

Growing Old and Getting Better

Luke 2:36–38

There's a certain question about Anna's age: whether she was eighty-four or had been a widow for eighty-four years. We know that she was married for seven years. So you add seven to eighty-four and come up with ninety-one. The average girl would probably have begun marrying at about the age of fourteen. So, Anna was somewhere between the age of 84 and 105 in a day the average age of death was 44. Verse 36 simply said "she was advanced in years." How does a person grow old and get better?

I. It's more important for you to be given grace than it is to be considered great.

This name Anna is the same as the Hebrew Hanna. There is no difference. In fact, if you go back to 1 Samuel 1 and look at Hannah, you'll see that she was characterized by *prayer and fasting* and so was Anna. The Hebrew name is a lovely name. Anna had been graced by God. Yet how do we know?

(A). Gratefulness to God is the mark of grace. "She began giving thanks to God" (v. 38).

"Give thanks *in* all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:18). Happiness happens when happenstances happen to be happy, but the graced person learns how "in all things" God's grace is present.

(B). Cheerfulness toward man is the model of grace. "She continued to speak of Him to all" (v. 38).

Until the vertical relationship with God is right, and the person is captivated by the grace of God in Christ, it is difficult to be cheerful to others. Notice, she gave thanks "to God." It was an understanding of the love of God. Only Christianity teaches "for God so loved the world."

(C). Contentment within is the measure of grace. "She lived with her husband seven years" (v. 36).

"I have learned in what I am to be content in whatever circumstances I am in" (Philippians 4:11). How? "*I am who I am by the grace of God*" (1 Cor. 15:10). How much of your identity is in grace?

II. It's more important for you to serve others cheerfully than it is for others to serve you expectantly.

Now what is a prophetess? It's not somebody who predicts the future, not a fortune teller, it's not somebody who works on the psychic hot line. It's simply somebody who is...somebody who speaks. She was a teacher. She was a speaker. But notice: "*She never left the temple, serving night and day.*" In the New Covenant, you and I (believers) are called "*The temple of the living God*" (II Cor. 6:16). Fasting and praying involves 'self-sacrifice' and 'others-focus.' Anna was a servant of God's people.

III. It's more important that you focus on the invisible spirit inside than the visible body outside.

Now she is further identified for us, and just an interesting note, Anna the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. Phanuel is the name Penuel, also Peniel...P-e-n-i-e-l, another Old Testament name...of the tribe of Asher. Now you say, "Is this important?" According to Jewish tradition, the women from the family of Asher were considered stunningly beautiful, fit to be the wives of 'kings and of priests.' Notice the description of this beautiful woman. Anna was "advanced in years" (v. 36). This phrase is the same with that in Luke 1:7 where it is translated in the KJV, "*stricken in years.*" The word gives a sense of something "attacking" or "striking" suddenly. The phrase 'aged gracefully' is possible for all.

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:16). We do not lose heart because "*the grace spreading to more and more people is causing the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God*" (II Cor. 4:15). Make it a practice to forgive as God has forgiven you. Make it a practice to love as God has loved you. Make it a practice to enjoy others as God enjoys you. Make your horizontal relationships look like the vertical relationship God has with you. Then, you and I will get better and not grow bitter.