

Two witnesses in the last days

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Can I speak some words back to Revelation please?

Revelation chapter 11 Verse 15 And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Luke chapter 2 [00:01:08] Verse 25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came by the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the Lord, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.

[00:02:05] Words, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Just further on down the chapter, verse 36 There was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Panuel of the tribe of Aser.

She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, [00:03:01] and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

And then just some familiar verses from the prophecy of Malachi, chapter 3.

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. The Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his

name.

They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts.

My burden is just to move on a little from what we've been hearing already this evening, and what we've been talking about in our conference, because my heart has been very much touched by these two witnesses in Jerusalem in the latter day. [00:04:06] We couldn't decide, could we, for sure, whether there were two, or whether there were more than two. But as was said, there were, or there will be at least two. And we didn't exactly mention it, but I think there is a comfort in the fact that there are two, at least. They can have fellowship, they can support one another, as well as knowing the help of the Lord for them, in their ministry in that day to come, in that very dark day when they shall witness for the Lord, in that place which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. But I would like just to comfort our hearts, as well as to encourage us a bit this evening about that, because we have, I think, a little prefigured for us, these two witnesses, in these two people we have read about in Luke's Gospel, Chapter 2. [00:05:04] We have Simeon, and we have Anna.

And it has been on my heart, over these past few days, that in some ways they anticipate the faithfulness of these two witnesses in the latter day. For just as the two witnesses we have read about in Revelation are speaking about the time the Lord Jesus is about to come and take up his kingly power and reign, his second coming in glory. These two, Simeon and Anna, were there in Jerusalem, the same city, just before the Lord Jesus was going to come. Not that second time in power and glory, but that first time in loneliness, to suffer and die upon the cross of Calvary. But the faithfulness that marks the two witnesses in Revelation marks Simeon, and it marks Anna.

And there are some practical lessons for us to learn from this that will comfort and encourage us. [00:06:05] I have read those words from Malachi. They show to us the value that God places upon faithfulness in a dark day.

Because Malachi prophesied before those 400 years of silence of which we have heard in our studies. When the scene was very dark indeed, but it was an encouragement for all who should hear and read that prophecy to remain faithful to the Lord during those years.

And if this world puts very little value upon those who are faithful to the Lord, in Malachi we see what value God places upon faithfulness to his word.

And we are in the same position, I believe, as the two witnesses in Revelation and the two witnesses, Simeon and Anna, in Jerusalem, just before the Lord Jesus came the first time. [00:07:05] In the sense that we are the twos and threes too, before the Lord Jesus comes, not publicly, but secretly, to take his own, to be with himself in heaven. And the question comes, the challenge comes, are we being like these witnesses of which we have been reading in Revelation? Are we being like Simeon and Anna? Are we being faithful to the Lord? What is the measure of faithfulness? The measure of faithfulness is obedience to God's word. And the mark of these people in Malachi's prophecy is that they spoke often about the Lord and they took attention to his word.

Now, we have already mentioned in speaking this evening, that it is one thing to come together and to pay attention to God's word in a conference, [00:08:02] and it is wonderful to be able to do that. The great privilege, I wanted to come to this conference last year, and I was prevented by domestic difficulty coming.

And I felt the loss of it. These conferences are for our edification and our building up and our encouragement. But the Lord Jesus is looking to us to work out these things where we are in our localities, as we gather around him.

The context of Christianity that is presented to us in the scriptures is the assembly where we gather to the name of the Lord Jesus.

Where two or three are gathered together to my name, there am I, in the midst of what Jesus says. And that's where we work out principally our faithfulness to the Lord. Yes, I don't take anything away from what our brother has said already [00:09:02] about the importance of our witness in the world. Most important, but in terms of Christianity and the testimony we give to the Lord Jesus and the answer firstly to him, before it goes out to others. It's in the place where we gather about him personally.

And are we being obedient to his word in connection with this? Are we being faithful to him in connection with this?

Well, that's where the comfort, I think, comes in from the example of Simeon and Anna in Luke chapter 2.

One of the things that slightly perplexed me maybe, but I think it perplexed us all when we were studying it, was that how God could take account of the temple at the beginning of chapter 11. [00:10:01] Because as we thought about it, we realized that the temple that was going to be built was going to be built in unbelief. And yet God takes account of the holy place, the temple, and those that worship in it.

Because there was something there for him.

And we have it here too, in Luke chapter 2. Because, you know, this temple, Herod's temple, was a temple that wasn't built with any real desire to glorify God. It was built to ingratiate himself with the Jewish people, to exalt himself. And yet, God takes account of it. The Lord Jesus himself takes account of it. You have made my father's house.

Made my house.

Not quoting it exactly right, but nonetheless, you know what I'm referring to. That house has become a place which was just used for their own interest, their own business. [00:11:03] Making money.

And yet, the Lord Jesus took great exception to that. Though it was Herod's temple, he calls it there his father's house. The zeal of his house had eaten him up.

How much care are we taking for God's house today? What is God's house today? Again, come back to the burden of my heart. It's the assembly.

The truth that God has committed to us.

We have been looking at the two witnesses and their faithfulness in regard to the truth that God had committed to them to keep in that day and to testify in that city of Jerusalem in that day. And how

faithful we see they're going to be. Well, the challenge comes back to us. How faithful are we to that distinctive testimony that God has given to us in this our day? [00:12:01] The day of his grace.

The day of his spirit. Well, Anna and Simeon, they were in this temple of Herod.

And yet God would take pleasure in them because they were faithful to him. I think it was mentioned earlier on in our studies that another example of how God could take account of that temple of Herod was Zacharias, for instance, in his faithfulness to God, his desire to glorify God, the father of John the Baptist. And Joseph and Mary, they came into the temple to do that which was required by the law. They were obedient to God. In the smallest details we might say they were obedient to God. And God takes account of it and he treasures it up. He puts it in his book. And here we see two others, Simeon and Anna.

[00:13:03] Now, I just want to make some practical points really about this. As I said, the world may have put no value upon this.

We may look at these two, Simeon and Anna, and see, for instance, that they are old people.

Too old people.

Too old people.

How could it be that God's testimony should have any value in their hands? But it does! Because they were faithful to God.

And we mustn't look at things from man's point of view. We live in a world today where that which is old is looked down upon. When God's word which exalts the old man in his experience before God, if he's kept close to God, is disregarded and set aside, and the experience and spiritual maturity of years with the Lord [00:14:08] is devalued and cast to one side, we see God was happy to have his testimony entrusted with a man like Simeon and a woman like Anna.

And we saw with these two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11 that whilst they didn't know the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as we do because we live in the day of the Church, it's a special privilege for us, yet they spoke with the power of the Holy Spirit. He came upon them as he came upon his servants of old in the Old Testament. Look at Simeon, how he's marked by this. Verse 26, it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, and he came by the Spirit into the Temple.

[00:15:10] There's no doubt about it today that one very distinctive thing about the Church is the importance of the liberty of the Holy Spirit to direct his people, God's people.

Are we allowing him to do that?

Simeon was directed by the Holy Spirit, he was led and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Here in the Temple of God, well we might have said, well how can there be any service for God in this place? But here was a man who was in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and as a result, he could be led into the secrets of God, and he could move according to the secrets of God, the Word of God

came to him in the power of the Spirit, and he was there at the right time [00:16:02] to do this wonderful act for God.

There was no readiness to receive the Lord Jesus in that place, we know. At a later time, when even the children would praise the Lord Jesus in the Temple, when he came into Jerusalem, the Pharisees, the religious people, they were angry that the praises of the Lord Jesus should sound in the Temple of God. But here was a man who was led by the Holy Spirit, and it says, we saw in that wonderful verse, and I'm always grateful to a brother who drew this to my attention, that we can apply this to our hearts, he took him up in his arms.

And spiritually, are we taking the Lord Jesus up in our arms?

The Holy Spirit, we are told, aren't we, in John's Gospel, he seeks to glorify the Lord Jesus, [00:17:06] he seeks to bring him before us in all his beauty and glory. And when we receive the Lord Jesus, as it were, as the Holy Spirit presents him to us, as we study his Word, as his Word is brought before us, particularly when we're gathered together, we were thinking, weren't we, earlier on, about the fact that tomorrow if the Lord Jesus doesn't come, we shall remember him in his death for us upon the cross of Calvary. There we can see that if we're in the Holy Spirit, if we let the Holy Spirit take control of us, we can receive the Lord Jesus in our arms, we can take him up in our arms, in a world that doesn't want him, that rejects him, that carves him out. And in this Temple, which had no time for the Lord Jesus, there's a man who's guided by the Holy Spirit, and he takes the Lord Jesus up in his arms.

[00:18:03] Oh, for a heart to love the Lord Jesus, to know him and to love him.

That's what the Lord Jesus is looking for today, those who would love him and know him and cherish him. And as we do that, then I'm sure these other things that we've been thinking about this evening, expressing him in this world, they will come out in our lives, day by day.

Simeon also is another example to us, in that it was told him that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And you know that, in a different way, is the hope that we have, that we will not see death, but we will see the Lord Jesus, because he will come to us before we go through death. That's what we're looking for, isn't it?

And then, we see another wonderful characteristic in Simeon, that we saw in those two witnesses. [00:19:04] It was brought before us, that at the point at which their service was completed, they had their lives taken from them, by that terrible power that would be in the land in that day.

And it was pressed upon us that we should be willing to allow the Lord to have his course in our lives, when one task is completed, to let the Lord take us on to himself, or on to the next task he has for us.

Here was a man who was in the good of that, wasn't he? It says of him, that he could say, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.

According to thy word!

And if we should be letting the Holy Spirit guide us, day by day, [00:20:01] and also particularly as we

gather around the Lord Jesus, so we should be living our lives in the light of the word of God. How much has the word of God a claim on our hearts? Are we being obedient to me? More and more lately I've heard people say, well, this is what we must do because it's fundamental truth. As if other bits of the scripture are not fundamental, and therefore they're optional. It's not important you don't do that, because it's not fundamental. But where do we see such a division in scripture? The whole of God's word is entrusted to us.

Not everything in God's word is for us, is about us, but everything is for us. And certainly those things which bring before us New Testament truth, is not for us to pick and choose what we will be obedient to, or not be obedient to.

[00:21:01] And in this scripture we have a wonderful example of Simeon. He might have said, well, let me stay a little longer to see what happens as a result of the Lord Jesus coming into this world, but he was happy. He'd seen the Lord's Christ as God had promised him, and he could say, now let this thy servant depart in peace according to my word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

And he also had a wonderful desire, didn't he, for blessing, not only to the people of Israel, but for the Gentiles. And we have seen in these two prophets, these two witnesses, their faithfulness to God in Jerusalem, just before the Lord Jesus, not only claims his rights over his earthly people Israel, but before he takes his kingship over this whole world, [00:22:02] when he shall be King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And something of that faithfulness to God in view of the coming one, the knowledge of whose glory shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, something of that comes out in Simeon. And I'd love to just reiterate what our brothers have said before, that it should be something that fills us with great pleasure, that the Lord Jesus is going to get his rights in this world, which cast him out. And if only we had a greater vision of that, then the difficulties that we have in terms of our own advancement, or whatever in this world, would pale into insignificance, wouldn't they? It would be like Simeon who could say, now let us thy servant depart in peace.

[00:23:02] It's a wonderful thing, therefore, to treasure up the Lord Jesus in this present day when he's cast out. And I just want to go back to those words in Revelation again. The coming kingdom is described as being the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ.

And here we have it again in verse 26, the Lord's Christ.

And it's a wonderful thing to be in agreement with God about the beauty and the perfection of the Lord Jesus, isn't it? Just as God treasures up his Christ, his anointed one, the one who's coming to fulfil all God's desires, all God's counsel in this world, it's wonderful that we can identify with that. And we can enjoy in the fact that he is our Lord.

And we identify with God in his pleasure, as he sees his son is going to fill this wonderful kingdom that's coming in a future day. [00:24:08] But a few more words about Anna.

I think this is an encouragement, if I may say so, to brothers and sisters. Here we see at this time there wasn't just two men, but a man and a woman. And here we see faithfulness in Anna.

If Simeon takes the public place in the words he speaks out, Anna takes her place.

She's marked by that godly deportment that should mark Christian women, and which is set out for us in 1 Timothy chapter 2 and also in Peter's letters. She's marked by that activity that doesn't take prominence, but is just as effective and just as glorifying to God.

[00:25:09] I want myself to see that she had had a life of difficulty perhaps.

She had suffered loss in her life, but she was still faithful to the Lord.

All those years we're reading about in verse 37.

And this is an important encouragement to us as we grow older. The Lord Jesus doesn't come, and we grow older as we will if he doesn't come. Are we going to remain faithful to him? We can be faithful to him in the early years of our Christian life, but when difficulties multiply, when age becomes a problem, will faithfulness continue to mark us? Or will we start to fade in our affection and our faithfulness and our obedience to the Lord? [00:26:04] Anna is an example to us of one who didn't do that.

She remained faithful to the Lord.

And it's sad sometimes I think when I look at an older person I learned much from in the past, I'm not speaking of anybody in particular by the way, and then I find that the things they once taught me they're now denying.

Though the Lord's looking for faithfulness to be maintained throughout our lives, and that's a challenge for each and every one of us. Anna is marked by this faithfulness to the Lord.

She departed not from the temple.

And that's why the temple could still be owned by the Lord, because there were ones like this in it who were faithful to him, who wouldn't depart from him, who wouldn't depart from the temple, [00:27:01] but remained faithful to the Lord in that place. And she served God with those things that have been mentioned to us already in this meeting, fastings and prayers.

She was marked by self-denial and by dependence upon God. Because of that she had a clear shining witness in her life, day by day.

You might even say to keep close to the words of scripture, night and day.

Night and day was marked by faithfulness on the part of Anna.

And it says she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord. She could join with what she heard Simeon saying. I believe that's the sense of this. And again we see the fellowship of these two, just two. [00:28:01] We saw how two was important for witness, but two is important for fellowship too. And here in these last days before the Lord Jesus was born, we have two, two, the minimum, not only witnessing but able to have fellowship together in doing it. Sustaining what was for God in that place.

But not only that, they had a heart for God's people. And we must never ever be sectarian in our

outlook. We must have a heart for all God's people. And she looked and she spoke of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

What a heart for God's people.

Those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. She would speak of the Lord Jesus to them. She would encourage them with the Lord Jesus. The Lord Christ was so precious to her as we might say he is precious to God.

[00:29:07] She would speak of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

These are just a few practical points we see in the lives of Simeon and Anna. And I was very interested to see that Anna came from the tribe of Asher. And maybe that's a little encouragement to us as we were studying earlier, that sealed 144,000 and wondering why.

Perhaps at that point in the revelation they include those of the ten tribes which had not yet returned to the land. Yet there were some found in the land even at this time. Remember only Judah and Benjamin and the Levites among them had returned to the land in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. But here we see one of the tribe of Asher. One of the ten tribes witnessing to the Lord in that day.

[00:30:02] And God has his witness from every group or in every situation.

Here was Anna fulfilling a witness to the Lord even though she was one of those as we sometimes call them ten lost tribes. There was something for God from the tribe of Asher even at this time. And that's a great encouragement I think to us. Things may be low and departure great but God looks for individual faithfulness.

And when we see the exhortation to separate from that which is dishonouring to God, there is also along with it the exhortation to pursue with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

And Anna and Simeon are examples to us of that. [00:31:01] And we may take their example for us. I believe they prefigure those two witnesses of which we've been looking at in Revelation chapter 11. But let's be encouraged and comforted and challenged to follow their example in this hour of day just before the Lord Jesus comes back for his church.