



Questions for a New Year

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation.”

Luke 2:29-30

As we quietly continue to move through January, I suspect you have been mentally engaged in some forward planning. You may be looking forward with great anticipation to 2020 and the accompanying birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, starting a family, beginning a new job, rejoicing in the birth of a grandchild, and moving to a new home. These events inevitably involve significant planning, preparation, and prayer.

Yet I wonder if we put the same amount of planning, preparation, and prayer toward growing in our faith. Growing in our relationship with God is not a matter of chance or accident. It takes intentionality, initiative, time, and most of all, a prayerful recalibrating of our deepest affections.

Recently as a congregation we began to consider a number of questions that would help us begin to draw closer to God in 2020. We prayerfully asked ourselves:

1. What is one thing I could do this year to increase my enjoyment of God?
2. What is the most important way that I will, by God’s grace, try to make this year different from last year?
3. What one thing could I do to improve my prayer life this year?
4. What is the most humanly impossible request that I will ask of God this year?
5. What single thing do I plan to do this year that will matter most in 10 years or in eternity?
6. Which biblical doctrine do I want to understand better this year, and what will I do about it?
7. What is one thing I could do this year to enrich the spiritual legacy I will leave to my children and grandchildren?

Where to Begin?

In Luke 2:29-32, you encounter one of the great prayers of the New Testament. It is a prayer filled with joy and excitement, surprise and delight. The contextual backdrop to the prayer of Simeon, an elderly man living in Jerusalem, is fascinating and intriguing; it contains helpful lessons for us as we continue to move into a new year.

During the 400-year period from the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament (the intertestamental period), it seemed that God had been inactive, unproductive, and silent. Yet the opposite was true. God had been steering and directing the whole of ancient history toward the birth of Christ.

There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon...

When we are first introduced to Simeon (Luke 2:25), we are not told much about him. He was not, as far as we know, a popular or well-known Rabbi. He seems to be a quiet, thoughtful individual, unlikely to make the headlines of a national newspaper or serve as CEO of an international company.

But one thing is certain: Luke describes Simeon as “righteous and devout,” so in tune with what God was doing that he was waiting for the salvation of God to appear.

Most of us can wait a day or two, but week after week, month after month, year after year? Waiting is not easy. Simeon had a deep and settled conviction that God was at work in quiet, almost unobtrusive ways, putting into place His purposes and plans. So Simeon waits.

For those with Type A personalities who find waiting difficult or exasperating, please understand this biblical principle: When God calls you to wait, His single biggest interest is in the kind of individual you are becoming while you wait. So ask yourself, “What kind of person am I becoming while I wait?”

Over the past twelve months you may have come through a difficult situation, one you never thought you would find yourself in. Yet in the midst of it, God has been shaping your character, calling you to be fully surrendered to His purpose and plan. In teaching you patience, consistency, and perseverance, He is developing within you a Christ-like character and attitude that protects

you from wandering from Him and teaches you to wait for His perfect timing and fully rest in Him.

The second lesson God often teaches when He calls you to wait comes in the form of a question. Millions through the centuries have discovered in this straightforward question the answer to the difficulties which lie before them. The question is straightforward yet it often provokes a response which helps prepare us for what lies ahead. Sometimes we find ourselves so wrapped up in issues that we forget to stand back and ask, “Is God sufficient for the challenges that lie before me?”

Whenever our challenges threaten to overwhelm us, God often enlarges our hearts so that we can be enthralled and thrilled by all that He is doing. The two questions Simeon faced while he was waiting are the same questions we need to ask: “What kind of person am I becoming while I wait?” and “Is God sufficient for the challenges that lie before me?”

In the days following the birth of Christ, when Simeon focused on what God was doing, he realized that the supreme Sovereign of heaven and earth, who reigns in transcendent majesty and unimaginable splendor, had become a man. Simeon understood that God, motivated by His nature of omnipotent grace and infinite love, had come to earth in the form of a child. Simeon’s heart and mind explode in gratitude.

Simeon had been patiently, silently waiting in the midst of impenetrable darkness when it seemed that God was not at work. But now Simeon articulates the richest of prayers as he realizes infinity cannot contain Him, eternity cannot encompass Him, and angelic arias erupted with unprecedented praise at His birth. Kings gathered to worship Him. Prophets longed for Him. History is defined by Him. God’s eternal decrees are shaped by Him, eternity’s sonnets speak of Him, and the salvation of humanity is found in Him. For all these reasons and many more, we can confidently say that God is sufficient for all that lies ahead of us in this New Year.

May you and your family know God’s richest blessings in 2020. Please come and join us some Sunday if you are serious about growing in your faith.