the move in the life of another obedient person who was about to cross paths with Joseph and Mary. Let me introduce to you a very special God-follower named Simeon as we read verses 25 through 33 of Luke chapter 2:

25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 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. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel."

33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed — 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul — to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

A. Simeon's character and focus (v. 25)

As Luke introduces this special man named Simeon, he provides us with some great insights into Simeon's character and what he was looking for in life. We learn 3 defining truths about Simeon. First of all, he was righteous and devout. As we already discussed in relation to Joseph and Mary, this does not mean that he was sinless, but rather that he was following God's rules and commandments as outlined in the Mosaic Covenant. And being devout, he was taking God seriously and devoting his life and energies to him.

Secondly, Simeon knew what he was looking for in life and we're told by Luke that what he was looking for was the consolation of Israel. The Greek word translated, "consolation," means comfort, solace, or that which affords comfort or refreshment; and significantly, Jewish rabbis call the Messiah, the consoler, or the comforter (*Blue Letter Bible*). What Simeon was looking for in life was God's promised Messiah, the One who would comfort and console the Jewish people after their many years of punishment and discipline for their rebellion against God. Numerous prophets had spoken of the future coming of this Comforter and Simeon's eyes and energies were fixed on looking for and hoping for his arrival.

Simeon was looking for that day spoken of in Isaiah 40, verses 1 to 3:

"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. 2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins." 3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

Simeon's hope and energies and time were focused on God and looking for that Savior and Comforter he had promised to send.

And the third thing we learn about Simeon is that the Holy Spirit was upon him. As Simeon fixed his eyes and energies on seeking God and his salvation, God filled him up with his presence through his Holy Spirit and began doing powerful things within him and through him. As Simeon earnestly sought God and desired him above all, God allowed himself to be found and what Simeon found was everything he had hoped for and so much more.

B. The active communication of God to those who seek him and live in his presence (v.26-27)

As we look at verses 26 and 27, we discover 3 things God was doing within a man who was earnestly seeking him and living in his presence. First, the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon the amazing truth and promise that before he died he would see the promised Messiah with his very own eyes. What a precious gift from God that must have been for Simeon! What an encouragement it must have been to persist in his active looking for the consolation of Israel and the coming of the Comforter. Secondly, the Holy Spirit directed Simeon's steps and ensured that he would be at the right place at the right time to cross paths with the baby Messiah as he was about to be presented in the temple. And thirdly, when Simeon did cross paths with Joseph and Mary, the Holy Spirit told Simeon in some unmistakable way that the baby they were holding was the One.

To me, what God was doing here in Simeon is an encouragement that when we're in relationship with God through Jesus Christ and earnestly looking to live in his presence and walk in his purposes...he will let us find him and he'll actively communicate with us, guide us, show us who he is and what he's doing, and empower us to fulfill his purposes. Of course what the Holy Spirit did within Simeon here was very unique, powerful and of special significance because it was part of God's plan to prepare the way for the long promised Savior. So we shouldn't expect these types of miraculous signs and workings of the Holy Spirit to be an everyday part of our lives. But we can be sure that when we earnestly seek God and his purposes in our lives, we will find what we're looking for and so much more!

C. Simeon's bold and confident response to the Spirit's guidance (vs. 27-32)

Well, God's presence and guidance within Simeon was so powerful and clear that when Simeon saw the baby and heard from the Spirit that he was the One, he didn't hesitate or second-guess, but instead boldly took the baby in his arms, blessed God and started having a conversation with God out loud in front of the parents and whoever else was there. Simeon blessed God and thanked him for fulfilling his promise of allowing him to see the Messiah with his very own eyes. He also proclaimed that the salvation God was providing was centered around this tiny baby and was coming in fulfillment of specific prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures. Simeon said:

29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel."

In what Simeon said here, notice first how he describes himself and what it tells us about where he's finding his identity in life. He sums up who he is in two words: "Your bond-servant." Simeon is fully surrendered to the Lord and his purposes and he's best described as the Lord's bond-servant.

What about you? Is that how you think of yourself when you boil down to who you are and what you're looking for in life? Do you see yourself as the Lord's bond-servant in everything you do? Survey the Bible sometime and see how many of the greats identify themselves or are identified by others as the Lord's servant or bond-servant. It's the path to greatness in the kingdom of God!

D. A proclamation about the salvation Jesus Christ was bringing (vs. 30-32)

Well, as Simeon prays out loud to God in front of Joseph and Mary, he tells them some significant truths about the salvation God was bringing through their Son. Simeon proclaims that God's salvation coming through this tiny baby is going to be for more than just the nation of Israel. He says that the Lord has prepared this salvation through Jesus in the presence of ALL peoples and it will be a light of

revelation to the Gentiles, the term used to describe all other people outside the nation of Israel.

And Simeon is not just coming up with something new here that God hadn't previously revealed to Israel, though it often seems they had forgotten or not noticed it. Even in the covenant God made with Abraham, he had promised that through Abraham and his descendants ALL people would be blessed. But Simeon here seems to be specifically referring to a couple of different prophecies from the book of Isaiah. The first is probably quite familiar to most of you because there's a well-known hymn that's based off of it. The prophecy is found in Isaiah chapter 52, just prior to the detailed description in Isaiah 53 of the Suffering Servant, the Christ, who was to come. This is what it says:

7 How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" 8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, They shout joyfully together; For they will see with their own eyes When the Lord restores Zion. 9 Break forth, shout joyfully together, You waste places of Jerusalem; For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The Lord has bared His holy arm In the sight of all the nations, That all the ends of the earth may see The salvation of our God.

This is good news of future comfort and salvation that would be shown clearly to all nations, not just the nation of Israel. ***10 The Lord has bared His holy arm In the sight of all the nations, That all the ends of the earth may see The salvation of our God.*** Clearly the Lord wasn't planning to keep his salvation a secret. The good news of peace, happiness and salvation was going to be revealed clearly to people from all nations. The Lord prepared it in the presence of all peoples!

The second passage from Isaiah that Simeon is referring to here is found in Isaiah 42, verses 6 and 7. Speaking of the Lord's chosen, coming servant, the Lord says this about him and the salvation he would bring:

6 "I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out

prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

This coming servant of the Lord, whom Simeon is now identifying as this tiny baby, Jesus, would be a light to the nations...and not just a light showing them God's salvation, but not allowing them to take part in it... but rather a Light that would open their blind eyes and free them from dungeons and prisons! So powerful and effective would this Light be, in fact, that Simeon also proclaims that He will be the glory of God's people Israel. The nations would be blessed beyond belief by the salvation that would come through this tiny Jewish boy Simeon was now holding in his very arms!

Simeon's heart was full at the realization of who this baby was and how faithful God had been to allow him to see with his very own eyes this Light, the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, the Lord's perfect salvation. Simeon had found what he was looking for, and his heart was full!

E. Amazement and a prophetic word (vs. 33-35)

Now as Simeon finished his out-loud blessing of God and proclamation about the salvation Jesus was bringing, Joseph and Mary were amazed at what they heard. God was continuing to confirm to them and expand upon how significant this special Child was, and they were once again in awe at the amazing things God was doing. Simeon then blessed Joseph and Mary and made this sobering prophecy to Mary:

"Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed — 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul — to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Hints of what the future of Jesus' life and ministry would hold were shared with Mary in this prophecy. There would be turmoil and opposition on the road ahead and his acceptance as the promised Messiah would not be universal in the nation of Israel. Some would fall and some would rise and there would be serious opposition to Jesus. This opposition and what it would eventually lead to for Jesus (the cross) would be like a sword piercing Mary's soul. Mary would

experience intense inner pain through seeing what her son, who was also the Son of God, would have to endure.

We also get the idea that those who will rise up to oppose Jesus will be revealed for who they are through their actions. Jesus was appointed for a sign to be opposed so that thoughts from many hearts would be revealed. Looking to the future, we think of the Pharisees who seemed so religious and spiritual on the outside, but who Jesus would describe as white-washed graves...looking bright and clean on the outside, but full of death and darkness on the inside. Their jealousy and hatred of Jesus would eventually lead them to murder him, exposing the darkness of their hearts they'd tried to cover up with religion. God was gracious to reveal to Mary that there were hard times ahead and that Jesus' acceptance as Messiah wouldn't be as easy as it seemed like it would be at this point.

IV. THE TESTIMONY OF ANNA (vs. 36-38)

And this brings us to verses 36 through 38 of Luke chapter 2, where we're introduced to another godly person who knew what she was looking for in life. Let me introduce you to a special lady named Anna:

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

A. Anna's character and focus (vs. 36-37)

Anna was a prophetess. She was a woman to whom and through whom God was actively communicating. She'd had some challenges in life, it seems, since her husband had long ago died after only 7 years of marriage. She was now 84 years old and had never remarried. Instead she seems to have taken up residence in the temple and was continually serving and seeking the Lord with fastings and prayers. Anna knew what she was looking for in life and God had allowed himself

to be found by her. She was in full pursuit of God and concerned only with his purposes, and God was actively communicating with her and guiding her steps.

B. God's communication with Anna and her response (v. 38)

We see God's direction of Anna and his communication with her as he directs her to cross paths at just the right time with Mary and Joseph and tells her that the baby they're holding is the One. In response to what God tells here she just comes right up to Joseph and Mary and confidently begins thanking God for Jesus. Don't you think Mary and Joseph by now must have been wondering, "What's God going to do next?!"

Well, Anna doesn't just stop with thanking God for Jesus, she also continues to tell many others about him. But notice that she doesn't tell everybody. Instead, the people she tells about Jesus are those who are looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. The Lord used Anna to communicate the good news to others who were seeking him and looking for his salvation. Do you think it might be important to be seeking and looking for the Lord in day-to-day life?

V. THE CONTINUING STORY OF JESUS (vs. 39-40)

Well, this brings us to our final 2 verses of the day, verses 39 and 40, which give us a short, concise summary of what happened with Joseph, Mary and Jesus from here:

39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Luke again points out that Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the terms of the Mosaic Covenant by performing everything according to the Law of the Lord. Then we're told that they returned to their hometown of Nazareth where Jesus continued to grow physically and in wisdom and Luke reports that the grace of God was upon him.

VI. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So as we wrap up our study today and briefly consider what God would have us take away from this account of Jesus' presentation in the temple at 40 days old, I'd like to first of all give this summary of the essential truths God is communicating to us through this passage:

Jesus Christ is the salvation provided by God for all peoples and God used his obedient followers who were trusting him, seeking him and looking for his salvation, to confirm his identity, provide insight about the salvation he would bring, and tell others about him.

Out of this summary statement, I see several applications for us today:

- 1) Mary and Joseph were walking in full obedience to God and fulfilling the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. They weren't sinless (as none of us are), but they were seeking God and putting his Word into practice. As they lived life this way, God used others who were seeking him and walking in obedience to miraculously confirm that Jesus truly is the Lord's promised Messiah and to provide insight about the salvation he would bring and make available to all peoples. While these miraculous signs confirming the arrival of the Savior were unique and not something we should expect to be exactly duplicated in our lives, what this does tell me is that our God communicates with, guides, and empowers those of his children who are earnestly seeking him, relying on him and putting his Word into practice. When what we're looking for earnestly in life is him...when we desire him above all and believe his Word...when we devote our time, energy and resources to finding him, living life with him, and telling others about him...he lets us find him and invites us to enjoy him and participate in what he's doing in the world by the power of his Spirit.
- 2) A clear theme in Scripture that's once again confirmed here in this passage is that God always keeps his promises and coordinates all the details of human existence to accomplish his purposes. ***The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it*** (Psalm 24:1). God is intimately involved in our day-to-day existence, we each owe our very existence and our every breath to him, and before the foundation of the

world he planned and formulated a rescue plan for human beings who would rebel against him to be restored to relationship with him. We've seen today again his commitment and power to bring that rescue plan to fruition in his perfect timing and to perfectly fulfill all the prophecies and promises he had previously made about it.

What does that mean for you today? It means that God is in control and you can completely trust him and believe the promises he's made to you. He's the only one in fact that you can fully trust and who will always keep the promises he's made. Know and meditate on his Word and the promises found there and build your life on them. There's no better foundation!

- 3) And finally, the most important point and truth found in the passage we've studied together today is this: The perfect salvation God makes available to all peoples...the salvation that can open blind eyes and set us free from the prison of our sin...that can restore us to relationship with our Creator and fill our lives with hope, joy, love, strength and peace...this salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, the Light of the World. He is what you're looking for, whether you know it or not. In all the empty and unsatisfying things you devote yourself to and pursue in life, what your soul is really looking for and longing for is found in and through Jesus.

Let's not make the mistake made by the writer of the lyrics for that U2 song I shared with you at the beginning of our message. As the song continues, he says this:

*I believe in the Kingdom Come
Then all the colours will bleed into one
Bleed into one.
But yes, I'm still running.*

*You broke the bonds
And you loosed the chains
Carried the cross of my shame
Oh my shame, you know I believe it.*

*But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.*

You get the idea that he's heard about Jesus Christ and maybe even believed that he really is the Savior, the Light to the nations that can open blind eyes and break the chains of prison, but he's passed on by and is continuing to search for something that I'll boldly tell you today can never be found in any other place.

Let's first of all be absolutely sure that we've been saved by Jesus through repenting of our sin, believing that he died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead, and inviting him to be our personal Savior and Lord. But for most of us who've already done that and have truly come to new life in him, let's be pursuers of him. Is he the focus of everything you're doing and pursuing in life right now, or is he more like a side note? Let's find what we're looking for in him as he becomes the full focus of our time, energy and resources. Let's be like Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna...earnestly looking for God and seeking him in everything we do. He will let us find what we're looking for as we earnestly pursue him and his purposes.

Let's close out our time together today by remembering through Communion what Jesus did for us on the cross to bring us from death to life and restore us to an abundant life filled relationship with our Creator.