

To See Salvation

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Date: 24 December 2017

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Merry Christmas. Wow, that's good. That's good. For those of you who don't know me, I'm one of the pastors here. My name's Chris. It's just exciting to just have all of you here. If you've got kids with you and they're a little bit rowdy, again, we have the room through there. If you are an adult and you're a little bit rowdy, you can also go through there afterwards as well. It's Christmas time. I found the one red thing in my wardrobe, which is a tie. I hope you like it. I don't normally wear a tie, but today is, yes, thank you.

Thank you. I have a friend called Dorothy. She's 94 years old. She lived through the Second World War.

She, just before the World War started, she got engaged to her fiancé, but he then just got called up to fly bombers over France and Germany. One day, my friend's fiancé didn't return from one of his flights. He got shot down over France. Dorothy waited. She waited. There was no sign, no sound of anything.

One week, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, six weeks, seven weeks, nothing. And you know when you're waiting for something, you have no idea what's happening. Isn't that just like the worst thing?

Just the worst thing. All she had was to hold on to was some hope and a faith in God. At the eighth week, she received a telegram. They had telegrams in those days. It had one word on it, safe, safe. That one word, that one telegram changed her whole world, changed the way she was thinking about life. Because what she didn't know during that time while she was waiting, that he'd actually parachuted out of the plane. He'd been hidden by French resistance fighters, and they'd smuggled him all the way back into the UK, and it had taken two months for that to happen. But she didn't know that until she received that word, safe. As we think about the Christmas story today, we've been looking at a few different characters. We've looked at Mary. We've looked at Elizabeth. And now we're going to look at this guy called Simeon today. Because the Christmas story is actually all about waiting.

[2 : 42] It's all about waiting. And this guy, Simeon, you know, he's got a long beard because he's been waiting a long time. Okay? Eric has also been waiting a long time, if you see the size of his beard.

But he's a good Jew. And he's been coming year after year to the temple. And he's been waiting, not maybe waiting for what you're waiting for, but waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And when you hear the word consolation, it means that you've been going, if you need consolation, it means you've been going through difficulty, trial, struggle, challenge. You need someone to comfort you. And this people, Israel, had been living in a state of survival, not thriving. They had constant pressure from foreign bosses, foreign leaders who'd imposed their will on the people, and he didn't care about them. Israel was surviving, not thriving. And I heard this poem by a guy called Merwin, W.S. Merwin, that goes like this. It says, on the door, it says what to do to survive. But we were not born to survive, only to live. We were not born to survive, only to live. And Simeon was looking forward to the time when his people would be able to live. They'd be able to thrive. He was looking for what the Bible word is, salvation. And Simeon actually has many similarities to us, because though this is a couple of thousand years ago, we're still the same, because many of us are waiting for things. Who here is waiting for anything in your life? Okay, a few of you. Okay, some of you, those of you who didn't put your hand up are probably in denial. Okay. But you know, we're waiting, we're waiting for change. We're waiting for Christmas, waiting for Christmas to be over. We're waiting, some of, if you've got kids, you know, you're waiting, you're waiting for a break. Maybe you're waiting for your kids to start sleeping. Maybe you're waiting for your kids to leave home. Maybe you're waiting for your spouse to forgive you. Maybe you're waiting for a break.

Maybe you're waiting, I don't know what you're waiting for, but you're waiting for something. And waiting can get difficult for us. Because I don't know about you, but we can get stressed while we're waiting. Anyone get stressed while you're waiting for stuff?

[5 : 10] Okay, someone's hand shot right out there. Okay? Because, you know, you get sick and you don't know what it is. And you go to the doctor and they say, oh, we're not sure what it is. And if you knew what was wrong with you, even if they said you're going to die tomorrow, that would be better than just not knowing.

Because we struggle with waiting, with uncertainty. Because ultimately, when we're waiting for stuff, it shows we're not in control of life. We're not in control of life.

And the salvation that we are looking for is ultimately found outside of ourselves. It's found out not from inside.

Because we stress and we feel restless when our life is out of control, is out of our hands. And I talk to many people here in Hong Kong. And we're all trying to stay in control of our lives, just trying to get stuff done.

And we just say, I'm just surviving. There's so much pressure. There's so much expectations. We're trying to cram all this stuff into our lives every day in case we miss out on stuff.

[6 : 17] And we're often waiting anxiously for the thing that's going to happen that's going to really help our lives to start working, for us to live. But the Bible says, and this story says, you weren't made to survive.

You were made to live. And Simeon, he's been waiting restlessly for all this time. And then one day, he goes into the temple.

Like every other day, he'd seen hundreds of people coming through with their babies, going to dedicate them in the temple. He'd seen all these different things happening. But then this day, he sees something different.

He sees one poor couple from an outlying area which no one cared about. It was like the Shem Shopo of Israel. It was Galilee.

They came from there. And the Holy Spirit says to him, that couple's, you need to go to them. And so Simeon walks up to this couple.

[7 : 18] And somehow, he manages to persuade Mary to give his baby to this guy. I mean, it must have been a nice grandfather kind of figure for him to actually allow him to hold Jesus.

And in one moment, his world changes. His one moment, because he says then, from a time of waiting, he says, now I can die in peace.

I have peace now. You can dismiss your servant in peace, he says, because my eyes have seen your salvation. If you could just put it on the slide.

My eyes have seen your salvation. Okay? Simeon, he hasn't seen the end of the story. He hasn't seen everything work out for him. He hasn't seen the whole of all that he's been waiting for come to pass.

But he can right now say, I have peace. I can be content. Even if I die. Even if I achieve nothing else in this life. I have peace. That's a pretty strong statement.

[8 : 23] I don't know in your waiting. Can you say, I can have contentment right now, even while I'm waiting? Because do you notice, he says, my eyes have seen your salvation.

He doesn't say, my eyes have seen my salvation. Because we all have our own ideas of what salvation, what things we need to make our lives thrive are.

We all have our own ideas. You know, we just say, if I just get blank, then I'll be happy. Okay? Fill in the blank for yourself. If I just get that bonus, then I'll be happy.

If I just get that relationship, then I'll be happy. If I just get some peace and quiet, then I'll be happy. That's what our salvation, that we think will make our life thrive, is.

But the problem is, if you're waiting for that thing, and you get it, let's say you want a new bonus. So you get your new bonus, and then what happens? The next year, you're like, if I get a bigger bonus, then I'll be happy.

[9 : 36] Right? Or whatever it is you're waiting for, you just want the next thing. And then once you get it, you want the next thing. And then you're waiting for something else, and waiting for something else, and then waiting for something else. And again, you're surviving, not thriving.

And if you don't get what you're waiting for, then you're just miserable. Right? Complaining. But this passage says, in this stressful world where there's so much uncertainty in life, Simeon says, my

eyes have seen your salvation.

That's God's salvation. He's saying, God has given salvation, not necessarily what I think I need, but actually what God knows that I need.

Right now. Right in my life. And if he's God, and if there is a God, don't you think he knows what you need to thrive more than you do?

Don't you think he knows you better than you do? Don't you think he knows you better than you do?

Don't you think he knows you better than you do? And so when Simeon says, my eyes have seen your salvation, what does he see? What does he see?

[10:49] He sees Jesus. As a baby, but he sees Jesus in front of him. And Jesus is that telegram from God which says, safe to us today.

Regardless of whether you get everything you're waiting for or not, it says you're safe. Now just think about that. If Jesus is God's salvation for us today, if the story of Jesus is just a fairy tale, then I could just be talking about Santa up here and it would make actually no relevance at all to your life.

I might as well talk about the fairies and whatever because it's no relevance. But if Jesus is truly God's salvation to us, that means the God who created the whole universe, who is the source of everything that you really desire right now, who is in control of your past, your present, your future, everything that you're waiting for right now, He loves you and He has come down to you and me. And He's come to give Himself to us in this crazy city so that we might thrive in life today. You see, He offers Himself to you and me in relationship with us.

Because if He's actually in control and He actually loves you, and you're in relationship with Him, then you can have peace in your waiting because your life is not out of control because He's in control.

[12:35] Augustine, the great Christian thinker, he said once this, he said, You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in You.

Our heart is restless until it finds rest in You. I wonder if you have rest, peace, you're thriving today. Because Christmas is ultimately about this gift of Jesus who will grow up to die on a cross to bring us peace with God and peace with each other and peace even while you're waiting for whatever you're waiting for right now.

He's got you. He's got you. So do you see the offer of what He's giving? You see, it was Christmas. A number of years ago, I was in the UK.

My family were all around giving presents to each other. My aunt takes out a beautifully wrapped present, hands it to one of my relatives. My relative opens it and then says, Oh, I don't really want it. You can have it back. She's going, You're not supposed to say that, right? That's just offensive. I don't know if you do that.

[13:55] But I was shocked. And the reason I was shocked because I know my aunt has spent time and love and effort thinking about that present and then it was just kind of thrown back in the face.

And you know, normally we're not kind of quite that direct as my relative. But we think the same things, right? Sometimes someone gives you, you know, that pair of socks and you're looking at everybody else who's getting those beautiful, you know, the new iPhone over there and everything. And you're going, Thank you so much for this, but I really wish I had that. Right? But you don't tell them that. That's actually exactly the way we treat God most of the time.

Except God actually knows your heart and what we're thinking. You see, when God gives this gift of Jesus to us and says, This is what you need to thrive, a relationship with me, a relationship with Jesus.

And sometimes we say, Hey, thanks. I don't really want it. But often what we're saying is, Oh, thanks for Jesus at Christmas. But actually what I really want is I wish I had their life over there, not my life.

[15:08] I'm staying in Hong Kong and they're going skiing in Japan. It's not fair. But thank you, Jesus. We say things like, I want those kids, not my kids.

I want that job, not my job. Don't we? And we look at everything else that's around and we miss what God says your salvation is today.

That to really make you thrive. Which is that relationship with Jesus. And that's often why we're actually in restless survival mode in most of our Hong Kong lives.

Because we're continually chasing after things which are never going to truly find you peace. When we were made to rest in Jesus. That's the gift of Christmas.

And Jesus says, I am your salvation right today, 24th of December, 2017. Treasure me. Do you treasure a relationship with me?

[16:07] Pursue me with everything you have and what you will find is you will find life. You know, you only treasure a gift if you really know that you need it or you want it.

Right? I used to get socks every single Christmas. I hated getting socks. I never understood why anybody would ever consider giving anybody socks.

Because my mum bought those for me. Why did I need any more? And yet, when I got older, and I had holes in all of my socks, and I don't like shopping.

When somebody gave me a pair of socks, I was like, I have never been so happy to find a pair of socks. If you know your needs for Jesus, that you are restless, that you are in survival mode, you are just getting through, just getting by in life, surviving.

Whether you are a Christian or not, this Christmas, God says to you, I want you to pursue me.

Surrender the control of your life to me.

[17:29] Ask me for forgiveness for when you have actually been looking at everywhere else rather than me. You've grieved me by the way that you're just running after everything else, and you don't see, I want to give you myself this Christmas.

Do you want me? Do you want me? He says, if you pray this Christmas, take my life. 2018, I want to live for you.

I want you. I want to know you. More than I've ever known you before. Whether you give me everything that I'm waiting for, or whether you don't, you are what I need to thrive this year.

Because if God, Jesus himself is not enough for you, nothing else will ever be enough for you. If Jesus himself is not enough for you, then nothing else will ever be enough for you either.

So if you turn to him this Christmas, what you'll discover is this. If you're fresh again and again, whether you're a Christian or not, on the door it says what you need to do to survive.

[18:43] But you weren't born to survive, only to live. That's the offer of Jesus this Christmas to you. Let's pray. Father, I don't know where we're all up to in our lives.

Some of us are Christians who, we kind of know the Christmas story. We know Jesus. We do the, we see you as just a kind of good moral figure that we want to kind of get some good morals about. But we don't treasure you. I pray this Christmas we would see that it has cost you so much to give this gift of Jesus that we would not grieve you by treating that lightly.

I pray that you'd help us to see how beautiful you are, how much you love us, how much you desire a deepened relationship with us. Let us pursue you this year.

Lord, for those of us who don't know you, Lord, I pray that we would see all the things that we're chasing after, waiting for, longing for, that actually, in the light of you, those are never going to satisfy.

[19:59] They're never going to bring rest and peace as you offer. Help us to turn to you today. In Jesus' name. Amen.