

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

**Chapter 2- Luke 2:36-38**

**29- The Fasting Ministry of Anna**

---

May 10, 2009

## **Luke 2:36-38**

Fasting is almost a forgotten art in our day. Fewer believers fast today than at any point in the 2,000 year history of the Church. But fasting is a way of life to those who are saved. Jesus did not say "if" you fast- but He said "when" you fast. So followers of Jesus are supposed to fast.

Fasting involves being led by God to stop eating for a period of time so that you may devote that time to prayer and seeking God's Face. Most of the time- individual believers should be led by God to fast- but there are occasions when a fast is "called" or in other words- a person in authority calls a fast so that an entire city or church may bear their souls to God.

Now this sermon is not a comprehensive study on fasting- so there is much about fasting that I will not cover in today's message- but suffice it to say that those who are following after Jesus must include fasting as part of how they serve the Lord.

As I understand God's Word- there are seven reasons to fast. Seven purposes of fasting that every believer should come to- off and on all during his pilgrimage through this life. Those seven reasons are:

1. To Change the Course of History
2. Because the Bridegroom is Away
3. Because We Do Not Live by Bread Alone
4. For the Safety of the Little Ones
5. For the Father's Reward
6. For Water's That Do Not Fail
7. For the Return of Jesus

For example- we should fast because in **The Acts 13:1-4**- the Apostles fasted so that they could be used by God to change the course of History. They fasted so that their lives would not be wasted on the pleasures of sin, but so that their lives would count for the Glory of God. So we should emulate them and fast so that we will not waste our lives but so that we may be used by God

We should fast because in **Matthew 9:14-17**- Jesus said that while He was here on earth- His disciples did not fast but when the Bridegroom was away- then the disciples of Jesus would fast. Well, Jesus is away and we are disciples and so we should fast.

We should fast because in **Matthew 3:16- Matthew 4:4**- Jesus said that those who follow after Him should not live merely by what we eat- but by every Word that comes out of God's Mouth. So we should fast so that we are not disrupted from spending time in God's Word.

We should fast because in **Ezra 8:21-23** the people of God fasted for the protection of their little ones. And we live in a day when in the richest and the most affluent nation in the history of the world- we are killing our babies to the tune of almost 3,800 a day. That's 158 babies murdered every hour or 27 every minute or 1 baby hacked or burned to death every two seconds for a total of almost 50 million human beings ripped from their mother's womb since 1971.

To put this in perspective- we have killed over 8 times as many people as Adolf Hitler killed in the concentration camps during the first third of the 20th Century because of which this nation fought a war to stop.

And so that you may know why we should fast- these little ones are brutally hacked to pieces in their mother's womb with surgical hoes developed in Communist China, or they are burned to death with saline solution developed in Nazi Germany, and ever since January 20th 2009- by executive order of the President of the United States- Barack Obama- those who somehow manage to miraculously survive the abortion butcher and are somehow born alive- are refused medical treatment and are allowed to starve to death or to be thrown into a closet to die by exposure.

In addition- by executive order- President Obama has reauthorized what is probably the most brutal and inhuman and evil act that a nation has ever perpetrated upon its own citizens by allowing partial birth abortion to be carried out on demand.

And in addition to that- by the same executive order President Obama has authorized that US taxpayer money to fund abortions in other nations.

It is fascinating to me to hear the moral argument against enhanced interrogation techniques on brutal savages by the people who promote and allow the chopping up of little babies in their mother's womb or the piercing of the skull of completely viable human beings to kill them just seconds before they are born.

So God's people should fast to bring the horror of this wicked and bloody holocaust to the fore front of our hearts and minds and to cry out against the blood of almost 50 million souls.

We should fast because in **Matthew 6:16-18**- Jesus said that we should not fast in public so that we may get the praise of men, but we should wash our face and anoint our head and fast in secret so that we may receive the open reward of the Father.

We should fast because in **Isaiah 58:1-12**- God said that there are waters in the Father's possession that are infinitely superior to anything that we have down here on earth and that do not fail.

And we should fast because here in **Luke 2:36-38**- an old woman named Anna fasted so that Messiah would come and end her way of life.

The nourishment of the Revelation of the Word of God sustained Jesus during His 40 day fast, and here this old woman has fasted and prayed off and on for 84 years- earnestly awaiting the entrance of the Messiah so that He could fulfill the Old Covenant and bring forth the New.

Now keep in mind a truth that should astound you. This old woman never knew one day of any spiritual regimen except the Covenant that spoke about the Temple and the Levitical Priesthood and the blood of animals. Anna sacrificed an animal every single day of her life. Anna never knew anything about the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. Anna never saw Jesus ascend into Heaven to sit at the Right Hand of God the Father, she never read a single New Testament Epistle, she did not see the Church born on the day of Pentecost, did not hear Peter preach, and did not live through the Acts of the Apostles.

And yet in her heart and in her mind there was burning the understanding that Jerusalem- the City of David; the habitation of Peace was sinful and it needed to be redeemed. It needed to repent and

it needed to be purchased, and it needed to be forgiven; Anna knew that Jerusalem had sinned and needed to be saved.

In her limited revelation- Anna somehow got this. She understood this important fact that all her life was simply waiting for this one moment- to see the One Who bring the Redemption of Jerusalem- that her life was not lived so that she could enjoy the world and its pleasures- but she was focused, her eye was single, her face was like flint, as she looked forward to the time when Christ would come and put an end to everything she held dear and everything she loved.

You see Anna was one of the few people in all of Israel who believed. She was part of that holy remnant that really believed and she proved her belief in the way in which she lived her life. And in her mind- to love God was the same thing as loving the Law and loving the Temple worship and loving the Levitical priesthood and loving the animal sacrifices. So she loved the Old Covenant and faithfully followed after it- even though she also understood that while it was the Law of God- it could never save her soul. Anna understood about Grace and she understood that Salvation did not come as the result of keeping the Law- but that Salvation came through the Mercy of God toward undeserving sinners.

Somehow through all the many verses of the 39 Old Testament Books- the Holy Ghost had given Anna the understanding that even though she loved the Law- that the entire Old Covenant was only looking forward to the time when it would completely vanish- giving way to the superior Promises made by a superior High Priest Who offered a superior Sacrifice in the superior New Covenant, and God would fulfill the Promise that He had given to Jeremiah 600 years earlier in **Jeremiah 31:31-34:**

**31 Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,**

**32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.**

**33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**

**34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."**

So Anna was led to fast and pray for the coming King. The focus of her fast was so that Messiah would come- even though Anna understood that when Jesus came- He would end everything about her life. Her focus was so intense that she not only looked forward to the day when Messiah would come- but she fervently prayed for it with fasting.

And she was somewhere between 84 and 106 years old. Luke says here in verse 36 that she was of a "great age". And yet instead of thinking about retirement- this woman continued to cry out to God for the day when Messiah would come.

And that brings us to ourselves this morning. What is it that chiefly orders our lives? What is that thing that consumes our thoughts and our desires? What is it that we fear the most, that we pay close attention to, or that we watch earnestly for? Is it money or power or material possessions? Is it that we will succeed or that we will be prosperous or safe? What is that thing that occupies our prayers and our thoughts?

And let me suggest to you that we are not much different than Anna, and our day and our culture is not that much different from hers. Temple worship was thriving in the first Century. King Herod- although not really a Jew, had built a very lavish building that was called Herod's Temple- in which the Jews came to worship God.

And while they were taxed and oppressed by the occupying Roman Army- the average Jew was still free to worship the one true living God.

And as I told you last week- the majority of the Jews of Israel during this time was not looking for the Consolation of Israel, nor were they looking for the Redemption of Jerusalem. But they were looking for some of the very same things that we look for in our day- more freedom to do what they wanted, more money in which to do it, and less Governmental interference.

Most of the Jews were not saved, they didn't obey the Law, they didn't follow after God, they did not hunger and thirst for Righteousness, and they certainly did not want The Messiah to come and interrupt their future plans and dreams.

So let's get to know this little old woman named Anna. Luke tells us that she was the daughter of a man named Phanuel out of Asher. And that she was very advanced in years. In fact, she lived with a husband seven years after her marriage. Now most women back then got married very early on. For example- Mary would have been betrothed to Joseph between 13- 15 years of age. So we can assume that Anna was probably married when she was between 13 and 15- which was pretty traditional. And Luke tells us that she lived with her husband for seven years- so she was a widow at between 20 and 22 years old. Can you imagine a widow woman today who is 22 years old? And then Luke tells us in verse 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.**

Now some Bible interpretations and people read this to mean that Anna was a *total* of 84 years old while others say that she had only been a *widow* for 84 years. So if she was between 20 and 22 when she was widowed that would make her somewhere between 104-106 years old.

We don't know for sure which way to take this but even if she was as young as 84- that's still very old. So take your pick as to whether Anna was 84 or 106- but let's agree with Luke that Anna was of a "great age".

But what is even more amazing than her age is what Luke tells us at the end of verse 37:

**... never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.**

"She never left the temple." That's an emphatic statement.

Now, the only thing we can surmise from that, the reasonable thing to surmise from that, is that she lived there in the Temple. And what Jewish historians tell us is that near the last century BC- there were some apartments around the Temple grounds. And these apartments were normally dwelling places for the priests, around the outer court.

You might remember back when we were studying Zachariah and I told you that when a priest came to do his two weeks of service at the Temple- he needed a place to stay. So they had quite a number of these

apartments around the Temple. So it just may well have been that because she was a widow so many years, and because she was continually at the Temple that the powers that be decided that Anna was so devout that they would just provide a place for this widow woman in the Temple and she came and lived there and never left.

Now Luke tells us that she wasn't there idly- she wasn't wasting her life watching TV or reading Murder Mysteries or collecting sea shells or playing shuffle board- but this old woman was serving God night and day with fastings and prayers.

Now I would say this was a very focused lady, wouldn't you? And we can also say that she didn't have a very complicated life. She never went anywhere. She was very focused and completely devoted to the service and worship of God.

Now notice that Luke doesn't say anything about her teaching here- and that is why I tend to think that the "prophetess" idea had to do with this one moment in her life at the age of 84 or 106. And she was in the Temple all the time, serving through her prayers and fasting.

Fasting associated with prayer is a matter of self-denying focus. And I'm not going to get into fasting too deep this morning but I would encourage you to think about the fact that fasting in and of itself doesn't have any particular virtue. Just saying, "I won't eat," won't help you at all. And I know that there are all kinds of books out there about the health benefits of fasting and how it can cleanse your system and all- but that is all superfluous to me because the purpose of fasting is not to increase your health but to cry out to God in desperation.

When you are so consumed with a spiritual enterprise or prayer that you have no interest in eating- then fasting takes its appropriate place. And fasting can become a reproach to God if it is mixed with self-righteousness and arrogance.

People can take great pride in how much they fast which to me is the dumbest thing anybody could ever do. I can be perfectly prideful without fasting, dear friends. I don't need to go through the discipline of fasting to be self-righteous. I can be perfectly and sinfully self-righteous and still eat all day long.

So if you're going to fast- for goodness sake don't fast to prove how spiritual you are or to brag about how long you fast or how many times you have gone before God, and do not become "super spiritual" because

you have fasted and think that now you have hot line to heaven that others don't have and that through your fasting- God gives you special Revelation- because that is simply not true. All of those things just makes fasting to be nothing more than a tool for your flesh to puff itself up and is a total waste of time. And, yet, in spite of that danger- fasting is something that Christians should do.

So here is a very passionate and sincere woman. Here is a woman who for all these years is fasting and praying night and day. I mean, she's been doing this for a long time- many decades. So she is a fixture in the Temple. Since the time of her widowhood she's been there. And she's a part of this holy remnant. She's one who takes the Old Testament very seriously.

So what do you think she's praying about? She's praying for the Manacham, the consoler of Israel, the Messiah. She's praying for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Promise and the fulfillment of the Davidic Promise. She took the Old Testament very seriously. She believed all the Promises that filled the Old Testament. And she believed in the coming of the Messiah. She was earnestly looking for Him and she's there and she's praying and fasting for it to come to pass.

Now we need to know that the remnant knew they were small and they knew there was great apostasy in Judaism. They knew that the Pharisees were corrupt legalists. They knew that the Sadducees were corrupt liberals. They knew that it wasn't right to politicize the Old Testament like the Zealots did and think it all resolved in overthrowing the Roman yoke. They knew that. They knew what it was to know God. This woman knew God. She believed the Old Testament. And all the years of her life since she was widowed she apparently had no interest in marrying...no interest in marrying anybody else. I mean, you talk about spiritual devotion, this has got to be the most devout person on the pages of Scripture. Do you know anybody else that prayed and fasted day and night for decades?

So if you're looking to find an eye witness- this is a pretty incredible one. If anybody knew the Mind and the Heart of God- Anna did.

And it says in verse 38, "At that very moment she came up." What very moment? The very moment that Simeon was uttering his prophecy. So you have to try to picture this with me.



Here is Herod's massive Temple- there is this huge courtyard with thousands of people milling around, and already Simeon- who doesn't know Joseph and Mary, and Joseph and Mary don't know Simeon, and God by His Providence through the Power of His Spirit brings them together, and the whole story is told from Joseph and Mary to Simeon, the Holy Spirit confirms it, and Simeon comes in and grabs the baby Jesus out of Mary's arms and launches in to this great testimony as to the identity of the Baby, and at that very moment the Spirit of God Providentially and powerfully moves this old lady who's there all the time into the presence of this little couple and the Baby and Simeon.

And again I am struck with Luke's typical understated way of saying this. It simply says- "she came up and began giving thanks to God."

Well, there must have been something between "she came up" and "began giving thanks," like they told her who this was, right? Luke assumes that you would know that, certainly. Simeon surely knew her. Simeon was a righteous and devout man looking for the Consolation of Israel. So Simeon was a temple-goer. And anybody who had been in the Temple over the last 84-106 years would have run across this woman sooner or later because Anna had been there for decades. And Simeon may have seen her and said, "*Anna...Anna...Anna, come...come.*"

Then as she heard Simeon's prophecy and saw the baby Jesus and saw the expression on Joseph and Mary's face- it all unfolded to her and all that she had been praying and fasting for these long decades suddenly burst on her mind and she began giving thanks to God.

All those many, many years of petition turn now to praise. And her praise is added to the praise of Zacharias and the praise of Elizabeth and the praise of Mary and Joseph and the praise of the angels and the praise of the shepherds and the praise of Simeon and she's filled with praise and thanks to God. So Anna began giving thanks to God.

And you can only imagine after all these many decades of having only one focus in life- God and His glory- praying and fasting for the Salvation of Israel- how she must have felt now that she sees it come to pass.

And it says it at the end of verse 38, that she was a part of the people looking for the Redemption of Jerusalem. There wasn't going to be any Redemption in Jerusalem until the Redeemer came. She had

been praying and fasting all these years for the Messiah to come and bring the promised redemption and fulfill the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants.

And so now she *becomes* the prophetess and Luke tells us- "She continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." So from this moment on- this little old woman- who had spent all her years talking to God started talking to everybody else. God had answered her prayer and this old woman had to tell somebody.

The Messiah had come and Anna knew who to tell- believe me, she knew who would be interested and who would not be interested. She knew the remnant because they all knew each other. They knew who the justified and sanctified believers were. So Anna continues to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Everybody anticipating Salvation, everybody anticipating that the promises of the prophets would be fulfilled, that the promises to Abraham and Moses and David would be fulfilled, she knew Simeon, surely, one of the godly remnant, she knew...she may even have known Zacharias and Elizabeth, that's speculation but possible, and now she has seen the Messiah.

God's timing is so amazing, so thrilling and so incredible. Her testimony, crystal clear, no questions. Not a moment experience that she began to doubt, but she continued to speak of Him to all those looking for the redemption of Jerusalem, the remnant.

And so Luke gives us three witnesses to indicate that this indeed is the Christ, the Son of God, the Son of the Most High, Son of David, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world...parents, old Simeon and Anna. There is a transition in verse 39, "And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own city of Nazareth."

Now there is one final note about the eyewitnesses. In **Luke 2:40**- there's a far *greater* testimony than the testimony of Joseph and Mary or Simeon or Anna. **Luke 2:40** says:

**The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.**

And the word "grace" here means: *loving favor*. So Luke is telling us that the loving favor of God was on Jesus. Luke is not teaching here that Jesus needed Grace in the same way that Mary or we need Grace. No, Mary needed Grace for the same reason that we need Grace- because we are sinners who are guilty of breaking God's Law daily.

But Jesus was perfectly sinless and did not need Mercy or Grace in the same way that we do. So even though this is the very same English word- the *meaning* of this word is different from the way in which Grace is normally used.

So because Luke tells us that God's loving favor was on Jesus- Luke is telling us that God Himself is the fourth eye witness as to the credibility of all that Luke has told us so far.

So the greatest testimony that will ever be given to the identity of Jesus Christ comes not from Joseph and Mary, nor from Simeon and Anna. It doesn't come from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John or Paul or Peter or James or Jude or the writer of **Hebrews**. No, the greatest testimony ever given to the identity of Jesus Christ in all His glorious perfection comes from the Father Himself- Whose loving favor is on Jesus, and Who said of Jesus at His baptism, "**This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.**" That is the *greatest* testimony to who is this child. And that testimony will unfold as the story goes on.

So we have seen the four witnesses that Luke gives us to lend credibility to all of the fantastic claims that he has made so far about Jesus in this Story of Salvation:

1. The Parents of Jesus- Mary and Joseph
2. Simeon
3. Anna
4. God the Father

So now we know that what Luke was testified about to Theophilus and to us about Jesus is true because Luke has given us corroborating eye witness accounts from four very reliable and four very credible witnesses.

But now before we move on to other things- I want to return back to Anna for just a moment because we don't need to rush away from her just yet.

Just a few minutes ago- I gave you seven Biblical reasons why we should fast. And one of those reasons to fast was what Anna was doing here. She was fasting for the coming King. And I tell you today that we should fast- not for the first coming of Jesus- but for His Return.

And I don't believe that many people today really believe that Jesus is coming back anytime soon. And the reason I say that is because there would be no way that they could live the way they live and talk the way they talk and do what they are doing if they believed that Jesus could burst the clouds and return at any moment. So how they live their lives betrays what they really believe.

I think that we- like Anna- live around a people who for the most part are lost, unsaved, backslidden lukewarm, or for the most part simply unconcerned about God or the things of God and especially unconcerned about the return of Jesus.

There are just too many things that rob us of being single minded today. Too many voices calling to us, too many activities that we can engage in, too much money to make, too many opportunities to "be all we can be" to set aside time to spend in fasting and prayer.

And this lack of attention paid to the return of Jesus has infected us into a very cold and shallow life that is not easily moved with compassion for God. We tend to think today more about the here and now than we do about the then and later. We tend to be more concerned about making ourselves more comfortable in this world of sin than we do about looking for a city whose Builder and Maker is God. We tend to be more earthly minded and less heavenly minded, and, therefore, our priorities and our vision and our scope and our purpose are all driven by the temporary things of life that are all passing away.

Now keep in mind that Anna was tempted about these things too. So in order to stay focused- she went aside to fast and pray to escape the trap of the pride of life and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things that come into our hearts and choke the Word until the Word of God becomes unfruitful in our lives. Fasting allowed her to escape that. And fasting will allow us to escape it, too.

So we need to fast. And we need to fast as a group- together- so we can share in the glory of waiting for the Messiah like Anna did, and so that our eyes can look up and not toward this earth. And I think that we will begin to see that fasting compliments both the Lord's Prayer and the Communion Table.

For example- in **Matthew 6** Jesus connects fasting with the, what we call, "The Lord's Prayer". The two preeminent petitions of the Lord's Prayer are:

1. Lord, let your name be hallowed
2. Lord, let your kingdom come.

So Christian fasting is a fasting not just for the *immediate* breakthroughs of faith or healing or righteousness, but also for the *ultimate* breakthrough— of the King's return in Glory- which is why Jesus told us to pray- "*Thy Kingdome Come!*" Or as the early Church prayed it: "Maranatha!" = "Our Lord, come!" Please turn with me to **Philippians 4:5**:

**5 Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near.**

**6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

**7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

So what Paul is teaching here is that in the midst of world-wide calamity and great persecution and economic disasters and wars and recessions- let your quiet and gentle spirit that is anxious for nothing be known to all men. Well, how in the world can we do that? How can we be calm when our nation is being overrun with wickedness? How can I be calm when work is scarce and we are in a recession? The last part of verse 5 gives us the answer:

**The Lord is near.**

We are comforted in terrible times and we can escape the tyranny of anxiousness because we know that God is absolutely Sovereign and that He is soon to come back. And we have developed a future focus of life that is the result of thinking and praying and fasting about the *return* of Jesus Christ rather than only on what is happening now. This is what Anna did and this is what we should do. Fasting is a *physical expression of heart hunger for the second coming of Jesus*.

And I also wonder if the Lord means for fasting to be a counterpart to the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." And by *eating* we remember that Jesus *has* come and died for our sins. So by not eating—by fasting—we say: *"Yes, we remember the Lord's Death and what it took to purchase our Salvation- but the Bridegroom is not here. He was here, and He loved us to the uttermost. And we can eat and even celebrate with feasting because He has come. But this we also know: Jesus is not here now as He once was. And His absence is painful to us- so we fast that we might be reunited with our Bridegroom."*

The sin and misery of this world is painful, dear friends. And the people of Christ are weak and despised—like sheep in the midst of wolves (**Matthew 10:16**). And so we long for Jesus to come again and take up His throne and reign in our midst and vindicate His people and His Truth and His Glory.

So the feasting of the Lord's Supper expresses what *has* already happened, and our fasting expresses what has not yet happened and what we long to see. So in that way- not eating through fasting compliments the eating of the Lord's Supper.

Here's another example. Please turn with me to **Luke 18:7&8**:

**7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?**

**8 I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?**

Have you ever seriously considered that Jesus has appointed a particular way for us to prepare for His second coming? Jesus said that God will send the Son of Man and vindicate His elect. And then He describes who the elect are:

**... who cry to Him day and night ...**

Cry for what? What do the Elect cry? They cry, *"Thy kingdom come!"* The Elect cry, *"Come back, O precious Bridegroom. Come reign as King. Come, vindicate your people. Come, marry your bride!"*

And since the life of the Church and the evangelization of the nations is part of that preparation of the second coming of Jesus- we cry

out for that, too. "*Lord, revive your people. Lord, cause your Word to run and triumph.*" So, if you have eyes to see the way the world is, in contrast to the way it is supposed to be under the Lordship of Christ, you will have plenty to fast for.

Now in calling for the Church to fast for the coming King- I am not asking for anything new. The morning's text shows us an old woman who gave almost her whole life to this sacred ministry before the King came the first time. **Luke 2:36–38** says:

**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.**

Mary and Joseph had just brought the infant Jesus into the temple. Luke tells us about two very old people, Simeon and Anna, who recognize who the baby is. What marks both of these people is that they were yearning and longing for the coming of the Messiah. In verse 25 it says that Simeon was "looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him." Jesus, the Messiah, is the consolation of Israel (vv. 26, 30).

And in verse 37 it says that Anna virtually never left the temple and was serving the Lord "with fastings and prayers." In other words, she was like Simeon—she was longing for the Messiah to come; she was fasting and praying *night and day* because she was looking for "the redemption of Jerusalem."

And then in verse 38- Anna comes at just the right moment to see the Messiah-child, and she gives thanks to God and speaks of him to all who were "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." In other words, God gave a special glimpse of the King's glory to those who were actually yearning and longing and looking for "the redemption of Jerusalem."

For Anna that meant a life of fasting decade after decade—probably 60 years since her husband died—as she ministered in the temple.

And I think one of the reasons Luke tells us about Simeon and Anna is to illustrate how holy and devout people respond to the Promise of Christ's coming. And how God responds to their longings. They see more than others see. They may not understand fully all the details about how the Messiah is coming—Simeon and Anna surely didn't—but God mercifully gives them a glimpse before they die of what they so passionately wanted to see.

So here we are—we Christians—on the other side of the King's coming. He has come and gone away again. He has revealed His Glory. He has shed His Blood for sins. He has risen from the dead. He has ascended into heaven to sit at Father's right hand until He puts all His enemies under His Feet. He has sent His Holy Spirit to regenerate us and sanctify us and indwell us. He has commissioned His Church to disciple the nations. And He has promised in **John 14:3**, "**I will come again.**"

Anna's hopes were based on the Promises of God like ours are. But, O how much more we have seen! How much more of the Messiah we know and can hope for! Anna never saw the years of Jesus' compassion and power, as we have. She had never heard the words of authority and wisdom and love, as we have. She had never seen the blind receive their sight and the lame walk and the lepers cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead raised and the poor evangelized the way Jesus did it.

Anna never saw Jesus consecrate Himself in Gethsemane, or crucified for our sakes on Golgotha. She never heard the merciful words, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise,*" or the triumphant words, "*It is finished.*" She never saw Jesus risen from the dead triumphant over sin and death and hell.

But we have. And now this Jesus- Whom we know so well, is gone. And so we walk by faith and not by sight. And the One whom we love was taken away. The wedding party was broken up. It is as though the wedding march had started and we were walking down the aisle to Him, and at the last minute He disappeared.

Is it reasonable for us to long for Jesus less than Anna longed for Him? Is that reasonable? Does the fact that we have had Him with us



and now have His Spirit make us long less for Him? O, what an indictment of our blindness if the answer is, "Yes".

I say, let us long for Jesus as much or more than Anna did, and let us yearn for Him and look for Him to come back with more intensity than Anna or Simeon. Shall we have less devotion than these pre-Christian saints? We have beheld His Glory. Glory as of the only begotten of the Father. And does that Glory that we have beheld cause us to hunger less for His appearing than those who did not even see His Glory? Paul said in **2Timothy 4:8** that he was going to receive a crown of righteousness with all "who have loved His appearing". So I ask you this morning, do you love His Appearing?

Are we so settled into the world, are we so comfortable that the thought of fasting for the end of history is almost unthinkable? What about older people? Can you taste the glories of the presence of the King better because they are nearer? Do you turn that taste into fasting for the King's coming?

What about younger people? Do you love Jesus so much that his coming would be the greatest thing you can imagine? Or is he a kind of weekend topic of religious talk that sometimes helps you with a bad conscience but isn't someone you would want to interrupt your life?

What about those of us in the middle—or pushing the upper end of the middle? How do we feel about being told that fasting may reflect how much we want the bridegroom to come? Does Anna's passion for the Messiah appeal to us at all? Do we want the appearance of Jesus more than we want to finish our career plans?

I believe that my life will never be the same after today. I have been challenged by this like very few things have ever challenged me. I have seen too much now about fasting and the meaning of hunger for God, and hunger for his Word, and hunger for the children's safety, and hunger for world evangelization, and hunger for the Bridegroom, and the way Jesus speaks of expressing this hunger with fasting—I have seen too much now to go on with business as usual.

So what do we do as a Church? Is it reasonable that we as a Body should:

- ✓ Keep the Biblical discipline of fasting before us as an ongoing and needful truth?

- ✓ Should we give more people a chance to grow in this kind of prayer?
- ✓ Should we avail ourselves of all that God has ordained for the empowering of our intercession?
- ✓ Should we be unrelenting in our pursuit of revival and world evangelization?
- ✓ And should we long for the Bridegroom night and day?

So if you agree with me that these are only *reasonable* things that the Church of Jesus Christ in the 21st Century should be about- then I am proposing that we yield to the very same thing that Anna yielded to- and that we fast for the coming of our King.

I am proposing that we get together and organize a fast whereby one of us is fasting one day a week- on Tuesday- every Tuesday- for the remainder of this year. And we must be careful to organize this fast in accord with what Jesus taught in **Matthew 6:16-18** so that we do not appear unto men to fast- so we must not say anything about this to anyone or to each other- and our Father Who sees in secret will reward us openly.

But I suggest that one of us each week takes up the gauntlet to fast for just that one day- from Tuesday Morning until just after Prayer Meeting- every Tuesday until the end of the year. And the focus of this fast is not anything but the second coming of Jesus Christ and what we need to be about as His people because the time is drawing near.

And I am proposing that after this year is over- that we take one month- say January- to set aside for all of us to fast together as a Church from Tuesday Morning until just after Prayer Meeting- every week of that one month- for those four or five Tuesdays so that we can earnestly desire for Jesus to come back.

I am proposing this morning a very simple ministry for us to reconnect ourselves with fasting for the coming King. And from what we have seen this morning- you don't need a sudden crisis in our life to call a fast. All we need is a longing for the Bridegroom to come. So Lord, increase our love for Your appearing!

Let's come and pray.

The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729 [www.covenantofpeace.net](http://www.covenantofpeace.net)

Scripture quotations, except those noted otherwise, are from *The New American Standard Bible* © 1996 by The Lockmann Foundation. Used by permission.

This is a single transcript in a larger series of teachings taken from a verse by verse study of **The Gospel According to Luke**. You are free to reproduce it and distribute it as the Lord leads you- without cost or reimbursement to us with the stipulation that you may not add anything or take anything away from this transcript without the express written permission of The Covenant of Peace Church and that this complete copyright statement be at the end of all copies.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.