

*Eyes that See*, Luke 2:22-40  
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Hussein Macho was a man of rare vision. He was our day watchman when we first lived in the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam. His last name means “eyes.” He was well-named. He watched everything that happened in the neighborhood. He knew all that was going on, everyone who passed by. Everyone called him *Bwana*: a title of dignity and respect (like the English word, *Sir*). Because we lived across the street from a major hospital, people often came to us for assistance. Often, when we would see just a beggar, Bw. Macho (Mr. Eyes) saw a friend. When someone came by who was not quite tacked down on all four corners -- living in his own world, not making sense – we might see a crazy man. But Mr. Eyes saw a person. He would take time to talk with him, eventually putting a friendly arm around his shoulders, finally escorting him down the road and on his way. Mr. Eyes had eyes that see.

Mr. Eyes didn't know his age. No records were kept in his little village; birthdays (a western concept) were not celebrated, traditionally. We might have guessed about 30 – he was quite strong and capable. But when he went for an eye exam, needing glasses, the eye doctor told him he was probably past 40, maybe 50, based on the way his vision was changing. But in spite of his aging vision, Mr. Eyes had eyes that see.

Our story of Simeon today reminds me of Mr. Eyes. Simeon was far older; some scholars suggest he was over 100 years old. But Simeon clung to life because God had showed him that he would not die before seeing the promised Messiah with his own eyes. It was the only thing on Simeon's bucket list, but it was a big-ticket item. And so Simeon stayed sharp; kept his eyes open, always looking, always searching.

Simeon had eyes that see. In this story, God is challenging you and me to sharpen our eyesight as well. That challenge requires several ways of

seeing. Searching. Recognizing. Appraising. Let's see how this played out for Simeon.

First of all, Simeon had *searching eyes*. Roving eyes. Simeon was always searching. Like all Jews, he was waiting and watching for the One who would deliver them from oppression, from exile. Under Roman rule, they were essentially in exile in their own land. Politically, they looked for a king who would bring freedom and sovereignty as a nation. Spiritually, they looked for the One who would rule forever, making things right, ushering in an age of peace and devotion to God. Simeon was one of those rare people who was actively searching for that spiritual deliverance.

This explains the kind of person Simeon was. The Bible tells us he was righteous; that is, in right relationship with God. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. And he was *devout* – to us perhaps, an old-fashioned term that brings to mind words like “pious” or “religious.” Today, we might think of *piety* or *religion* as simply going through the motions. But Simeon was devout in an authentic way: he was devoted to God. He was devoted to his search. His whole reason for living (at that stage) was to wait and to watch for the Messiah, the hope of his people, Israel.

What about you? Are you devoted to worshiping God, devoted to his work in this world? Are you constantly searching, asking: *Lord, what do you want for me today? How can I be part of your plan? Who is there, today, that I can reach out to, for your Kingdom?* I am reminded of the best of our secret service men, whose eyes are always roving, always searching, on the alert. Starting today, pray to be on the alert, for eyes that search for God's presence and will in your life.

Simeon was always searching, on the alert. And so when the newborn Messiah arrived, Simeon had *eyes to recognize* him. Now, you need to imagine, with me, the context. When Mary and Joseph entered the busy Temple courtyard, lots of people were milling around. It was a kind of organized chaos. You need to understand that going to the Temple then

wasn't like coming to church today, where everything is neat and orderly; where a newcomer or a latecomer might stand out. It was different. People would bring sacrifices at any time of the day or week. There was a lot of bustle and commotion because sacrifices involved animals, some of which were bought and sold on site. Visitors came for miles from outlying areas, so strangers were common. When Mary and Joseph walked in with their baby that day, there were no trumpets, no announcement which might herald the presence of the Messiah. There were no outward signs that Jesus was *The One*. They were just another young family in the bustling crowd.

But Simeon was searching. Every day was a day of anticipation. Every day he had his sensors up – *is this the one? That one? Lord, show me your Messiah*. Today was the day. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Simeon made a beeline for Jesus. Taking the child into his arms, this holy man recognized the Messiah he had been searching for. This child named Jesus, son of Mary, was *The One*: the Redeemer of Israel.

So we need eyes that recognize. It is one thing to see. It's another to recognize the meaning of what we're seeing. Perhaps you saw the segment on *60 Minutes* that featured a brain disorder called "Prosopagnosia." Individuals with this disorder cannot recognize people's faces. They can see eyes and nose and mouth, but they can't recognize a picture of a loved one – neither parent, spouse nor child. Even in person, they have to rely on cues like clothing, or hair color, or gait to recognize people they know well.

Simeon had the opposite of prosopagnosia. He had the kind of eyesight that recognized this child for who he really was. Most people merely saw a child being dedicated at the Temple. If they noticed anything at all, it was only a poor couple, buying the cheapest sacrifice allowed, for the purification of their first-born. But Simeon saw more; he recognized the Lord's Messiah. And seeing him, God opened his eyes to an even greater vision.

This child embodied God's salvation. He was the Messiah all Israel awaited. But Simeon recognized more – that this child meant salvation, not only for Israel, but for *all* nations. That means, not only for Jews, the ones to whom he gave his law and revealed his presence and power; but for *all people* (like you and me)! This is really good news for us. As Paul phrased it later (Ephesians 2:19) -- you and I are no longer strangers or foreigners, but fellow citizens! The Apostle Peter said, "You who had once not received mercy have now received mercy; you who once belonged to no one are now God's own people. Good news! It's the Christmas message: Emmanuel, God with *us*!

So, here's a question for you: Can you recognize God's presence in your life -- or do you have prosopagnosia? Do you recognize God's voice when he answers your prayer -- perhaps differently from the way you had imagined? Do you recognize the evidence of God's promises fulfilled for you? Pray for eyes to recognize God's working in your life. Look for evidence of his work – God's footprints, all around you.

Searching. Recognizing. Finally, appraising. We need eyes that see the cost. When you have your house appraised, you are getting an evaluation of the good and the bad. Simeon was searching and could recognize the object of that search when it appeared. He could also see something else: that God's good news of salvation was not *just* good news. He could see that God's salvation would come at a cost. Simeon had the kind of balanced spiritual eyesight that we need. What God offers us came at great cost, after all – the cost of his son's life on the cross. Likewise, following Jesus is not all celebration and happiness. Being a Christian can be costly, too.

On that day in the Temple, it seemed like nothing had changed. On the surface, little had changed. But underneath, everything had changed. A new force had been unleashed which would undermine the world's power. And Simeon recognized that change – and appraised its values and its dangers.

Messing with world powers inevitably brings battle. Changes in the spiritual realm come at even greater cost. The Enemy will not willingly let go of the reins of power. Note what Simeon saw:

- that this child would cause the falling and rising of many;
- that people would speak against him;
- and in doing so, would be revealed for who/what they really are.

On a personal note to Mary, Simeon warned that a sword would pierce her heart. Watching her son suffer would cause her great suffering as well. Change is costly. Suffering will be part of this new world order, until death is defeated at last and the new King is fully in charge.

Simeon understood that Jesus was central to God's massive plan for redeeming this world. Ours is not an altogether pretty world; a lot of wrongs need to be made right; a lot of brokenness needs to be made whole. The proud, the arrogant will be humbled. The humble, the oppressed will be raised up. Some will encounter Jesus and stumble over him; others will honor him as the centerpiece of their lives. Tragically, there are those who will reject Jesus outright, casting themselves out of his Kingdom. Jesus is the light that will reveal the inner secrets of every soul. You can either run from the Light or embrace it. But one thing is certain: you can't ignore it.

Put all of that together and what you have is a very costly gospel. It's appraisal: highly valuable; very costly. It is glorious and attractive, but it is not exactly safe. You may remember C. S. Lewis' description of the Christ-figure in the Narnia series. There Jesus is portrayed as a powerful lion. One of the children, hearing this, timidly asks Mr. Beaver, "Is he safe?" "Safe?" answered Mr. Beaver. "Who said anything about *safe*? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

When you change world powers, suffering will result. Christianity represents a powerful change and is not a "safe" religion, in the sense that you will be protected from all dangers. But here's God's promise: while you are in the battle Jesus will be your Champion, and in the end, he will prevail. The victory is his – as we have seen already, in the cross and resurrection.

Simeon had the vision to see that. He caught a glimpse of God's great plan, and rejoiced to see the day. What about you? What kind of eyesight do you have? Are you *searching* for Jesus, his presence, his word, his guidance? Do you *recognize* him as being God's Chosen, God's Son, God in the flesh? Have you *appraised* the cost of being different? Can you follow Jesus even when it proves costly? Because being a follower of Jesus isn't safe – not in every day terms. There will be awkward times – or worse – because you follow Jesus. Pray that you can embrace and celebrate a costly gospel.

My friends, open your eyes to see God's presence in your life. His footprints are all around you. Recognize his work and activity – and seek to be a part of it. Appraise the dangers and ask God's help, looking for his victory. It's a rich and full life. Following Jesus, you will be able, like Simeon, to say at the end of the day, "Lord let your servant now depart in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation... a light for all peoples." Open your eyes to see! As a follower of Jesus, you have a role to play in God's great plan of redemption. My friends, it's a day of rejoicing, when you have eyes to see. Amen.