

The Testimony of a Senior Saint, Part 2

Luke 2:36-38

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, 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."

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. 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." 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.

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. Anna hoped in God.

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. "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 seen the character of this senior saint. Let's consider a final point, 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.

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 is an indication of a strong, strong faith. Anna modeled what taught us that we ought always to pray and not lose heart.

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. 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. 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 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.

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?

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.

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. Listen, senior saints, we, we thank God for you. 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.