

## Good News, Great Joy

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### Week 5: The God Who Answers Prayer

- Today as we close out our 2024, I want to stay in Luke chapter 2, and look at an account that takes place right after the birth of Jesus.
- As Jesus is still an infant, 40 days old, specifically, Mary and Joseph take Him to the Temple in Jerusalem for a child dedication, if you will.
- And while they are there, God continues to show them the greater picture of everything that is going on with the birth of His Son.
- ***“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's***

***Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.” And His father and His mother marveled at what was said about Him.” -Luke 2:25-33 (ESV)***

- Simeon is a very interesting man in Scripture
- Because outside of this account, he is not mentioned and doesn't seem to play any real big significant roles outside of this one day
- But the bible speaks very highly of him
  - Luke says that he was righteous and devout: Literally it means that he lived his life in reverent obedience to God.

- Luke says that he was waiting patiently, for the consolation of Israel and ....*the Holy Spirit was upon him.*
- Now that is not a phrase that we are to take lightly. Because Luke does not identify what Simeon's occupation is.
  - I just assumed that he was a priest, however, there is nothing here to indicate that he is
  - Luke only tells us that he is a man, upon whom is the Holy Spirit
- And that is all we need to know about him to know that he is credible.
- To contrast, throughout the gospels there would be many of those who are named in prestigious priestly or pharisaical positions, but they would not be credible at all because the Holy Spirit was not upon them.
- And it was revealed to him that he wouldn't die until he saw the Lord's Christ, could also be translated, The Lord's Anointed One, The Messiah
- That word for **Reveal (chrēmatisō)**: used here literally means: **To teach from Heaven**
- Simeon had the scriptures available to him, but the Bible wants to be very clear that He did not teach himself, he was taught directly and divinely from heaven about who the Messiah was, first and foremost, and 2ndly that He would actually see the Messiah while he was still on this earth
  - It's apparent that he was taught from heaven, because Luke seems to want us to know that there is something different about Simeon
- Unlike so many of the priests, scribes, and pharisees, Simeon was not looking for the liberation of Israel. He was looking for the consolation.
  - That word **Consolation (paraklēsis)**: **that which affords comfort or refreshment**
- He wasn't looking forward to a violent warrior, he was looking forward to the comforter and refresher of souls

- He had some true insight to Who the Messiah was going to be and what He was going to do
- And I think from his response whenever he sees the Messiah, I think we see how God Answers Prayer:
  - **God Answers Prayer: IN HIS TIME, IN HIS WAY, FOR HIS GLORY**
  - I can't help but wonder just how long Simeon had been waiting to see the Christ.
  - How many years, if not decades, had passed between when he first had that promise revealed to him, and the day he was able to hold Jesus in his hands?
  - And I also, cant help but wonder, why God would give Simeon that insight, and then make him wait so long to see it fulfilled?
  - And really I don't know why God would have told him what he did when He did, and I don't know why God would make him wait so long

- All I know is that sometimes God will give us insight into His will and His plan but has us wait on His timing in order to increase our faith.
- **Waiting (prosdechomai): To Expect**
  - This type of waiting is not just sitting around blindly hoping to see something happen. No, it's a confident expectation.
  - I'm turning 34 this week, and all I want for my birthday is to go over to Charlais and get a steak! So when I go to that Restaurant and put in my order, I'm not just going to be crossing my fingers and hoping that I get my steak
  - No I am going to sit there in excitement and anticipation expecting to have a delicious meal!
  - This is the type of waiting and expecting that Simeon had been doing.
- *But it is very important to remember:*

- **Our faith is not in our expectations of how He'll move, our faith is in expecting that He will move**
- And He will move according to His timing and according to His way for His Glory
- Almost everyone else among the Jewish people were expecting a Messiah that was just for them, but Simeon had insight that God had a bigger plan and a better way
  - He foresaw by the Holy Spirit that God had a plan for salvation for all people, to be a light for the gentiles as well as the people of Israel
- We can become very shortsighted in our prayer lives whenever we think that our prayers and the prayers that God answers is just about us
- But He normally always has a much bigger plan in store
- He blesses us to be a blessing to others
- You see God didn't just bless Abraham with a son in his old age to answer he and his wife's prayers for a family.
- It was bigger than that: He told Abraham that in him all the world would be blessed
- And God had been working through and preserving this people ever since the days of Abraham, working out His plan of salvation so He could bring the manifestation of His Glory into the world through the Person of Jesus Christ
- Yes, God had revealed the coming Messiah to Simeon long before he held Jesus in his arms, however, God had this promise instilled long before this nation of people had even been formed
- But now, this promise was finally being fulfilled
- And again, we don't know how many years or decades Simeon may have been waiting to see the Christ, but one day he felt led by the Spirit to go into the Temple at the exact time that the baby Jesus was being presented to God

- And he knew immediately in his Spirit that this was the promise that he had been waiting for
  - This was the fulfillment of God's Word
  - No one had to explain it to him,
  - This may not have been exactly what he was expecting to see...But when the Lord's answer was there right in front of him, there was no denying it
  - And he says now he can finally die in peace, knowing that he has seen the salvation and fulfilled promise of God
- However, just because God's promise had arrived, it didn't mean that it is going to be an easy road for everybody
- He goes on to say in verse 34, ***“And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that***

***thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” -Luke 2:34-35 (ESV)***

- You see, when God is on the move, especially in a new way, it tends to show where people really stand.
  - It's like whenever persecution has hit the church throughout the centuries it would reveal who really believed what they say they believe.
  - And Mary, even though she was blessed to be the mother of Jesus and that would bring so much joy to her life, she still would be grieved so deeply, that it would feel as if her own soul was being pierced by a sword whenever she would see her Son rejected and crucified.
- Jesus is the light of the world, because He is the great revealer
- When the Light of Jesus comes into your life He reveals the sin that you didn't know that you needed to deal with

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- When Jesus moves in your life, sometimes He reveals wounds that you didn't know that you needed to heal from
- When Jesus moves in your life, He moves in ways to grow you and stretch you as He reveals His calling on your life
  - And those growing pains are never comfortable
- But that is why even when He answers prayer, we still have a choice to make
  - Because often times He answers the prayer, and we start to panic a bit because we could be thinking, wait is this really happening? Is this the way I wanted it to go? Are we sure this is God!?
- Jesus is going to go on to meet face to face with so many people that had been praying to see the Messiah their entire lives
  - But they would reject the Messiah to His face because their hearts were revealed and He wasn't what they wanted.
- Man, it feels like Simeon really starts on such a high note, and then just kind of bums everybody out.
  - He starts off blessing God and talking about His salvation, but then ends with telling Mary that a lot of people are going to reject Him and it's going to hurt Mary so much it feels like she's being stabbed through the heart.
  - Geez man....not the vibe we're looking for at the baby dedication!
- But then comes in Anna, to pick the mood back up again!
  - Anna was a woman who had been a widow for 77 years, and she spent all of her free time worshipping, fasting, and praying in the temple
  - And verse 38 says,
- ***“And coming up at that very hour [Anna] began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” -Luke 2:38 (ESV)***

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- Anna's is the response we need to have whenever God answer's prayer.
- **WHEN GOD ANSWERS PRAYER: WE THANK HIM AND GLORIFY HIM**
- And I believe that we are walking into a season of answered prayer in which we get to thank Him and Glorify Him.
- We are about to be starting off a new year and a new season of our church and I have been waiting to be able to tell you all this full story from the beginning.
- Most of you know the story of our sending church
  - Whenever I was a student pastor on staff of a young, portable church about my 2nd year there...my lead Pastor, Skip Allen, had went away to the mountains to pray and fast...and while praying the phrase that kept coming to his mind was, "They have property, we have people"
- So whenever he was on the drive back, he called the other pastor on staff and said, "I don't know maybe we are supposed to reach out to some of the other churches in town that may be dwindling and maybe be open to doing something together."
- But before he could reach out to anyone, there had been a message left on the church phone from Jeremy Peeler, the Pastor at 2nd Baptist Church reaching out to him about potentially doing something together.
- So in the fall of 2016, the two church bodies came together and 2nd Baptist Church began doing business as **Hope Community Church (PIC 1)**.
- We were able to **move into the building (PIC 2)** and we were able to do some updates and renovations **over time. (PIC 3)**
  - There was no doubt that the Lord was in it, and that He was answering prayers... however during the process, hearts were revealed and some things did get messy.

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- However, the Lord was gracious through it, and over the next 5 years that I was there, the church had grown significantly and we were able to baptize over 200 people in that span!
- And that church building that was on the verge having to have it's doors closed is still being used for incredible ministry today.
- Now around 2018-2019 Rachel and I knew that the Lord was calling us into a new season... and we found ourselves pursuing church planting
- Now, how we got to Hickory is a story in and of itself and those who go through our family member class hear that whole part
- But once, Hickory was decided on as the location of the plant, the year leading up to the plant, our core team began meeting once a month during the 2nd service in Shelby.
- And during these meetings we could cast vision and pray together over the coming church plant.
- And Eric reminded me not long ago, that one of the things that we would pray for, was for the Lord to open the door to a church partnership like we were able to experience in Shelby.
- But we launched our weekly services in December of 2022 right here in the Rec Center. We originally met in the community room over where the kids are now.
- And we started with about 30 people and we had another church plant meet with us during our first year before they launched and they were about 30 as well
- And we always had scheduling conflicts with the Rec Center, however, in that first year, at the size that we were it was always pretty simple to adjust, adapt, and overcome (as Emma likes to say)
- Now we really started to experience some growth here in year 2.



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- And the more that we grew, the more the scheduling conflicts with the Rec center would become more problematic.
  - They have baseball/softball tournaments, we didn't have enough parking for church
  - They have wrestling/basketball tournaments. we can't all cram into the community room with the kids any more.
- And around the summer time I really began to feel the pressure of needing to find a new space for us to meet in.
- We looked at and spoke with a couple of schools but the cost of those rentals would be about 5 times what we were paying and we really didn't want to move everyone to another place and still be portable
- We looked at a space that another church was moving out of soon, and that space was no bigger than what we had now and would have cost us about \$8-9K a month.
- I had been talking to realtors about various spaces but nothing was seeming to work
- In September, when it came time to revisit our rental agreement with the Rec, it was apparent that they were not comfortable with the size that that had grown to
- They allowed us to sign another agreement, however, they more than doubled our rent and gave me a list of scheduling conflicts for the year that was more than the first 2 years combined.
- Now, I'm really feeling the pressure. And it started to get to an unhealthy place.
  - One Wednesday I was over at an office space at IChurch and those are the days that I do the majority of the sermon writing
  - But I caught myself for the first 2 hours I was there, just researching vacant buildings all across Catawba County.
  - I realized that this wasn't good, so I texted Pastor Carlos and he graciously met with me

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right away and I asked him to give me some Holy Rebuke.

- And we talked for a while, and he advised me to get away, and just put it down for a while and pray
- Well, it just so happened that the very next week Rachel, Fletcher and I were taking our vacation...so while there I just turned my phone off for 3 or 4 days and really just put it down
- The following Monday, I went to a local Pastors gathering in town, and when I got out of the car the first person I met was Pastor Mark, from East Hickory.
  - He got out of his car as I was getting out of mine, he had his Eagles shirt on, I had my Phillies license plate on my car so of course we talked Philly Sports as we walked in and that was it
  - The next day I met with a man named Chuck Campbell who is the Church Missions Strategist for Catawba County. He leads the

local baptist association and his job is to just help churches in any way that he can

- And towards the end of our meeting he asked what our greatest needs were and I told him that honestly we really needed to find a new space this year because I really didn't think that the Rec Center would allow us to sign another rental agreement after this one was up
- So he said he would be thinking and praying and we would meet up again in another month
- Then hurricane Helene hit and we were all very involved with helping with relief, so location searches got put on hold
- But, Josh Tomasek, one of our elders called me and said that he knew we were praying over a potential new location and said that he wanted to start taking prayer drives around town on his lunch breaks
  - So he asked what specifically we were praying for

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- And I said, we really are just looking for a place with plenty of parking, a worship area, plenty of space for kids ministry, and something no further than 5 minutes away from LR's campus
  - Because we still wanted to be as involved with the college ministry as we have been
- So he began making those prayer drives on October 7th
  - On October 16th, Emma, Jalisa, and I met for our weekly staff meeting
    - And we had been having a difficult month of scheduling conflicts with the Rec and that day Emma came in saying that she was feeling it
    - Which said something, because Emma was the one that was normally calming me down and talking me off the ledge whenever I was panicking about needed a new space
- But this day she said, "No, I'm really feeling it now, we really need the Lord to do something."
- So we spent the rest of that staff meeting, all 3 of us just praying out loud in the middle of Palm Berries on the square in Lincolnton, that the Lord would open a door for a new location
- After we were done praying, Jalisa asked me if I was going to reach back out to a realtor again, and I said, "No, I think I just need to wait and talk to Chuck again."
- The following Tuesday, both of our elders, Josh and Rance, were on a prayer drive together and they were driving around a part of town and Josh said, "Man this would be the perfect location for where we want to be, but there's already another church here, so probably not right here but somewhere close."
- And that church that he was talking about was East Hickory Church

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- The following Tuesday I had my next meeting with Chuck Campbell
  - And he was sharing his idea of churches sharing space.
  - In his mind a church like ours could come in to a church that was beginning to struggle for resources for one service time, set up and tear down, and just pay the other church rent to help them and be out for their service time
  - Which to me did not make much logistical sense
  - I felt if you were going to do something like that it would need to be more of a merger like we did in Shelby
  - The just sharing space to me did not seem realistic
- But in that conversation East Hickory came up and Chuck said that within his conversations with Pastor Mark he knew that they had been praying about what the future could look like for their church and said that might need to be a lunch or conversation that we could have.
  - So after that meeting, I went over to the parking lot at East and prayed, “Lord if this is Your will for something to happen here, make it easy. If it is going to cause any dissension among that body, I don’t want any part of it.”
- The next day Chuck called me and said that he had spoken to Pastor Mark about the idea of shared space and Mark said that he would talk to his elders about it
  - And I was thinking, Chuck, I told you that we cant do that idea of shared space
  - But I didn’t say anything, I just said look, I’m not going to close a door before God does so I’ll at least meet and talk with him.
- So November 4th, Pastor Mark and I met for lunch.
- And going into that meeting I was nervous, the night before I told Rachel that I felt like I was

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going to have to tell this guy that we can't do this shared space thing.

- But when I got to the lunch the first thing he told me was that he was familiar with us and our story because in 2016 right after we went through the merger in Shelby, my pastors at the time came to a pastors gathering AT HIS CHURCH, AT EAST HICKORY to do a presentation on the merger!
- So he had already been thinking about what that could possibly look like for their church
- And he said that when Chuck reached out to him, he and his elders had been looking at the budget and the cuts they were having to make and had instituted a prayer and fast about what God had in store for them in the future
- So we talked for about 3 hours, he heard my heart and I heard his
  - We talked about the idea of shared space but I was honest about how I did not think that that was a realistic possibility

- But we kept talking about church partnership, and what not, so at one point I just asked him point blank, "Ok, in a perfect world, best case scenario, what do you think a church partnership looks like here"
- And he said, "That the two churches would become one."
- And I agreed.
- So we decided that the next step would be to talk to our leadership teams about it, and then get our two leadership teams together to talk and pray.
- If that went well, maybe we would discuss having a joint service together to see how it would go.
- So we thought that maybe we could plan a joint service for February or March whenever we started to get some scheduling conflicts with the Rec Center.
  - But later on in the week we talked on the phone and we were both thinking and feeling

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that that may be too far out, so maybe we'll try to do a joint service sometime in December

- So that Sunday evening our two leadership teams got together at East Hickory and we had a really good meeting and decided to move forward with the joint service and we were going to plan it for December 15th
- Well on November 20th I get a call from the Rec Center that tells me that we cannot meet here on Dec 1st, and so Pastor Mark and his team were more than willing to move the joint service up which led to us having the service over there
- And it was a beautiful time, at one point during Jalisa's hand shaking time, I had a sweet lady, Ms Gayle come up to me in tears and hugged my neck saying, "I haven't seen this place this alive in 30 years."
- Jason Elder was up in the balcony with the AVL team and was so excited to see the room

that full that he decided to ring the church bell at 10am

- I asked Mark if they normally rung the bell and he said, "I don't remember them ringing that bell one time since I've been here."
- Also after that service, one of the congregant of East came up to Pastor Mark saying that he realized that he needed to be baptized!
- The following Sunday, when we were back here, Pastor Mark presented the idea of the merger to the congregation, and he told me that the response was pretty much "Well, why cant we just do it now?"
- And he explained that according to their by-laws they would need to have the elders propose the vote and then they needed two weeks to talk and pray between when the vote is proposed and when the vote actually takes place.
- So they agreed to immediately propose the vote

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- The next Sunday our staff and families went over to East to have a lunch and Q&A with their people
- The following Wednesday our staff, elders, and Treasurer met together and voted in favor to move forward with the merger if in fact the East Hickory voted in favor as well.
- And last Sunday, Pastor Mark texted me after their service, “Unanimous vote in favor of the merger. Praise the Lord!”
- So here’s how this is going to work:
  - This is our last Sunday in the Rec Center! GOODBYE TARPS!
  - Going forward, East Hickory Church will officially be doing business as Hope Hickory Church
  - I will be the Lead Pastor, Pastor Mark will be the Associate Pastor
  - Emma and Jalisa will stay on in their staff roles as Children and Family Coordinator and Worship Minister
- Peggy Senn is the part time Administrative Assistant for the church and she will stay on as well.
- Pastor Mark and I, as the Pastoral staff, will appoint the Elder board and the plan is to offer our two elders and their two elders to stay on in those positions and if all 4 agree we will present the elder board to the church at the appropriate time
  - A ministry counsel will be formed to establish the new orders of operation, constitution, by laws and things of the like.
- But we are entering into a new season, in which there is no doubt that God’s hand is in it and it is an answer to prayer
- Yes, it has moved fast, and honestly last week I was wondering if making the move January 5th would be too soon, but then I got a call from the Rec Center that same day telling me that we could not be in the building January 12th
- So there was confirmation right there.

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- And I'm telling you Chavis gave me a word the other week....
- I'm not used to God answering prayers quickly...
  - He essentially said, "What if this is bigger than you and your prayers. What if God is answering prayers that have been prayed for generations. What if God is answering prayers that were prayed over the bricks of that building as they were being laid. For God to use this place for incredible ministry and we are walking into the answers of those prayers!
    - And I couldn't say anything other than AMEN!
  - What if God is just answering Prayers in His Timing, in His Way, for His Glory!!
- What if we're more Anna in this story than Simeon.
  - Simeon had this promise given to him long ago, that he had been waiting on the Lord to reveal and then finally the day arrived when the promise is fulfilled that he had been waiting on for so long
    - But Anna just walked in on that answered prayer and was able to join in on the thanks and praise and giving God all the glory!!
- Now just because this is such an obvious answer to prayer from all angles, that doesn't mean that it is going to be the smoothest and most comfortable thing
  - Change is never easy
- But I need to be very clear that just because we may be changing location, that does not mean that we are changing who we are as a church
- If who we are changes based on the location in which we meet, that just means we were never real in the first place
- But God has established this specific church, with this specific culture, and now He has just provided a place for us to be able to call home



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and begin to be able to expand the ministry that He has entrusted us with.

- Now, I do want to be sensitive to the fact, and understand that there are some that enjoy the environment in which we worship now, because it is not a traditional church building setting
  - I am not naive to the fact that there are people in this room that have experienced massive church hurt in the past, and seeing some red carpet and pews as it is now, might dredge up some hurt
  - My prayer is that this will be a time of healing
- And understand that there are some from their side that will struggle with this too
- Martha Ann
- This process is going to take a lot of humility and patience from all of us
- Like Simeon said, thoughts from many hearts will be revealed, but I pray that a kingdom mentality will prevail as we move forward into

this new season of answered prayer that the Lord is allowing us to walk in.

- CALL UP WORSHIP TEAM
- Marcus Redding