

Galatians 4:4-5

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[0 : 00] Jesus. You'll turn in your Bibles to page 857 in the Black Church Bible.! I'll work out that people learn as much by observing models than they learn in the classroom.

In fact, people learn more by observing models than they learn in the classroom. That's been my experience, and I suspect it's been yours, and I think it's certainly the teaching in the New Testament.

For those of you who are parents, where did you learn about parenting? For those of you who are married, where did you learn about marriage?

In your job, where did you learn to do it? In preaching, it's certainly the case, isn't it? That you learn more from models than you do from the classroom.

You've seen people who've done it well, and you've got to learn often their voice sounds the same, isn't it? There's a generation of Welsh preachers that were trained under Barbara's husband, Geoff Thomas, and they all speak like this with big hands, and they wave like windmills.

[1 : 35] And you observe the model, and you seek to emulate the model, don't you? And I want to say to you this morning that we learn far more from observing models than we do by listening to all the theories of education.

It's why reading Christian biographies is so really vital and important. It's why finding people in this congregation who you can look to, and they can be your model, is so vital.

And Luke understands this. Let's just look at his purpose. Come back with me to the start of his gospel. You'll see why he's writing. He's writing for his patron, the man who supports him.

A man who's called Theophilus, that's his name. And he says, well let me read you one more, it's fine. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative, a report of the things that have been accomplished among us, have been fulfilled among us.

What has happened in Jesus is a fulfilment. Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers, servants of the word, delivered them to us.

[2 : 45] That is, my source is eyewitnesses. And so therefore it seemed good to me, also having followed all these things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you.

Most excellent Theophilus. Do you see, my research method is, Luke says, I want you to know that I investigated very carefully in order that I can write down an orderly account for you.

I didn't just sit down one day and think, oh, what do I remember about the Lord Jesus? Let me write it down. Now look at the first verse, that you may have certainty concerning the things which you've been taught.

In the original it is this, that you may know the things which you've been taught, certainty. The last word in which Luke uses in verse 4 is the word certainty.

Because he wants Theophilus' patron, the man who's supporting him, above all things, in this orderly account, this eyewitnesses sources that he's researching.

[3 : 52] He wants Theophilus to be certain, to back his life on it. Certain of what? Well, Luke proceeds to give us the fullest account of Jesus coming into the world. So look at chapter 1, verse 8.

Here's the coming of John the Baptist. He's the forerunner. He's the one that goes before the Lord Jesus. The angel speaks to Zechariah and tells him that his angel, his aged wife, Elizabeth, is about to give birth to a son.

Verse 18. Zechariah said to the angel, how do I know this? If I'm an old man, my wife is advanced in years. And so sure enough, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, the wife of Zechariah, she becomes pregnant in her old age.

And in her sixth month of pregnancy, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary. Look at verse 31. Verse 31. And the angel says, behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

And he will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and ever and ever. And Mary said, well, how will this be?

[5 : 01] Because I'm a virgin. The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come upon you. And the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child will be born to you and be called Holy, the Son of God. In the Creed, already this morning, we confessed together, haven't we, that Jesus is both of Mary and of God.

Early Christian, David Ignatius said that he was both made, that is, of Mary, and he is not made, that is, of the Holy Spirit. Both of Mary and of God.

And Matthew and Luke both account the virgin birth. Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, report that he is not the son of Joseph, but he is the son of Mary.

The Bible is very clear that it wants to say to you that Jesus Christ is truly human. But he is truly divine, he is not tainted by sin, he is born of God.

And therefore, because he is both fully God and fully man, he can bridge the gap between man and God, the God and man, because he is the God-man. Look at verse 38. And Mary said, behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.

[6 : 16] And the angel departed from her. And I want you to notice the song in 52-53. Mary praises God.

In verse 52, she says this, He's brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate. He's filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he sent away empty.

And so the birth of this child, who is the son of God, the birth of this child, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is going to be marked by humility.

And if you come to chapter 2, you will see that the Lord Jesus is born in Bethlehem. He's placed in a manger, chapter 2, verse 10. And the angel comes and announces the birth to shepherds.

Shepherds, we learned last week from Chris Humphrey, that the lowliest of society, they literally have no name. There's no names of the shepherds. They are lowly people.

[7 : 18] You don't worry too much about shepherds. They were not people of status. So chapter 2, verse 10, the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy, and it would be for all the people.

Chapter 2, verse 20, And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. Augustine said this famously to me, Without ceasing to be what he eternally was, he became what he eternally was not.

God became flesh. Luke says, I want you to have absolute, rock-solid certainty. Now let's follow what happened to Jesus.

He's circumcised on the eighth day. On the fortieth day, he's brought for presentation. Verse 21, I seduce them. The visit is timed by the law.

It's not random. Circumcision on the eighth day, They say that's the day that vitamin K, the blood-clotting agent, is at its maximum. So it's a good day for circumcision.

[8 : 22] Forty days later, he's presented at the temple. There's nothing haphazard, nothing random. The time table has been set down by God's law, and this is no chance encounter. And he goes to Jerusalem, verse 25, and he meets Simeon.

Now there's a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation, the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And then it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he'd seen the Lord's Christ. So Simeon is getting on in years, but he had a conviction that he will not die until he'd seen the Christ of God, the anointed ruler of God.

And he sees him. Verse 29. Lord, you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. Why?

Because my eyes have seen your salvation. He's seen Christ Jesus, the Son of Mary, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, forty days old.

[9 : 32] I've seen it. I've seen him. But I want you to notice that people were divided in their response to the Lord Jesus. Look at verse 34. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,

Behold, this trial is appointed for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, for a sign that is opposed.

And a sword will pierce your own soul also. Mary, you'll see him suffering. He will bring about division.

There will be those that rise up and greet him. There will be those that fall at him because they won't recognize him. There will be those that follow him. There will be those that recognize him and those that don't.

And a sword is going to pierce your heart. There will be those who Christianity, they will not even give him a second thought. They'll think he's unimportant.

And there will be those for whom Christianity is of infinite importance. C.S. Lewis said, The only thing that Christianity cannot be is moderately important.

[10:43] There will be those for whom Christianity is utterly irrelevant and unimportant. And there will be those for whom it is infinitely important. Now notice a prophet.

An old man. A six week old fragile little baby boy. There's another prophet there. A prophetess. Her name is Anna. Who's 36. And notice that Anna is the daughter of Fanuel of the tribe of Asher. She is very old. I know that when you're 23, everyone seems very old, don't they?

Maybe you're young. You're a teenager here this morning. And you're mid-twenties. She was very, very old. But we notice she was 84.

She's been widowed after seven years of marriage. And she was so devoted that she virtually lived at the temple. And she gave thanks to God and she praised God for the child. Look at verse 38.

[11:45] Look at verse 38. And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Now, just notice what we've seen this morning in the kind of whistle-stop tour. What have we seen? We've seen in Luke's gospel that the gospel, the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ comes from the humble.

Look at how Luke gives prominence to women. To Elizabeth. To Mary. To Anna. And it's not as though he neglects the agent, is it?

The agent Zechariah. The agent Elizabeth. The agent Anna. The agent Simeon. All of those are involved in the coming of the Christ.

The gospel is going to come. The Christ is going to come. And he's going to solve the greatest problem of humankind. But he will not do it in a way that pays any concession to our pride.

[12:53] He will do it in the way of humility. And the people involved will be women and aged people. Look at verse 39. And when they performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

Absolute obscurity. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favour of God was upon him. So where's my model for living?

That's my point this morning. When I go into the sales this week, I'm confronted with all the bargains. As I face 2020 with all my plans and all my thoughts of getting fit, who is my model? Who is my model? My model is Simeon and Anna. And your model is Simeon and Anna. They are a pattern for Christian living today.

And I cannot think of anyone in the Bible who is more of a pattern for me today, living the Christian life. Today in 2020, than Simeon and Anna. Apart from the Lord Jesus himself. Look at them. Here is our mentor.

[14:03] Here is our pattern. This is my pattern for living. Simeon and Anna. Here they are in Jerusalem, in the city of God, living in the shadow of the temple. The huge religious infrastructure is in place.

You've the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. And then there are these two little people. I don't know if you've been to the Vatican in Rome.

I went when I was about 12 years old. I was visiting my aunt in Rome. And at that point, our church didn't have a building. It met in a kind of sixth form common room.

And what I remember about that room was for you is that it was very serious, that kind of church series. But there were deaf leopards and Iron Maiden posters all along the walls. And there was kind of...

We met in a... We met in Forest and Comprehensive in Cumberland y Cayule. That was the name of the place. It was obscure. You kind of went up these steps and you went in.

[15:06] And then we went to Rome and you visit the Vatican. If you've ever been there, it is magnificent. It is a multinational corporation. And it was like I...

We kind of went to this little corner shop church. The Vatican was so impressive. And yet we met in a... Dirty, sixth form common room. And Simeon and Anzal must have been overwhelmed by this, wasn't they?

All the religious structures in place. But Jesus is fragile. Born out of wedlock. Born in obscure Bethlehem.

Born in a stable. He's placed in the animals' feed trough. We were given... You know, where's Wally? A friend of mine says a book called Find the Dragon.

You know where's Wally? And you have these scenes, don't you? Really, really busy scenes. Really important scenes. And you have to find either Wally or the dragon. And you look and you can see everything, but you can't see Wally.

[16:10] And then once you spot him, once you spot him, you can't unspot him, can you? He's so insignificant in the drawing. But once you see him, you can't see, that's what this is like here.

It seems so insignificant. This baby, born out of wedlock, born in obscure Bethlehem, born in a stable. He's placed in an animal feeding trough. He comes to the Holy City at six weeks old, barely. And here's an old man who has received a promise. And here's a woman, they're 84 years of age. And they're very, very much in the minority, but they're looking for the Christ. And the religious hierarchy is in place.

The chief priests are meeting. The elders are meeting. And they all seem to be going through the motions. They've got no sense of expectation. And so what you have, at this point in history, is you have a nation of hope, living in hopelessness.

And you have a people of expectation, living without any sense of expectation. And he comes to the world, but the world doesn't recognize him.

[17:18] And it does not receive him. But Simeon does. And Anna does. And they are people of hope, living with hope, surrounded by a people of hope, living in hopelessness.

And I want to say to you, that's exactly our situation. Next week, the business of church life will start up, won't it?

Little stars will start up, gloriously, on a Monday morning. We'll move things around. And put things out. And language class will start up on a Wednesday.

And kids clubs on Thursday. and Ealing Lumpstein talks. And the book tables. And Sunday school. And presbytery will come.

And there will be committee meetings for those of us. And discussions and decisions all in place. But if we're honest, little real expectation of the coming of Christ.

[18:26] People with hope, living as if there was no hope. If Simeon and Anna were here today, they'd be quaint. They'd be oddities.

They'd be oddballs. Barely holding onto life. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. But this is authentic Christianity.

Authentic Christian experience. We are, as God's people, anticipatory people. When looking to the future, God has promised me that in life I'll have six experiences.

And so far I've only had two. I was born and by His grace I was born again. What are the other four? What are the other four experiences I will have?

Death, resurrection, judgment, and entering into the new heavens and the new earth. So I've had two and I've got four to count.

[19:35] Don't you think we should be like Simeon and Anna? We live in anticipation, future focused mindset. Will it be today? Chapter 2, verse 25. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and devout waiting.

Waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Chapter 2, verse 38. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Listen, if you will, to the song of Simeon in the Anglican prayer book. Which comes, it's in the Anglican service of morning and evening prayer every week. Listen to these words. Now let your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For mine eyes have seen your salvation which ye prepared before the face of all people to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to the glory of your people Israel. You see, Cranmer got it.

Cranmer got it. That Anna and Simeon were to be a constant reminder to prayer book Anglicans that Simeon is our model and that Anna is our model. That we're looking for the day.

[20 : 49] It's a weekly reminder. Do not live for the day today but live for the day which is coming. And allow our hope to spur us on.

How are we to live holy and godly lives as we wait for the day? How are we to live while we wait for the blessed hope? And in the light of waiting for that blessed hope Titus says we say no to ungodliness.

And we live for holy, godly, upright lives. That is how we're to live. So here's Charles Simeon. Charles Simeon was an African rector in Cambridge.

And his church you can still go and see it today. It's opposite King's College Chapel. And Charles Simeon laboured there for the gospel for over 50 years. He endured great opposition. But Charles Simeon saw many young men and women become Christians.

And one of those young men was a young man by the name of Henry Martin. And Henry Martin had a wonderful career ahead of him. He was a remarkable linguist. But when he came to Christ he shaved his back and all that.

[22 : 01] And he went to India. And he went to Iran. He lived in Iran. modern day Iran. And he began to translate the scriptures in those countries.

Fluent Farsi speaker. At the age of 31 Henry Martin went to Turkey but he died. At the age of 31. Charles Simeon his old minister his old boss placed in his drawer a portrait of Henry Martin.

And every morning one biographer said Simeon would walk past that portrait and stop. And he would look into the face of the painted Henry Martin and he would say be serious.

Be earnest. Don't trifle. I won't trifle. And that's living for the day isn't it? Be serious. Be earnest. Don't trifle.

Don't trifle. I won't trifle. Simeon and Anna expected waiters for the day. The first advent has come with all its fun.

[23 : 12] But through it all the second advent is still coming. I don't want you to know the story of Bishop Frank Retief. He was a minister in Cape Town in 1993.

Four men broke into his church in the evening service. They took out automatic weapons and they killed 11 members of the congregation. There were 58 people in that church wounded as a result of the breaking.

And as a result of that Frank Retief said I formulated my five minute rule. And my five minute rule is this whatever is causing me anxiety and worry right now imagine I was to die and go to heaven in five minutes or the Lord Jesus was to come back in five minutes.

How does the issue look in the light of my five minutes till my death or the coming of the Lord Jesus? Think about this week.

What have you got stressed with? What have we got anxious about? What have we lost it with the children over? How does that look in the light of the five minute rule?

[24 : 20] Frank Retief said he formulated the five minute rule not to live for now but to live in the light of the imminence of eternity. And that is how Simeon and Anna lived.

They had a promise. Anna was looking every day 84 years of age but she did not lose that sense of expectation. What about you? Will you and I as we move into 2020 will we live by the five minute rule?

He is coming and it could be at any moment. And how does that which causes myself and you so much anxiety how does that look in the light of his return?

Simeon and Anna are examples are models are patterns are mentors be serious be honest don't trifle I won't trifle let's pray but I will as far as as as as as as