

New testament living Luke 24:49-53
CF Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36

Proposition: The Christian life, properly understood is to be daily guided by God (not rules) on the most awesome adventure.

I believe that being close to God makes me a happy person. When I feel his presence I also feel a divine joy that goes above and beyond natural reason. Another reason I find myself excited about life is that I find to depend on the Holy Spirit is to be a part of life's biggest and best adventure. Let's turn to these final words in Luke's gospel.

Luke 24:49-53

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

49I will send you the one my Father has promised, but you must stay in the city until you are given power from heaven.

50Jesus led his disciples out to Bethany, where he raised his hands and blessed them. 51As he was doing this, he left and was taken up to heaven. 52After his disciples had worshiped him, they returned to Jerusalem and were very happy. 53They spent their time in the temple, praising God.

The disciples were living in the ultimate exciting times in world history. Just 40 days earlier Jesus had been crucified cruelly on Calvary and when he died the disciple's dreams were shattered. They didn't know what to think, where to go, what to do, they were depressed.

When they started hearing stories of Jesus appearing to believers (12 appearances in all) they just couldn't believe it but eventually did. During these appearances he explained to them why the cross and the resurrection and how the OT prophecies clearly foretold these events. These Christians who ate with him and listened to him and touched him over this 40 day period became world changers.

Now some people who are seeking after God will say to you, yeh but if I saw and heard and touched in person, I would believe to. Would you? When you look at who Jesus appeared to there were no cynics, no sceptics only believers. He appeared to those who believed in Him. If you are a seeker here tonight you want to find out if the God of the bible is true, you want to see first then you will believe. Know that you need to believe in him first then you will begin to see him. We walk by faith and not by sight. But why, why is faith so vital? God must get you to learn the language of faith here because it is the language of eternity. Jesus only appeared to those who had already committed their lives to Him. Now after 40 days of hearing Him teach, of being in His presence He now leads them out of Jerusalem across a brook called Kidron, up the slope of the Mount of Olives, past the garden of Gethsemane. And he goes to the top of the hill called the Mount of Olives. And there He lifts his hands to pronounce a blessing on them.

And He is caught up into heaven.

John 14 says that He left earth to go to heaven to go to prepare a place especially, specifically for you.

The book of Hebrews tells us that he had to return to heaven to function there as our high priest. There He is saying that our sins are covered by His blood.

Here he says to the disciples I am going to heaven so that the Father can send power to you.

John 14:26

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

26But the Holy Spirit will come and help you, because the Father will send the Spirit to take my place. The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I said while I was with you.

Jesus ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us and to be interceding and advocating for us but most importantly He went home so that the Father could send the third person of the trinity and begin a new era

for believers. Jesus came to bring about a whole new way of living with God almighty. It had been prophesied so many times in the OT, my favourite passages being Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36.

Jeremiah 31: 33*Here is the new agreement that I, the LORD, will make with the people of Israel:*

"I will write my laws

on their hearts and minds.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

34*"No longer will they have to teach one another to obey me. I, the LORD, promise that all of them will obey me, ordinary people and rulers alike. I will forgive their sins and forget the evil things they have done."*

The OT prophets said that there would be a day when God's will would not be written on tablets of stone but on the hearts and minds of his people. Hebrews 8 is where the new covenant is articulated.

Hebrews 8

A Better Promise

1*What I mean is that we have a high priest who sits at the right side of God's great throne in heaven. 2***He also serves as the priest in the most holy place inside the real tent there in heaven. This tent of worship was set up by the Lord, not by humans. 3***Since all priests must offer gifts and sacrifices, Christ also needed to have something to offer. 4***If he were here on earth, he would not be a priest at all, because here the Law appoints other priests to offer sacrifices. 5***But the tent where they serve is just a copy and a shadow of the real one in heaven. Before Moses made the tent, he was told, "Be sure to make it exactly like the pattern you were shown on the mountain!"*

Hebrews 8 begins to talk about Moses the bearer of the old covenant being like a shadow or a forerunner of Jesus the one who brings in a new covenant relationship with God. There are some amazing contrasts between Moses and the law and Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Moses goes up Mount Sinai in the middle of the desert and alone to receive the first covenant. Jesus goes up the Mount of Olives in the centre of the Promised Land and surrounded by believers to send the second covenant. When Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai he ate nothing. When Jesus spent 40 days in Jerusalem after his resurrection he was eating and celebrating with his disciples. When Moses came down the mountain he lifted up his hands with the 10 commandments carved in them on stone and then smashed them because the people were sinning and worshipping a golden calf. When Jesus ascends the Mount of Olives He lifts up his hands and blesses them and the people rejoice and worship. When the law was given 3000 idol worshippers were killed. When the Holy Spirit was given 3000 people were saved that day. The law said do, do, do, and follow all these rules and regulations. Now when Jesus gives the new covenant he says done, done, done, finished, and completed. The new covenant written on your hearts is a whole new way of living.

You might ask as many have. Well if the Old covenant was not good enough and had to be improved, why give it at all? Simple. The reality is that all men and woman have a tendency to think they can live without God. They can be self sufficient. They can sort out all life's problems themselves. That they are good people. There are books written which say "I'm OK, you're OK".

When the law was given God declares through it loud and clear "I'm OK, you're not" and here is why. These are the standards of what goodness looks like it and compared to these standards every person has failed hopelessly and miserably.

Galatians 3 tells us that the purpose of the law was to be a schoolmaster to drive us to a realisation that we need a saviour and a redeemer, and that we need God in our lives personally.

Rituals and religion just don't cut it. You can't get right with God by doing good things because you just aren't good enough.

Hebrews 8:6-8

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

6Now Christ has been appointed to serve as a priest in a much better way, and he has given us much assurance of a better agreement.

7If the first agreement with God had been all right, there would not have been any need for another one. 8But the Lord found fault with it and said,

"I tell you the time will come,

when I will make

a new agreement

with the people of Israel

and the people of Judah.

How many of you have realised that being an employee can be tricky?

How many of you have realised that being in a family or being a parent can be really tricky?

How many of you know that often in life things are just tough?

When things go wrong or we are struggling in some area in our lives humanity has a tendency to go back to old covenant thinking. Hey my kids are playing up give me 10 steps to sorting them out. Parenting tools are great but are they the best answer?

Hey my boss treats me awfully – give me a book on how to win over a grumpy boss. Hey I can't work out what to do about my financial problems please give me 5 certain steps to make me wealthy. Humanity has a tendency to want rules and regulations and a to do list. Old covenant thinking. Now there are helpful books on lots of the areas of life we find tricky but are they the best form of counsel? Well isn't there an answer for everything in the bible? Tell me where in the bible does it tell you what to do when your teenager starts missing school or dating for the first time. Where is it? It's not there.

The church is a New Testament community but there is always a tendency to fall back to old covenant ways of thinking, give me the list of to do's. Give me the 10 steps. Jeremiah said that God would write his will on our hearts and on our minds when the new covenant came about. Jesus said the Holy Spirit will come to comfort and to guide you. Proverbs says of this covenant that God will put His desires in your heart to will and to do what He wants you to do. Books are good. Courses are good but the greatest; the best form of direction comes from what the Holy Spirit is writing on your mind and your heart.

Here's a radical piece of church history. In the first 40 years after Pentecost those first Christians turned the world upside down. Millions became Christians and were willing to die for their faith. Supernatural signs and wonders were common place and ... not one of those Christians had a new testament. They taught, they witnessed, they prayed with such power and they had no bible, just what the Holy Spirit prompted them to do.

God's will appeared to be written on the tablets of their hearts. It wasn't about regulations but about relationship. And then decades later the Lord inspires writers to write the NT, not to become another rule book but rather as a testimony as to what they had been doing already.

Humanity wants the rule book; the to do list to solve all our problems and we might even look at the bible in such a way, even the NT. But that would be a mistake. When I read the NT or hear the word being spoken it corrects me if I think I have heard from God that it is OK to sleep with my girlfriend then I read that those who are immoral will have no part in the kingdom of heaven and I am corrected. I think it's OK to cheat on my tax return and then I read that I am to be a good citizen and pay my taxes.

I sense God calling me to witness to a neighbour and then that day I pick up the word and the passage is all about witnessing and I think, hooray, I got it right.

How does God want us to live under the new covenant, what does NT living look like?

It looks like this, each day moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, we say Lord what do you want me to do. What is your will for me in this relationship, this business deal, this sporting group?

Suddenly you find yourself with a strong urge to phone your sister right out of the blue, and so you phone her and she thanks you so much for your time because just then she needed encouragement.

You are working and suddenly the idea drops into your head, stop work now and go and make a coffee for that guy over there. And you do and his reaction seems disproportionate – something bigger is going on. You are heading off to the shops and you feel God saying, stop right now and worship me. And so you do and you find that He is so close to you while you are shopping and you are led to pray prophetically for other customers.

That is what NT living is all about.

If you and I treat the bible as a book of laws and rules and a to do list we will become dry and boring people. If on the other hand we allow the Spirit of God to write His will on our minds and hearts daily and we learn to obey those promptings, those leadings, then we will live a life at the highest level of adventure and inspiration. That's how those early Christians were able to turn the world upside down in those first 40 years. It was all about hearing His voice and just obeying the Lord and trusting Him to turn up.

Philippians 2 declares that it is God who works in you to both will (that's the desire) and to do (that's the power) His good pleasure.

So if I am just loving the Lord and listening for His voice He will put His will into my mind and into my heart, His desires become my desires and then when I act on those promptings He gives you and I power to do what He wants us to do.

When He says give that gift, forgive that person, take a break, give a hug to him, take your wife some flowers, go and lay hands on your sleeping child and rebuke the enemy's attacks over him. When you hear and you just do those things – the power of God turns up. The results are disproportionate to the actions. It's fun and it's powerful. If you are led by the Spirit you will have daily testimonies to encourage yourself and others.

Friends, brothers, sisters, Jesus ascended so that the Holy Spirit could descend upon your life and mine. It's no longer about rules, or regulations or a to do list. It's all about relationship, just listening to His voice and responding moment by moment to what He is writing in your mind and on your heart. I pray that you and I will steer clear of the tendency to look for rules and lists and instead seek after Him and live the adventure that you were made for.