

ANNA: Advanced in more ways than one
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
Luke 2:36-38
Loving Jesus Sermon Series
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We do not know how old Simeon was, but Luke says Anna “was advanced in years.” Our text says she was 84. Anna seems virtually destitute of the world’s goods, but her heart of worship made her rich in spirit. Anna might not have been on the cover of Cosmopolitan magazine, but she was truly a lovely woman. Hers was not external beauty—but the presence of God within her. Like Simeon, she saw the Messiah. She wasn’t wealthy, educated, cultured, famous, beautiful, or powerful in secular ways, but she was mighty in spirit and in power.

We meet some truly wonderful people in life. Some are wealthy; but often they are simple people with a singular focus. They do not need “stuff” to live a meaningful life. Americans have more stuff than at any time in the history of the world, but I doubt we are the happiest people ever. Wealth can have a significant downside. I’m reminded of Proverb 30:8-9 (NIV): “... *give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.*”

APPLICATION: Our readings this week look at stories of Jesus’ interaction with women. He paid attention to them—He did not overlook them. Who should you pay more attention to? Children? Seniors? Women? Men? Bosses? Employees? Rich? Poor? Someone from a different culture or race, or who speaks a different language? Be on the lookout for divine encounters that God has ordained for you this week.

Intro: This is the 2nd of a two-part series about two aged people who were able to love Jesus when Jesus was brought into the Temple for dedication by his parents. *SIMEON took him up in his arms and blessed God*
And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of (Fa-NOOL), of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ 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.

ANNA's **IDENTITY**:

a **prophetess** – There had been no prophet in Israel for hundreds of years, so it's noteworthy that the Lord had raised up two – Simeon this prophetess. Women have a place in ministry

a **daughter of Phaul, of the tribe of Asher** = one of the 10 lost tribes. Evidently some members of it survived and kept their genealogies.

advanced in years – 84 years old. We don't know Simeon's age, but it says *he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ* which sounds like he's elderly, too.

a **widow** = She was only married for 7 years when her husband died. If she was married at 17, she would've been a widow for 60 years.

her **ACTIVITY** v 38

lived at the temple – She never missed a meeting. She came to the temple every time the doors were open – and they never closed.

a **worshiper fasted prayed** (Asbury has a prayer ministry. We'd love for you to join it)

night and day Anna had a mission/purpose in life

³⁸ **And coming up at that very hour** – She was present. When we show up – She got to witness Simeon's blessing of the baby Jesus.

she began to give thanks to God – She didn't have any money, but she had something very important to give – she gave thanks. Praise. When we consider who God is and all He has done, it is hard to have a bad day. We forget to give thanks. Instead, we gravitate towards its opposite. Instead of giving thanks we grab grumbling. We lament, complain, it's not fair. Anna could have done that, too. Life had been unfair to her. Her husband died when she was young. She had lived in poverty ever since. But she made a choice – to be present. I looked up how often it say,

"The Lord is my...."

(Ex 15) Moses' song after deliverance from Egypt: *"The Lord is my **strength and song**, and he has become my **salvation**."*

(Ps18:1-3) *I love you, O Lord, my **strength**. The Lord is my **rock** and my **fortress** and my **deliverer**, my God, my **rock**, in whom I take **refuge**, my **shield**, and the horn of my **salvation**, my **stronghold**. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised.*

(Ps 23) *The Lord is my **shepherd**; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley*

of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

*(Ps 27:1; 4-5) The Lord is my **light and my salvation**; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.*

(Ps 28:7) The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped. My heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

(Lamentations 3:22-26) The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

*(Habakkuk 3:17-19) Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my **salvation**. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. "Lower your expectations – raise your commitment"*

*(Hebrews 13:5-6) Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my **helper**; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" and to **speak** of him to all - Witness*

*who were waiting for the **redemption** of Jerusalem. The Bible in 5 Words (graphic) leads to the purpose of the Bible = redemption.*

APPLICATION:

James 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

There's a role for the church to play.

Orphans & widows = the most vulnerable in that population.

Development Center will house a partner ministry = "Circle of Care." Helps with adoption and foster care. We don't have to wait until then, as this will just give them an office space, but Circle of Care is an outstanding ministry. (\$75,000 Restore Hope Sunday offering + \$30,000 = \$105,000)

Two people who have gone on to be with the Lord really fit the "Simeon/Anna" role at Asbury: John Westevelt was called "Grandpa John." A legend in Asbury Kid's Ministry. We need some folks who will interact with children like John. We will be recruiting for Kid's Ministry in May, but John found a purpose in his life by being present with children. He died this past October at the age of 92.

The "Anna" in our congregation = Esther Gene Morrison. Like Anna, she was advanced in years. She was 95 when she died. She was a force.

Esther Gene impacted many, including Melissa Phenicie. Melissa is not advanced in years or a widow, but in Feb. 2014 she came to see me about starting a new ministry called "Balcony Women." I've worked with Stand in the Gap with women transitioning out of prison and several of their administrative projects. I adore this ministry and all they do for women and children aging out of foster care.

They have added a new ministry for widows and have asked me to help launch it. This is a little out of my comfort zone. I am an educator by profession. I have taught 5th grade, 2nd grade, many children's bible studies, taught Sunday school, and Mother's Fellowship with Esther Gene.

Shae Hedrick (son Hayden got married yesterday) saw the need for a widow's fellowship for younger widows.

Balcony Women meets twice a month, as does the young widows support group. Andrea Stephens, our Pastor for Women has started two communities called "**Solo Sisters.**"

Jim Furman has just started a ministry for widowers. Has spoken to over half of the 78 widowers we have listed.

A role for widows/widowers to play.

Come – This elderly woman, Anna, showed up to worship and pray every day, year after year. Rain, cold, heat. Regardless of age, things happen when we show up. Some of us are homebound and we understand why folks aren't physically able to attend. But many folks have become lax. Erosion happens slowly and imperceptibly. We don't realize it until it washes away. A ship loosed from its mooring doesn't make a lot of noise. It just drifts away quietly. Muscles atrophy without calling attention to it. Use it or lose it. Must work at it. We cannot coast.

Be Involved Be like Simeon – Bless others. Be proactive = 1st habit. Do something. Don't go passive. Be in a group. Serve. Teach. **Pray**. Give thanks. **Invite** others. Be like Anna. Give a witness.

Information is available in the main foyer. Will connect with “Widow's Fellowship” or Widower's ministry.