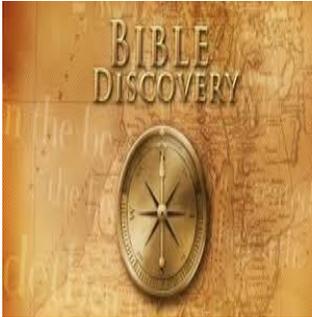


God Draws Near to His Church



Our story shows us an amazing feat of recognition. We've this very elderly man named Simeon who just happens to go into the temple of God in Jerusalem and see a couple there holding a baby. No doubt he'd seen a baby or two over the years, yet even though he'd never before laid eyes on this child, he recognises him instantly, goes over, takes him in his arms and praises God, saying, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." God led him to the right place at the right time giving him what he'd longed for – to see this particular baby, Jesus, God's chosen Saviour. From Simeon's response in meeting Jesus, this morning there are a series of questions for you to answer...

Do you know Jesus?

Do you recognise Him for who He really is?

Have you seen Your Salvation in the person of Jesus Christ?

Some years ago the Statler Brothers sang asking, "Would you recognize Jesus if you met him face to face or would you wonder if he's just someone you couldn't place." It's a question required to be asked of today's Church; it's what James was driving at when he implored us to, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you." It's a matter of raising our eyes and looking with fresh faith to see God in the midst of our lives. For Mary and Joseph, looking upward began with keeping the Law of God. As faithful Jews, Mary and Joseph, dedicate their firstborn son to God But through their meeting with Simeon, we see how God draws them closer into the fold of His plan for God's Son, Jesus.

The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon he'd encounter the promised Messiah before he died. We're told Mary and Joseph marvel at what they're told, and little wonder. This isn't what they expected. Jesus, the long-expected Messiah, was what the Jews expected would free them from Roman tyranny and this probably included Mary and Joseph. However, Jesus is a Messiah of God's making, not of our own will. Jesus came to free Mary and Joseph, the Jews, all of us from tyranny – the tyranny of sin, separation from our Heavenly Father.

Simeon speaks prophecy: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel..." [vs.34]. Simeon speaks of one person choosing Jesus while another rejects Him. It's an idea repeated often throughout the Gospel. The message reminds us of the demands of discipleship – it's saying, *unlike the Staples' button*, being a disciple of Jesus "ain't easy". In fact, because the suffering of Jesus is the mission for which He came through His work on the cross, it shouldn't come as a big surprise to us that we too suffer as we live lives following God – led His Word, following the example of His Son Jesus, empowered through the presence of His Spirit.

It all begins with what we see, what we're able to recognize – how our spiritual hearts are able to open our eyes to God's presence in our lives. ***Have we accepted or rejected Christ? God sees from our***

**Jesus is God's
Messiah, come to
set us free from
the tyranny of sin!**

heart! What does God see in your heart as He draws near to His Church? If we'd enjoy relationship with Him, having God draw near – we would do it through sincere worship. Chip Ingram from *Living on the Edge* has said, "Worship is the key..." explaining, "I wish I could transport you back in time to the early church so you could...a worship service, because I think the experience would change you forever. As you observed the believers devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to prayer, and to praising God [Acts 2:42–47], I think you would say, 'Wow, listen to how they speak to God! He seems so real to them! They seem to have such intimacy, such freedom, and such power!'"

Could it be that what fails to allow people of our world to see that God draws near, what causes our youth to "drop out" and our neighbours to look away is the anemic state of those who profess to worship the Living God and yet are satisfied to live mediocre lives without expectancy from God?

As I read this it got me thinking such intimacy, freedom and power known to those early believers is exactly what's lacking in the church today. Could it be that what fails to allow people of our world to see that God draws near, what causes our youth to "drop out" and our neighbours to look away is the anemic state of those who profess to worship the Living God and yet are satisfied to live mediocre lives without expectancy from God? Could it be that as you see how the Holy Spirit manifested the intimacy and awesomeness of God's presence to those early believers as they praised and worshiped Him you're lead to say (to borrow from yet another commercial), "I want that!"

Worship's a matter of the heart since it's the heart God looks at. Here I'm suggesting worship of our Lord is everything we do and therefore can't be ritualistic. It can't be just an external going through the motions. I've been there. Growing up in the Anglican tradition, I could recite the prayers, knew when to stand, sit or kneel but could do so with my mind far from God – *and I never heard about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ*. True worship comes from a heartfelt expression of love, adoration, fascination, and celebration for the One we know – that's right – worship is first **knowing** Jesus for only then can we praise Him. Jesus, this man who was born and laid in a borrowed manger, worshiped by humble shepherds, visited by magi bearing gifts, praised by an old priest named Simeon & prophesied of by an 84 year old lady named Anna.

Jesus! He, who lived, died and rose again around 2,000 years ago, is exactly as Simeon speaks of Him here – the One prepared by God for our salvation. God's Word then makes it very clear salvation is only for those who truly **KNOW** Jesus – those, if you like, who recognise Him and believe in Him as the Son of God come to earth – Emmanuel, God with us. Yet today there are more and more who neither recognize nor know Him. They've chosen to believe in whatever popular philosophy draws the attention of the masses. They're unfortunately not all outside of the church either. But God still draws near to His Church – the Church composed of those who love His Son, Jesus, have surrendered their hearts to Him, called Him Lord and given Him their lives.

While Mary and Joseph marvelled at the words Simeon shared, we have the benefit of Jesus' life lived on earth, the benefit of His sacrifice for our sins through His death on the cross, the joy of His resurrection and the triumph of His promise to return. But Simeon also warns that "*a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed*" meaning through Jesus Christ which is

central to the life of the church, central to the life of each and everyone's daily practice. What's revealed if we've Jesus at the center of our life? It has been said, and I wholehearted agree, this essential Christian practice is life changing, Kingdom enhancing and world changing. Isn't that where God calls His church to be? Therefore if as His Church, we profess Jesus is the center of life having risen from death and now seated at God's right hand, having been given the name above all names - as LORD, we must agree He not only rules over the universe, He is head of the Church. More importantly, in examining your heart, Jesus should be revealed at the center of *your* life through your attitude and choices. Putting Christ at the center of your lives as your personal Lord, being filled and led by His Spirit, is the key to living as a Christian.

What is more as God draws near to His Church, as we live lives anchored in Christ, we're to respond by serving Him. At Hebrews 9:14 we're reminded, "*Christ...cleansed our consciences from acts that lead to death (sin), so that we may serve the living God!*" I say this is a response, just like when you get your knees checked at the doctor – reflexive without having to work at or even think about it. We owe so much to our Saviour (the Apostle Paul tells us we're bond slaves, indebted to Christ) so we must naturally respond to Jesus. As we do it's life-changing. When we do this in our local churches and in our communities, it's world-changing because more and more people will hear of Him, see Him in us, and have the opportunity to respond.

I've been speaking of how God draws near to the church, and I've suggested we respond first through worship and secondly through service. May I suggest they're not separate entities but rather two sides of the same coin? When we make a great division the two, we're really saying we've set aside a fixed amount of time to praise the Lord, and likewise reserve portions of time for serving Him. It doesn't work that way. The reality is all we do must be worship **and** service. Many speak of a day in glory when we'll worship and serve the risen Lord. I believe we're called in this present age to do the same. That's the test we must use in measuring all we do through our personal devotion to Christ. It's wonderful to gather to sing songs of praise, to pray together, to study God's Word and to plan for service. But if we're truly to live lives centered in Christ from our heart, we must do so as naturally as we breathe. Have you thought of reserving time for a breath lately?

Unfortunately in our everyday lives, we readily worship & serve everything but God. Yet when we do respond, He draws close to those who choose to worship and serve Him. He desires it and He deserves it. In turn, God blesses those who worship & serve Him. If you choose not to do so, that's your choice, given you by God through free will, however, you must realize because you're designed for it, you'll worship and serve something else. That's why Luke uses the presentation of Jesus in the Temple as a way of pointing out to us that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and the One to whom our worship & service is due.

God's calling His church to grow in its understanding of Jesus as both Lord and Servant together – the One who brings salvation because He's our Lord God, & the One who's saved us from our sins because He chose to serve as our substitute Lamb – the sacrifice to bring about the salvation of all mankind through His death and resurrection.

If you'd come with me to the Jerusalem of long ago and see what Simeon found so long ago, find your salvation wrapped in the arms of a young mother coming to dedicate her child, discover God's wonderful blessing to us, there are two things I challenge you to do in response to all Jesus your Saviour has done for you.

**God's calling His
Church to grow in
understanding of
Jesus as Lord and
Saviour!**

2 Challenges for You...

1. Look up and take a glance at God on His throne seated in all His glory. Refocus your view of life and the world in which you live, through your vision of God. Take your eyes off your idols and refocus them on the Son of God - the most loving, the most powerful, the Holy One - JESUS. Focus on being the Church that accepts Jesus as the Messiah and seeing how He suffered & died for our sins ask the question "***is there any other way?***"
2. Having looked up and witnessed the Living God; **take an inward look**. Both Simeon and Anna waited patiently for the coming of the Messiah. Being a follower of Jesus means you too anticipated His coming into your heart, rejoiced with His coming and called Him Saviour. (*I pray that's your testimony this morning. If it's not, don't leave here without addressing this essential matter.*)

It's my hope when you look up seeing God for whom He really is, and when you look inward seeing yourself for who you really are, you'll start seeing things in your heart and in your life that really didn't bother you before and give it all to Jesus! You'll start to see opportunities for service. You'll respond to Simeon's challenge to be the Church that accepts rather than rejecting Christ. That begins through real worship, through really allowing God to draw near. As we prepare to enter a New Year – 2015 on the calendar, will you declare your stand for Jesus through worship and service? Will you make it your desire to be *obedient* to whatever God calls you to do, acknowledging in the same way as Jesus, "*Not my will, but your will be done*". He's worth it all—the best of your time, your ability, your thoughts, and your actions. And having seen in a new way the tremendous worth of God, having recognized His Son Jesus as God drawing near to His Church – to you, then in response, having surrendered your pain, your sorrow, your failures, your sin, you'll give Him the best of everything you've got as well.



You'll find God worthy of your trust and worthy of your praise. Contact us at 1-519-317-8659 or visit us at mtbrydgesbaptistchurch.ca and let us know if we can help you. I'd love to pray with you and talk some more about Jesus – He is so good!

Blessings,

Pastor Dave