



World Christian Fellowship

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Anna the Prophetess Life well spent.

How do you know whether you are wasting your life or investing it in the things that really matter?

We have several yardsticks by which we measure a life.

One is usefulness.

We are pragmatists at heart. We feel that if a person does something useful for society, whether it is a profession or a trade, he or she spends his or her life well.

Another yardstick we use is busyness or sheer activity.

Our lifestyles reflect our values here we are all extremely busy people. Our weekly calendars are full to the brim. We have the notion that if you just sit around, you are wasting your life.

Luke 2:36-38, *Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;³⁷ and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.³⁸ And coming in that*

instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

The Hebrew “Hannah,” no difference at all.

1 Samuel 1 Hannah was characterized by prayer and fasting and so was Anna. The Hebrew name means grace.

Anna had been graced by God to be a prophetess.

What is a prophetess?

It is not somebody who predicts the future, not a fortune teller.

It is not somebody who works on the psychic hot line.

It is simply somebody who speaks.

She was a teacher.

She spoke God's truth.

She spoke God's Word.

She may have been a teacher of the Old Testament to other women.

She is not a source of divine revelation. There is no revelation that has ever come from her, none comes in this passage. But she was known as one who taught, one who spoke.

If we study the Old Testament, there are only three women who prophesied.

1. Miriam, Exodus 15, sister of Moses.
2. Deborah in Judges 4.
3. Huldah, in the times of revival of Judah

We have only three, and when we study their life, we do not find any ongoing prophetic ministry such as you do with the men. Whereas men who were prophets in the Old Testament who were largely life-long prophets. Women prophesied at some event or some moment or some important time.

Couple of other incidents I would like to show in the scripture.

Old Testament:

Isaiah 8:3-4, *Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; ⁴for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria."*

She did not get any revelation from God that was intended to be passed on. There is no record that she prophesied on any occasion, but she is called a prophetess and most Bible scholars assume that she is a prophetess.

Name him, "you're going to be plundered," that is exactly what is going to happen. This nation is going to be plundered.

New Testament:

Daughters of Philip.

Acts 21:9, *Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.*

Out of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, none was written by a woman. Though Esther and Ruth are named for women, but they were not written by women.

Out of all the books written in the New Testament, none is written by a woman.

Of all the Old Testament prophets with an ongoing prophetic ministry and revelatory ministry, none is a woman.

Of all the apostles of the New Testament, none is a woman.

Of all the elders of the church, none is a woman.

God has designed as it is clear in the New Testament that He would work through the man, who is given headship.

This does not make men superior women are inferior its God's design to work through people.

Anna the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. Phanuel is the name also Peniel in the Old Testament.

Asher was one of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom. After Solomon's reign the kingdom got split into two.

Ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom.

Two tribes Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom.

In 722 B.C. the northern kingdom was taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Assyria came under Sargon II and destroyed them and carried them away captive. Their capital city was Damascus. The northern kingdom was taken captive and never returned.

Lost ten tribes of Israel?

It is a very popular sort of anti-Semitic theory. In fact, it goes so far as to say the ten tribes that were taken away captivity migrated across the north of Europe and came across the English Channel and ended up in England.

That is what the Worldwide Church of God taught for decades and decades and others have taught. British Israelism it is often called.

The book of Revelation in the end time, we have got 144 thousand witnesses. They were 12,000 from every tribe. So, we cannot take that literally if they are all gone.

Anna is long after 722 B.C, eight centuries later, is of the tribe of Asher. The ten northern tribes did go into captivity, but prior to that there had been a steady migration of those people down into the southern kingdom.

When we study the kings of Northern kingdom, how many kings were good kings?

Zero!

There was a remnant of believing Jews up there who were not happy with that. Those who wanted to be a part of the temple left the northern kingdom and migrated to Southern kingdom.

There was a steady migration downward because of the city of Jerusalem, because of the temple, and because of the priesthood. They came to the south so that by the time the northern kingdom was taken into captivity, there were people from every tribe, families from all ten tribes who had systematically migrated south.

2 Chronicles 30:6, *Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the command of the king: "Children of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.*

Part of that turning back to God was going south.

2 Chronicles 30:11, *Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.*

Eventually all the people from the twelve tribes had migrated. Particularly that occurred also during the revival under the King Josiah, as well as throughout the years.

So that when 603 comes the first deportation of Judah the southern kingdom to captivity and finally in 586 three deportations to Babylon. All those taken to Babylon represented all twelve tribes.

At the end of seventy years of that captivity when they come back, there are people from every tribe that come back under Nehemiah to re-establish themselves in the land so that 700 or so years later this woman still knows she is of the tribe of Asher.

They knew it up until then. When they stopped knowing it was in 70 A.D. when all the massacre of the Jews, one million 100 thousand Jews were killed in the slaughter of Titus Vespasian in 70 A.D., the destruction of Jerusalem, and over the next series of years, 985 Palestinian towns were literally massacred.

In the massacre and destruction of the temple and the slaughter that followed, they lost the records, they were all destroyed. Today Jews do not know what tribe they are from.

Anna was from Asher.

The ten tribes were not lost, they are still there and still around. They do not know what tribe they are in, God knows, and there's still enough from every tribe that in the future there will

be twelve thousand selected during the time of tribulation to preach the gospel.

Asher means happy.

Asher was the second son of Leah's maid, Zilpah, and the eighth son of Jacob, according to Genesis 29 and 30.

Anna lived with a husband seven years after her marriage.

V 37, and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Some versions say she lived as a widow for eighty-four years. Which would make her 104.

It is also possible that she was eighty-four. She is an older person, even at eighty-four!

She never left the temple.

Around the temple grounds there were some apartments. They were normally dwelling places for priests, around the outer court.

When a priest came to do his two weeks of service at the temple, he needed a place to stay. It just may well have been that because she was a widow so many years and because she

was continually at the temple, they just decided that she was so devout that they would just provide a place for that widow in the temple and she never left. She was not there idly. She was serving night and day with fasting and prayers.

She did not have a very complicated life. Never went anywhere. She was singularly and completely devoted to the service and worship of God.

A life devoted to God is a life well spent.

1. Devotion to God is all that matters.

What else matters in this life?

The Pharisees and scribes thought that their religious duties were what mattered. They rushed around the temple precincts that day performing their rituals, oblivious to this unique baby who was being dedicated to the Lord.

It gave them a sense of pride to be able to say, “All my life I have kept the commandments of the Torah.”

But they missed the Messiah because they were more devoted to themselves than to God.

The Sadducees thought that political influence and power were what mattered. “Life after death,” A group of them passed

within yards of the child and Anna as they debated the latest edict from Rome.

The temple merchants thought that a good income was what mattered. They hawked their temple money and sold their officially approved sacrificial animals within earshot of this humble couple and their new-born son. They lived well and left a nice inheritance to their children when they died. But they missed God's Saviour that day.

In contrast to all these, Anna knew that devotion to God is all that matters. She recognized the child as God's promised Messiah. She was wiser than all the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

2. Devotion to God is available to ALL

No matter what your station in life, you can devote yourself to the Lord, and that makes whatever you are and whatever you do count considering eternity.

Anna was a woman.

The rabbis did not approve of the same amount of instruction in the Torah being given to girls as to boys. They regarded women's minds as not adapted for such investigations.

The women were restricted to an area of the temple called “The Women’s Court.” They could not enter the inner court where the ceremonies were performed. According to Josephus, women and slaves could not give evidence in court.

Yet the Lord is pleased to include the testimony of Anna concerning Jesus. God is no respecter of persons. He is pleased with the devotion of any person, male, or female.

Anna was a widow.

She had been widowed at an early age. She easily could have grown bitter toward God. She could have complained of her loneliness.

Widows in that culture did not have much opportunity to get an education and learn a business or trade to provide for themselves. They were often the target of unscrupulous businessmen.

No doubt Anna had experienced a difficult life, yet she did not turn her back on God.

Psalms 68:5, *A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation.*

Anna took refuge under God’s protective care. Her trials drove her to deeper devotion to God, not away from Him.

Anna was elderly.

While the elderly were more respected in that society than they are in ours, they were still subject to the abuse of the unscrupulous.

In our society, the elderly are often viewed as useless. They cannot take care of themselves. They cannot make a living.

God does not view the elderly as useless or as a burden on society! If an elderly person is devoted to God, their life and death is precious in His sight.

No matter what your station in life—male or female, young or old, rich, or poor—you can be devoted to God and He will be pleased with your devotion.

The world may ignore or despise you, but God always has had such a godly remnant. They are the salt of the earth; they preserve the whole mass from corruption. You can be counted among them.

3. Devotion to God always involves worship, witness, and waiting.

Worship:

Most likely Anna did not live in the temple, but Luke means that she was there all the time. The word translated “serving” has the nuance of worship or service to God.

V 37, and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Fasting means going without food for some period of time and is usually joined with prayer.

For the Jews, the most common fast lasted from sunrise to sunset, although longer fasts are mentioned in the Bible.

The Day of Atonement was an annual national fast. Otherwise, fasting was done in times of personal or national distress, or as preparation for special times of seeking the Lord.

While there are no commands in the New Testament epistles for us to fast, there are examples of fasting (**Acts 9:9; 13:3; 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27**).

Personally, I have found fasting to be a beneficial way of setting aside time to seek the Lord in times where I needed to know His will or in times of crisis.

Anna's worship also took the form of prayers. Some of God's saints are especially gifted for the ministry of prayer in that He enables them to devote large blocks of time to it.

Part of that time involves interceding for others, but part of it also will be devoted to praise and thanksgiving. The main thing in prayer is to seek God and commune with Him.

Set aside time for fasting in your workplace:

Read His Word, sing some hymns or praise songs, and pray.

ACTS—

Adoration,

Confession,

Thanksgiving, and

Supplication.

Witness:

V 38, *And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

If your cup is brim-full, you cannot help but slop some of it on others. If you are excited about your relationship with the living

God who sent His Son to save you from your sins, people around you will know about it.

Part of living the Christian life is talking about it!

We all talk about the things we love.

Have you ever been around a sports fanatic?

What does he talk about?

Have you ever been around a young man or woman who has just fallen in love?

Worship first, then witness.

The reason Anna was telling everyone about the Lord Jesus was that she spent much time in private devotion with the Lord.

All too often, the reason that we do not bear witness is that we have lost our first love.

Waiting:

Not only Simeon and Anna, but others also were “looking for the redemption of Jerusalem”.

It refers to the spiritual redemption that God had long ago promised and now was bringing to fruition for His people.

(Isaiah 40:1, 9; 52:9; 63:4).

They were not infected by the carnal expectations of a mere worldly Messiah, in which most Jews indulged. They lived in the

faith of patriarchs and prophets, that the coming Redeemer would bring in holiness and righteousness, and that His principal victory would be over sin and the devil.”

4. Devotion to God and Christ are the same.

Anna was devoted to God, but the second she saw the baby Jesus, she thanked God and began to speak of Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Note:

God the Son and God the Father are inextricably joined in Scripture.

Psalm 2:7, *“I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*

This does not mean that the Father brought the Son into existence at a point in time. Rather, the “today” is the day of God’s decree. Since it is an eternal decree, it means that Christ is eternally the Son of God, one with the Father.

While we can never fully understand the nature of the Trinity, we must affirm the revealed truth of Scripture, that the eternal relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity is expressed as that of Father and Son.

This means that you cannot know God the Father apart from God the Son.

John 8:19, *Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also."*

1 John 2:23, *Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

You cannot separate God and Jesus Christ. Those who say they worship God but who deny the deity of the Son of God are sadly mistaken.

John 5:23, *that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.*

God the Son is the Redeemer of God's people. In the eternal decree of God, God the Father determined to send God the Son to bear the sins of His elect. The entire human race is in bondage to sin and under the just condemnation of God's law.

Galatians 3:13-14, *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

To understand the concept of “redemption,” you must keep in mind three things.

First, redemption implies forerunner bondage.

A free person does not need redemption. Slaves need redemption. Every person is born enslaved to sin and under the curse of judgment imposed by God’s holy law.

Second, redemption implies cost.

A price must be paid to buy the slave out of bondage. Since the wages of sin is death, that was the price to redeem us from our sins. A sinless substitute had to die in our place. Jesus Christ did that on the cross.

Third, redemption implies the ownership of that which is redeemed.

Since Christ bought us with His blood we are not our own.

1 Corinthians 6:20, *For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.*

You cannot be devoted to God unless you have been redeemed by His Son. That redemption cost Him dearly, but He offers it to you as a free gift that you can only receive by faith.

The instant you receive it, He will free you from sin and judgment. You can go your way singing His praises, devoting your life to Him who loved you and gave Himself for you!

Conclusion

On his deathbed, **Matthew Henry**, whose commentary on the whole Bible is still widely used almost 300 years after his death, said to a friend, “You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men—this is mine: that a life spent in the service of God and communion with Him, is the most pleasant life that anyone can live in this world.”

Anna would agree.

A life devoted to God is a life well spent.

A life devoted to anything else, no matter how noble, is a life ultimately wasted.

Whatever you do for a living, make sure that love for Jesus Christ is at the heart of why you are living. Then, whether you live a short or long life on this earth, you can have the assurance that you have spent it well.