

On August 12th, 1805, after over a year and a half of backbreaking travel, Merriweather Lewis stood in the heart of the Rocky Mountains at a place called Lemhi Pass. He sat down, scribbled some notes in his journal and breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, the current would be in their favor.

Merriweather Lewis was standing on the Continental Divide, on what's known as a watershed. Up to this point in the journey, Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery had been rowing up stream against the current, because every river east of Lemhi Pass runs in the same general direction - towards the Atlantic Ocean. Now, they would finally be rowing *with* the current because every river west of Lemhi Pass runs in the opposite direction - towards the Pacific Ocean - their final destination.

A watershed is a place from which the rivers flow in two opposite directions – to two completely different destinations.

Lemhi Pass is a watershed. So is Jesus. In the Gospel I read just a bit ago Simeon predicted that Jesus would be the greatest watershed of all history. In Simeon's words, **“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.”**

Jesus is a watershed in a number of ways. First, Jesus is the watershed between heaven and hell.

Jesus is the one point, the one person where if you find yourself on one side of him, you're in a river whose current flows straight to heaven, but if you find yourself on the other side of him, you're in a river whose current leads to hell. Jesus is the one person who divides every other person who has ever lived on this earth into one of two camps, rising or falling (saved or condemned).

For some, the mention of the name Jesus brings joy and peace and singing. For others the name Jesus is, as Simeon said, **a sign to be spoken against** – a name and idea that makes some in this world angry, bitter, and defensive. There's no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. Some may try to straddle the fence by saying nice things about Jesus while refusing to believe he is God and King, but Jesus leaves no room for that. He is a watershed – there is no middle ground here – either you are on the right side of Jesus and on the way to heaven, or on the wrong side and riding the current to hell.

He's the watershed between heaven and hell, he's also the watershed between the Old and the New Covenant.

For thousands of years God's people had lived their lives by the covenant that God made with Moses and the Israelites he had led out of Egypt at Mt. Sinai. You can read about this covenant in the Old Testament, all of those rules and regulations about what to eat and what to wear, being clean and unclean, and all the sacrifices. Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple that day in Luke 2 in obedience to that old covenant. It was the God-given rule that 40 days after the birth of your first son, mother and father had to come and offer sacrifices to God for mother and son.

Jesus, his birth, his life, his death, is the point in history where the covenant changes. Instead of circumcised on the eighth day, we baptize. Instead of celebrating

the Passover we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Instead of sacrificing animals every time we get together in God's house, we spend time remembering the Lamb of God who's death was the last sacrifice that would ever need to be made.

Jesus is the watershed between heaven and hell, between the old and the new covenant. He's also the watershed between hope and despair – the rising and falling of our hearts, if you will.

And it is this last watershed that we get a powerful case study of in Luke 2. Your God wants you to find in Jesus the relief that Merriweather Lewis felt at Lemhi Pass. In Jesus we find the hope and relief we so desperately need in this world where it often feels like the powerful currents of sin, death, and the devil are too strong to row against. Jesus is the watershed at which point we see the current turn in our favor.

So let's look a bit more at Simeon and Anna, two case studies in Jesus the watershed between hope and despair.

To most people in the Temple that day, Jesus wouldn't have looked like anything special. This was, after all, a long-standing law God gave through Moses. Every single day 40 day old Israelite boys were brought into the temple for these sacrifices.

But two people that day knew differently.

First, Simeon. Simeon was waiting...

Imagine how you would feel if someone told you that you were going to meet your favorite celebrity or athlete or hero? You don't know when, but at some point in your life you would get a chance to personally meet Aaron Rodgers or Giannis Antetokounmpo (Adedo-koonbo... I really hope I said that right ☺).

Every day you would wake up and wonder, “Is this the day? Will I get to meet him today?”

That was Simeon's life – only exponentially better. God had revealed to him that before he died he would see not just a famous athlete, he would see the long-promised Messiah.

Can you imagine the excitement that would bring to your life? Every single time Simeon experienced the brokenness we talked about this Christmas, every single time he got the common cold, every time he got a tooth ache, every time he watched someone he loved get sick and die, every time he woke up and felt the living decay of his body as he got older and older he could think to himself: “Before I die, I'm going to meet the person who is going to fix all of this!” Can you imagine the excitement that brought to his life?

For thousands and thousands of years, from the minute sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden, God had been promising to send a Savior. Through his prophets God had made hundreds of predictions about all the amazing things that Messiah would do when he came. Every good Israelite was eagerly expecting the Messiah, every good Israelite was waiting for **the consolation of Israel** (the one who would come and make everything right again), and Simeon had been told by God that it would happen in his lifetime.

Can you imagine how exciting that would be to wake up every day and wonder, “Am I going to meet the Messiah today?”

Simeon was waiting... and then it happened. The Holy Spirit moved him to walk into the temple one day, and there he was... the watershed between hope and despair.

Can you imagine what that would have felt like – with trembling arms to reach out and hold the Savior of the world in your hands? No wonder Simeon burst into song!

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations.”

Simeon, eagerly awaiting his Messiah got to see him and hold him – a case study in Jesus the watershed between hope and despair. Do you think there was an ounce of despair in Simeon’s heart as he stood there with the Messiah in his arms?

Friends, I know you are waiting too. You too have an amazing promise from your God. You have the promise from your God that one day soon the Messiah will come and take you home to be with him in heaven. I want you to realize and feel in your promise from God the same excitement Simeon had. This is no small thing your God has promised you.

Friends, I know that the world around you wants you to find your excitement elsewhere. I know that the length of our wait makes it easy for the excitement to fade. But this morning for a moment I want you to see in this incredible moment with Simeon a foreshadowing of what is coming for you soon. I want to remind you of the hope and excitement we have because the Messiah came once and he will come again. I want you to wrap your minds around the truth that you get to wake up every single day and wonder, “Will I get to meet the Messiah today?”

Understand what an incredible watershed we have in Jesus, he offers you hope that is far better and longer lasting than anything else. Want some more proof? Look at Anna.

Anna was waiting too...

Luke tells us that Anna **never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.**

Anna’s waiting was a little different than Simeon’s. Simeon’s waiting was an excited waiting because of God’s amazing promise. Anna’s waiting, however, was a heartbroken waiting.

In one short and seemingly easy to ignore sentence Luke captures a whole world of heartbreak. Luke tells us that Anna had been married for seven years (plenty of time to grow incredibly close to another human), but then her husband died. I don’t think you need to have seven years of marriage under your belt to know how devastating that would have been for Anna, to understand, at least a little bit, the heartbreak she felt.

Driven by that incredible heartbreak Anna grabbed hold of the only thing she had left... her God. She grabbed on and didn’t let go. For probably decades (Luke tells us she is 84), she had made the Temple her home because death had taken her other home from her.

Anna was waiting too... while the day to day waiting was not as excited as Simeon’s, can you imagine what that day in the Temple meant for her?

Every night, as she fell asleep in bed *alone*, she felt the inescapable, heartbreaking consequences of sin. Every day she worshiped, and fasted, and prayed, hoping that she could find healing in her God... and on that day, she got it!

Can you imagine being in Anna’s shoes and what it would be like to look up from your heartache and see Jesus? That heartbroken woman was the exact reason that baby had been born. He was given the name Jesus for people just like Anna – Jesus a name that means the Lord saves.

Can you imagine how that felt? It’s no wonder she ran off to tell everyone she knew...

Just like with Simeon, in Anna’s waiting we see some more foreshadowing of our own waiting...

Some of you are already all too familiar with that heartbroken waiting of Anna... even if you haven’t, you know it’s coming, don’t you? This is why Jesus is the watershed between hope and despair. Without Jesus, even the best things in life (like marriage) are only going to bring incredible despair as sin and death rip them from us one by one.

But with Jesus... the current changes. Despair turns to hope, because this is why he came.

Friends, this is the dual miracle of Christmas, first the God who created the heavens and the earth became a human baby. Second, that he has revealed to us that Jesus came be the great watershed we desperately need – that baby came for you! That baby is the only thing in this world that can take you from the sin-wrought despair of this world and give you hope.

God grant that every day we would wake up and experience the excitement of Simeon, the heart-healing joy of Anna as we look at the great watershed of all history – Jesus.

Amen.