



“Face to Face”
Luke 2:21-38

Idea: A face-to-face encounter with Jesus satisfies the deepest longings and needs of your heart.

Intro: “We were face-to-face.” I bet you have used that expression at some point to describe an encounter that you had. Face-to-face encounters usually create a lasting memory. They mark you. Several years ago, I was in Uganda with a short-term mission team, sharing the gospel house-to-house among rural villages. One of the things, I usually do on an overseas trip is build in a “fun” day. In Uganda, this always involved a safari experience. We would go to Queen Elizabeth National Park early in the morning to see as many animals as possible before it got hot. Then, we would head over to Mweya Safari Lodge for an incredible brunch followed by a boat ride on the Kazinga Channel. This day, we arrived at Mweya a little later than normal, which meant we had to eat fast to make the boat ride. Well, after eating I sent most of the team down the hill to the channel to make sure the boat did not leave us. A couple of us stayed behind to pay the bill. Mweya sets up on a plateau high above the channel. It has a beautiful view of the channel and park. The team took the van down to the channel, which meant we were walking. We were in a hurry, so we were walking fast to get to the dock. Not far past the gate, as we were going down the hill, a full-grown leopard came out of the bush and started walking down the road away from us before going back into the bush. The cat never saw us, but it went in the bush in the direction we needed to go by the trail we needed to take to get to the dock. We paused for a minute and thought about what might happen on that short trail.

In that moment, we did not necessarily come face-to-face with the leopard, but it was close enough for me. A full-grown male leopard can weigh up to 150lbs. It is a ferocious and opportunistic predator. All I had to defend us was the small knife in my pocket. I will never forget that day. After the boat ride, we drove back up the hill to the lodge for some snacks before leaving the park. On our way up the hill, that leopard or its mate walked across the road, holding a giant lizard in its mouth. I am glad the lizard was lunch rather than us.

That close encounter created a lasting memory for us. As we continue working our way through Luke’s Gospel, we discover two people who came face-to-face with the infant Jesus. The encounter they both shared with Him left a lasting mark on their lives. We will learn from this passage that a face-to-face encounter with Jesus satisfies the deepest longings and needs of your heart.

Read Luke 2:21-38.

Inquiry: Like Zechariah and Elizabeth did for their son John, Joseph and Mary had their son circumcised on the eighth day according to the commands of the Law (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3). This procedure and ceremony likely took place in the home where they were staying. On this day, they also named the boy Jesus in

accordance with Gabriel's instruction to Joseph (Matt 1:21). This common Hebrew name means "The Lord is salvation." It was both a claim and a promise.

On the thirty-third day, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord at the Temple. The Law commanded a purification period of thirty-three days for a woman who had given birth. During that time the new mother was not to touch anything holy or enter the sanctuary. At the end of the period, she was to bring to the priest a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering. If she and her husband could not afford a lamb, she could bring two young pigeons or two turtledoves. The priest would then make atonement for her discharge (Lev 12:1-4, 6-8). They also had to redeem the boy since He was Mary's firstborn son (Ex 13:1-16). Every firstborn male belonged to the Lord. The price of redemption was five shekels.

During Jesus' first month of life, He came face-to-face with Moses and the commands given to him by God for Israel. There were two other people the infant Jesus met. Luke is the only gospel writer to detail these individuals and the encounter they had with the Lord. First, Jesus met Simeon. Luke tells us that he was a man in Jerusalem. We do not know if he lived in Jerusalem or was simply visiting. We also do not know the man's age. He has traditionally been thought of as being an elderly man, specifically 113 years old. The details about Simeon that we do know is that he was a righteous and devout man. He was "*waiting for the consolation of Israel.*" He possessed a messianic hope and was waiting for God to fulfill His promise to comfort Israel with a Savior. Luke also tells us that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon. In fact, the Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen "*the Lord's Christ.*" On this day, the Spirit led Simeon to the Temple where Jesus was being presented, so he took the Lord up into his arms and blessed and prophesized over Him.

The second person Jesus met was Anna. This lady was a prophetess. She was a saintly senior. She was a widow who had been married for only seven years. When her husband died, she devoted herself to worshipping the Lord through fasting and prayer. On this day Anna is either 84 years old or had been a widow for 84 years. Either way, she had spent her life in devotion to God and anticipation of His Christ.

Simeon and Anna came face-to-face with Jesus. Those encounters surely created a lasting memory for them, but they did more than that. It changed their lives. From this passage, I want you to see that a face-to-face encounter with Jesus satisfies the deepest longings and needs of your heart.

What happens when you have an encounter with Jesus? There are three things we see in this text. When you have a face-to-face encounter, you recognize that:

1. Jesus is God's salvation.

Read Luke 2:29-32.

This is the fifth and final Christmas song in Luke's Gospel. It is a worship hymn blessing God for keeping His promise of a Messiah. It is also a salvation hymn as Simeon praises God for the Savior and details who can receive it. As we read Simeon's hymn, it is important to keep in mind the larger context of spirituality both in him and throughout Israel. Luke describes Simeon as being a righteous and devout man. He believed and followed God's Word. He was a regular worshiper in the Temple. He prayed and presented his tithes and offerings to the priests. Israel, too, during this period was deeply committed to following the Law, prophets, and *Mishna*. The Jews understood the reason their ancestors had been sent into exile was because of their faithlessness. Therefore, they now believed God would send them Messiah in response to their faithfulness.

The Jews, like all other peoples, fell into the spiritual trap of believing that their good works and devotion could and would result in God's blessing. They believed that somehow, they could sufficiently keep the Law and be righteous before God, or at least they believed their righteousness could outweigh

their unrighteousness. What they failed to recognize is that man's work is not sufficient. Isaiah declares that man's righteousness is like filthy rags (Is 64:6).

Simeon was waiting and looking for the Savior God was sending to them. He understood that his spiritual devotion was good but insufficient. He understood that God was sending something, Someone, better...a Savior who was sufficient. On this day in the Temple, Simeon came face-to-face with Jesus, and in that moment, he declared God's sufficiency in salvation. *"For my eyes have seen your salvation."*

Salvation is the work of God in a person's life. It is an encounter with Jesus, which brings an awareness of one's sin. Like Isaiah, you see your sin for what it is (Is 6:5). You see yourself justly condemned by it and separated from the God who loves and created you. You also see the beautiful gift of forgiveness and life offered to you. In that moment, God's Spirit leads you to confession and repentance. You turn from yourself and sin to the Savior and are transformed (2 Cor 5:17).

Simeon's encounter with Jesus led him to not only confess God's sufficiency in his salvation but also God's sufficiency in bringing salvation to both Jew and Gentile. God's forgiveness of sin is good for all peoples. Jesus was not just the Jewish Messiah; He was and is the global Messiah. He offered His life as a sacrifice for all peoples. He reaches into every nation, language, culture, and situation of life with salvation.

Have you had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus and placed your faith in Him alone for salvation? Why would anyone do this? When you come face-to-face with Jesus you recognize that He satisfies.

2. Jesus satisfies.

Verse 29 describes the satisfaction Simeon experienced in Jesus. Peace (εἰρήνη) settled over his life. He was at rest in God. The deepest longings of his heart were met. His needs were completed. Jesus did this for Him. For Simeon, in that moment, what he had believed and hoped in was confirmed. The Lord's Messiah (Jesus) + 0 = rest/peace

Oh, how we long for peace and rest! In our sin we chase everything this world has to offer hoping to find satisfaction, to know peace. We chase fame and fortune. We chase fun and family. We chase sex and security. All these things leave us empty and unsatisfied. They leave us wanting more. Some turn to alcohol and drugs to medicate and numb the pain and stress. We are broken and unable to put the pieces of our lives back to gather again. Simeon's declaration reveals that God alone heals the broken spaces of our lives.

The satisfaction we find in Jesus leads to gratitude as Anna shows (vs. 38). Her face-to-face encounter with Jesus resulted in her offering thanks to God for His goodness. You see, when you realize God has sent a Savior for you, then the natural response is to give thanks. We do not want to be like the nine lepers in Luke 17 who were healed by Jesus but failed to give thanks. How can you not show gratitude when Jesus satisfies the deep longings of your heart?

Have you had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus and found satisfaction in Him? There is a third thing we recognize when face-to-face with Jesus.

3. Jesus must be gossiped.

Verse 38 tells us that in addition to giving thanks, Anna gossiped Jesus to everyone who was looking for the Savior. The news of the Savior was too sweet and good for Anna to keep to herself. She wanted others to know what she knew. She became an evangelist who personally shared her faith. The same

was true of Andrew when he met Jesus. His first action was to go and gossip the gospel to his brother Peter (John 1:41). Anna, Andrew, and everyone we see in the Gospels who met Jesus face-to-face like this show us that the natural response to His salvation is to gossip it to others.

What would have happened in the lives those Anna spoke to about Jesus if she had not told them the Good News? What would have happened in Peter's life if Andrew chose not to tell his brother that Jesus had changed his life? We cannot know for sure, but it is quite possible they would never have met Jesus and placed faith in Him. What are the dangers of failing to gossip the gospel with those in our circles of influence? They might spend eternity in hell. They might further ruin their lives and family. They will continue in their brokenness.

Conclusion: Face-to-face encounters leave a mark on your life. The close encounter I had that day with the leopard left its mark and memory on my life. As I think back over the past forty-three years, nothing has shaped and marked my life more than the times I have come face-to-face with Jesus. It began in 1997 when my eyes were opened to the truth of 1 John 5:12. *"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."* In that moment I recognized that Jesus is God's salvation. It is not found in good works, trying hard, or religious devotion. Salvation is found in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Over the years, I have been learning more and more that only Jesus satisfies the deep longings and needs of my heart. He alone is the well that quenches the thirsts of my heart. The life and satisfaction I have found in Jesus leads me to be grateful and hopeful that others will find the same things in Jesus. For this reason, I am committed to sharing the gospel with others and telling my story. Have you had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus like Simeon and Anna?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ? What would keep you from embracing the truth and believing on Jesus today?

What keeps you from turning to Jesus in faith and repentance? What keeps you from allowing Jesus to satisfy you? You were made by and for Him (Col 1:16). Therefore, you have a God-shaped hole in your life that only He can fill. What keeps you from gossiping the gospel? It could be that you need to come face-to-face with Jesus.