

Following Christ's Lead Into 2024

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] So, Psalm 98 is our first psalm of praise this morning, Psalm 98, and it's on page 129. We're singing verses 1 to 6. The tune is Peter's psalm.

O sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders he has done. His right hand and his holy arm the victory have won. The Lord declared his saving work and made it to be known to all the nations of the world.

His righteousness is shown. Psalm 98, verses 1 to 6. And we'll stand to sing. If you're able to stand, please stand. His right hand and his holy arm the victory have won.

The Lord declared his saving work and made it to be known.

To all the nations of the world, his righteousness is shown.

[1 : 29] His death, but love and faithfulness, he has remembered them.

The covenant, he made with him the house of Israel.

And all the nations of the earth have seen what God has done.

His right hand and his holy arm the victory have won.

His right hand and his holy arm the victory have won. His right hand and his holy arm the victory have won. The Lord, O all we are, shall love be and rejoice.

[2 : 29] Make music and be children, to them lift up your voice.

With heart, his music to the Lord. With heart, his graces sing.

With trumpet and with glory rejoice. Before the Lord the King.

Let's join together now in prayer. We're praying specifically for the children and for the Sunday school. Lord our God, help us, we pray, to rejoice today in your presence here as we gather to worship you.

And we thank you for the children who are with us. We thank you for all the young folk and children who belong to the congregation and their homes and families. We pray for them today.

[3 : 33] And we ask, O Lord, that they may progress in the knowledge of the Lord as their Savior. And we pray that you'll bless the teaching they receive from week to week in their own homes, in the Sunday school here and elsewhere.

We thank you for the way that they form such an important part of the congregation's life. And we pray that we may continually bear them before you in your presence in prayer.

And so we ask now as we seek to wait upon you here that you'll bless them. And as they continue, O Lord, to attend upon Sunday school and creche and tweenies, we ask that your own blessing will continue to be with us.

Hear us, we pray now, and pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. My children, the Sunday school is looking today at the story of Simeon and Anna.

You'll find an account of that in Luke chapter 2 and from verse 27 or so. And at verse 27, we read about Simeon. He was a holy man, a man who was waiting for something that God had promised in the Old Testament, and that was the coming of the Savior.

[4 : 43] And he was actually told, he had been told by God that he would not die until he had actually seen for himself the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when the Savior was born, some time after that, Simeon came to the temple, and the parents of Jesus brought the child, the infant Jesus, just to follow out what was required in the law of God.

And at verse 28, we read, And also we find Anna, also mentioned in the next part of the chapter.

So, Simeon and Anna were both waiting for this one important event of the birth of the Savior, the coming of the Savior. And this is what Simeon did after seeing Jesus, the infant Jesus.

He took him up in his arms, and he blessed God. Now, this is one of my favorite passages in the whole Bible. It's such a wonderful passage. The infant Jesus, and there's the old man, Simeon, waiting for the coming of Jesus.

[6 : 08] And there he is, and as he's looking at Jesus, as he takes him up in his arms and embraces him in his arms, he looks down at him and says, Now, Lord, I can go in peace, because my eyes have seen your salvation.

Isn't that an amazing thing? That he could say of this infant child, there is God's salvation in my arms. And now I can go from this world, he said, in peace.

He was full of thanks, full of gratitude to God, that God had fulfilled his promise, not just for him, but indeed for all who would come to be saved through Jesus.

And he put it there even, for all people, this is a revelation. This is your revelation for them. Now, from that, there are two or three things that we can say about ourselves or apply to ourselves.

First of all, you need to take Jesus up. I'm speaking especially to the young ones, but it's true for us all. You need to take Jesus up in your heart the same way as Simeon took him up in his arms.

[7 : 24] Just picture Simeon reaching out and taking the infant Jesus like that into his arms. Well, this is what we have the opportunity to do ourselves, that we can reach out and by faith and by trust, we can bring Jesus into our hearts.

We can have Jesus coming to live in our hearts as we embrace him, as we receive him, as he offers himself to us in the Bible, in the Gospel.

And then we can be full of joy as well. We can be full of joy because we then have salvation in our lives, in our hearts, God's salvation. Just as Simeon could say, now my eyes have seen your salvation, so we can say, having Jesus in your life, you have God's salvation in him.

So today, young ones and old ones, we can embrace Jesus, welcome him into our lives, and so rejoice and be glad and be happy that we have God's salvation in him.

Now, Simeon did this in public. Now, that's important as well. He wasn't embarrassed that people were seeing this, that people were hearing him saying this.

[8 : 41] And when you have taken up Jesus into your heart, and when you hold Jesus in your heart, and when he becomes precious to you, then you want to tell the whole world about him.

Because what makes him precious to you as a savior is what you want others to have as well. And it's wonderful to hear of you young folks yourselves, children, telling others about the Sunday school, about how good it is to learn about Jesus.

That's you just like Simeon telling the world how precious Jesus is. So today, Simeon and Anna tell us the importance of taking Jesus to ourselves, the importance of rejoicing in Jesus, being glad that we have him, and the importance of telling the world that this is the savior who is for them as well, Jesus Christ, the Lord.

So may God bless these words. Let's say the Lord's prayer now together. Amen. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

[10 : 00] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

We're going to sing again now. We're singing this time in Psalm 25. Psalm 25 in the Sing Psalms version, page 29. Another tune is Finart, and we're singing verses 1 to 7.

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. I trust in you continually. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my foes gloat over me. No one who sets his hope in you will ever suffer such disgrace.

But those who act with treachery, humiliating shame, will face. So to the tune Finart, verses 1 to 7, to God's praise. Let us sing.

Let us sing. Let us sing. Let us sing. Let us sing. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. I trust in you continually.

[11 : 09] Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my foes go over me.

No one who sets his hope in you will ever suffer such disgrace, but those who act with treachery, humiliating shame will face.

O Lord, reveal to me your ways, and all your paths help me to know.

Direct and guide me in your turn, instruct me in the way to go.

You are my Saviour and my God, all day I hope in you alone.

[12 : 41] Remember, Lord, your love and grace, which from past ages you have shown.

Do not recall my sins of youth, or my rebellious evil ways.

Remember me in your great love, for you, O Lord, are good always.

Okay. We're going to read from God's Word in the Gospel of Luke. And it's chapter 24. We're reading verses 36 through to the end of the chapter.

This is Luke's account of those who met with Jesus after his resurrection, as they were traveling on the road to a village called Emmaus. You'll find that from verse 13, and the incident as it's described there.

[14 : 11] And then from verse 36, Jesus having spoken to them and taught them as to who he was, and the scriptures being fulfilled.

He said then in verse 36, And when he said to them, And when he said to them, He showed them his hands and his feet.

And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat? And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, That everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

[15 : 43] You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city till you are clothed with power from on high.

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.

And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, blessing God. Amen. May God bless to us again this reading of his word.

Let's now call upon him again in prayer. Our gracious God, we thank you for the testimony of your word, that the fulfillment of your promises, given so long ago, came to be fully realized in the person of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you today, Lord, for what we have read, even in this short passage, and the words that we have been singing as they describe your salvation. And we thank you for all that has come to us in him, and for everything, Lord, that you have brought to us by way of your redemption, your salvation, the forgiveness of our sins.

[17 : 04] Lord, help us, we pray today, to not only embrace these great truths for ourselves, but to embrace you as that person in whom we have salvation. for we know that there is no other name given under heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved.

And so help us, Lord, we pray today, to have our trust deposited in you, to have our lives given over to you, to be ruled by you, and to give ourselves to you, to your service, while we have the opportunity of doing so in this life.

We thank you today, Lord, that we gather as worshippers of your great name, that you have been exalted to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father on high, and that you receive the worship of your people as we worship you today as God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We give thanks, O Lord, for the revelation you have given of yourself and of the way in which we find in the very mystery, but beauty of the Godhead, our redemption to be placed.

We give thanks, O Lord, to you as our Father, who sent the Son into the world, as to give him to the death of the cross. And we give thanks, O Lord, to you for coming into the world and for giving of yourself obediently and fully to the death which we deserve, but could never fulfill ourselves.

[18 : 31] And we give thanks for all that that death accomplished, for the way in which the will of God not only expressed in him, but also the wrath of God coming to rest upon him instead of his people, and the justice of God satisfied fully.

We bless you, Lord, today for the work of your Holy Spirit, and we thank you that the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. And we pray today that that may be our experience here, that however we appear before you, whatever our circumstances in life may be, and whatever our relationship with you presently is, Lord, we pray that today all of us will leave this gathering as people who know the Lord for ourselves, and to come to be as we saw with Simeon, embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and to take you up into our hearts, and to dwell believingly upon you for every day that goes by.

So bless us, we pray, once again as a congregation of your people. Lord, we thank you for every encouragement that you give us, for every way in which your blessing is revealed to us, and for every way that we can still wait upon you for all our worship services and all our related activities throughout each week.

We thank you for all that you enable us to do, for all that you enable us to carry out. Lord, we pray again that you would bless all of these activities and enterprises that we are privileged to be part of and to join in with.

Lord, we pray that you would especially bless the gospel, for we know that whatever activities we engage in or organize or set up, that they are to be subsumed under our concern for the glory of your name, through the blessing of your word, through your salvation coming to be known by those who come under the teaching of your word.

[20 : 30] We ask today that you'd bless us in all the various ways in which we need your blessing, O Lord. Bless us in our families and homes. Bless us in our relationships, one with another, in marriages, in being parents and grandparents, and bless again our children and our grandchildren.

We ask, Lord, today that you would be pleased to receive them to yourself in blessing and to carry out further their standing in the gospel so that they may come, Lord, to be truly rooted and grounded in the Lord himself.

We ask your blessing for every activity that we engage in from day to day and pray that you would continue, Lord, to encourage us by the work of your Spirit being made known amongst us.

We ask your blessing today to be with all of our number who have difficulties and trials to contend with in the course of their lives. We ask, O Lord, that any of ourselves here present or watching online who have trials today to contend with will know of your upholding and supporting of them and of your encouragement.

Draw us, we pray, to yourself amongst all the changes and the turns of life in your providence. Help us, we pray, to constantly reflect upon your wisdom and your right to rule our lives.

[21 : 56] And we pray that you would give us a willing heart, O Lord, day by day to place our trust in you. We remember, too, Lord, all today in our community who have suffered loss in these days or recent times.

We pray that you bless those who have lost loved ones and who mourn over them and continue to miss them from their lives. We pray for them and we pray for their comfort. You alone are the great comforter who can comfort in a way that none other can.

And we pray that you would grant that comfort to them today and to all of us, Lord, in our circumstances. Whenever we have circumstances of trial and pain, of disappointment, of unexpected events, we pray, Lord, that you would grant that we may be drawn to yourself.

and remember, we pray all who help others in their time of need. We thank you for all in our community who attend to us by way of nursing care and medical practices, both in hospital and also in the hospice in Bethesda, in our care homes.

We thank you again for the provision that is made for us there. We pray that you would bless those who attend to us in our times of bereavement and sorrow. Remember, the undertaker, his staff, we thank you for them and for the way that they are so helpful to us in these times of need.

[23 : 23] We pray that you will continue to provide for them as each day goes by. And we ask you a blessing for all others in our community who carry out such valuable service for all the emergency services.

We pray for the street pastors who go out in the late evenings and early mornings. And Lord, we ask that you would keep them safe. We pray that you would bless their ministry in their community.

We pray that they may be of much benefit to those that they meet with. And we ask that you would help them as they seek to encourage others, that you would grant encouragement to themselves.

ourselves. We pray too that you'd bless us in our further waiting upon you here. And we ask that your blessing will be with us throughout our nation at this time and these difficult times.

We ask that you'd bless those who are suffering different ways from lack of work or lack of income. And we pray that you would, Lord, help them and help them to come to trust in you, to know the riches of eternal life.

[24 : 30] Even though we know that our financial and economic situation is in itself important. Grant to us, Lord, that we have our affection on those things which are above, those things which are unseen, these riches that are within your salvation and provision for us in Christ Jesus.

Remember our rulers. Lord, be with them, we pray, in different governments and administrations. We pray for wisdom for them. We pray especially for the light of your gospel truth to come to dwell in their hearts and to come to guide their minds and their thoughts.

We pray throughout the world, Lord, today, that where there is conflict, war, strife, terrorism, lack of resources, devastation, earthquake, and floods, O Lord, we pray that throughout the world your own kingdom may advance, that we may, as we have been thinking and reading through and saying the Lord's Prayer, help us truly to know, Lord, and to come to experience your will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

And we pray that your kingdom will advance. Remember the places in the world where there is such devastation of war. We think of the Middle East at this time and ask that you would bless those who are seeking to bring peace of a proper kind to these places, Gaza and Israel.

We pray for Ukraine and their situation, asking, Lord, that you'd continue to bless them and to bless your people there. And we ask that you'd continue to bless those of them who are with us here in this congregation as a family.

[26 : 14] Lord, continue. We pray to provide for them. Help us to continue to pray for them and for all who belong to that nation at this time. We ask that you would continue to bless them with that persevering spirit that would seek to resist aggression and to seek to live their lives again in freedom.

And so bless us now, we pray, and hear our prayer. Pardon our many sins, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise this time in Psalm 21.

Psalm 21, and that's in the Scottish Psalter this time, verses 1 to 6. The King, in Thy great strength, O Lord, shall very joyful be.

In Thy salvation, rejoice, how vehemently shall he. And as we read through the words of this psalm, we think of the Lord Jesus Christ himself in whom they are so wonderfully fulfilled and how he himself has come to rejoice in the salvation that he has provided himself and come with blessings to occupy the crown that's now upon his head at God's right hand.

So Psalm 21, we're singing verses 1 to 6, and the tune this time is Paisley, the King, in Thy great strength, O Lord. The King, in Thy great strength, O Lord, shall very joyful be.

[27 : 56] And Thy salvation, rejoice, how vehemently shall he.

Thou hast bestowed upon him all that his heart would have, and Thou from him didst not withhold what e'er his lips to crave.

For Thou with blessings him previst of goodness manifold, and Thou hast set upon his head a crown of purest gold.

When he decided life of thee, Thou life to him didst give, in such a land of peace that he forevermore should live.

in that salvation in that salvation wrought by thee, his glory is made great.

[29 : 46] Honor and comely majesty thou hast upon him said, because that Thou forevermore most blessed hast him made, and Thou hast with Thy countenance made him exceeding glad.

Well, for a short time, let's turn again to the passage we read in Luke 24, and looking this morning at the final few verses from verse 50. Then he, Jesus, led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them.

While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

We want to look at this passage under the general title of Following Christ's Lead into 2024. In other words, that as the passage deals with Jesus leading these disciples, we learn much that will benefit us, we hope, as we seek to follow his leading and guidance of us through the year that has just very recently begun.

Luke ends his gospel, his book, the gospel of Luke, as he began. He ends it with worship, the worship of God, as he began, with a reference in different ways to the worship of God.

[31 : 43] And of course, in between, Luke fills the gospel with an account of Christ's ministry from his birth through to his death and here his resurrection and ascension to glory.

And the focus really in these verses from the beginning of this chapter is on the fact that this in fact is the same person who died who is now meeting with these disciples and showing himself to them and then taken up from them into heaven.

And that's an important point. It's not a different Jesus who appeared after his resurrection and in these passages here to the Jesus they knew before he died.

It's the same person, the same Jesus who died and rose again and now comes to be taken to heaven. And in verse 42 you can see a reference there to the fact that it's still very much the human Jesus.

He took this piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate before them. In other words, he demonstrates this is not really a spirit that is not some ghost-like phantom-like figure.

[32 : 56] It is in fact Jesus himself. His humanity is still true humanity. Whatever we say of the meaning of that verse this is obviously a demonstration that he isn't still the same Jesus.

He's still the same person. He is still fully human just as he is God. And verses 50 to 53 then take us to see how the emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus, the appearance of Jesus after the resurrection and how that in a way logically in terms of God's provision of salvation and provision of all that's in Jesus as it logically in that sense flows into his ascension.

One thing just carries on into the other, the resurrection and the appearances carry on into his being taken from this world up into glory. And there are three things that we can look at from these final verses of Luke.

Three things that apply to our own Christian experience that we can look at as significant features of a Christian experience that I hope we all can follow today and if not then you have to ask yourself the question why can't I I'm not yet in that position to experience and enjoy these experiences.

What are they? Well here we find first of all this Christian life the life of following Jesus it's a life willing to be led by Christ.

[34 : 27] A life willing to be led by Christ. It's secondly a life secure within Christ's intercession. Within Christ's blessing we'll see that that takes us to think about his intercession.

And thirdly it's a life rejoicing in worshipping Christ. A life willing to be led by him a life secure within his intercession and a life that rejoices in worshipping him.

then he led them out as far as to Bethany. Now that's a deliberate reference it seems by Luke. It doesn't say that he walked with them as far as Bethany.

He actually says specifically and deliberately he led them out. He actually led them and he went before them. In other words they were following him.

He deliberately chose this way of progressing towards his ascension. It is Jesus who chose the route. It is Jesus who went before them.

[35 : 32] It is Jesus who led them. He was the leader until he was taken up from them. They were under his direction. And that itself seems a simple point is a very important factor in our discipleship.

In our living life under the direction and control and government of Jesus. It is life willing to be led by Christ.

A life that wants indeed to know more and more of his leading and of his guidance, of his going before us and of his being with us. In other words, the turns and the climbs and the descents, the experiences of providence which is God's providence, Christ's providence, all that we find in the turnings of our experiences from day to day, the gains and the losses, the highs and the lows, the pains and the joys, the unexpected things and the expected things, whatever they are as they combine together in the providence, in the lot that we have, that is by Christ's choosing.

That is by Christ's choosing. And our peace of heart comes from acceptance of that great fact.

Because we will never have that peace of heart if we keep rebelling against the Lord and against His wisdom. Everything in your life today has been appointed by Jesus.

[37 : 08] Not just appointed in any old way, in a loose kind of a way, but appointed deliberately and appointed wisely. I think one of the things that we always need to come back, myself especially, again and again to, is the fact that it is the wise Savior, the wise God, who chooses the route for us.

It's not the one we would have chosen ourselves. If Jesus had left the route to these disciples and said to them, well on you go and I'll just follow you and just wherever you want to meet, wherever you want to stop, I'll meet with you there.

He led them out as far as Bethany. Is that how it is with your own life today?

Is he leading your life onwards day by day? Are you today willing to be led by this Jesus? Are you willing that your life will be patterned by his wisdom and his choice of the route for you?

That's all built into this very brief reference. He led them out as far as to Bethany. And not only that, but remember who this is and what his position is here.

[38 : 27] It's the risen Jesus who's leading them out. The Jesus who's conquered death. The Jesus for whom death is now behind him and having gained that victory over death and over the grave and over sin and over Satan and over the world, here he is leading his disciples on into further blessing.

It's the risen Jesus that's doing this. It's the risen Jesus, the one triumphant over death that actually leads his people onwards through life. And how important is that?

Because it means that in him and having him as your savior, as your leader, having your life willingly under his direction, it means that all the things that happen to you in your life, he and in him you are able to actually prevail over them and benefit from them and gain from them, however difficult they might be.

Because he's in charge of them and he's in charge of your life and in charge of the turns of your circumstances. Let me just take you to Psalm 68.

You turn briefly with me to Psalm 68 in the book of Psalms. I want to pick a few verses there because this is a psalm really about what we can call the divine conqueror.

[39 : 42] Words that apply very much to Jesus himself as they were fulfilled in him. And it's a psalm of praise by David to God. But notice how it begins.

God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered, and those who hate him shall flee before him. As smoke is driven, so you shall drive them away. But then if you turn to verse 7, O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the one of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel.

You see, there is God going out. Yes, it's a reference especially to Sinai, to the wilderness, to the journey that they have, which itself is symbolic in a sense to a measure of the journey that we have through this life.

And here is God going before his people. What happens when God goes before his people? Well, they are victorious in him. They march after him as he marches ahead of them.

Go to verse 12. The kings of the armies, they flee, they flee. The women at home divide the spoil. The conqueror has come back from his victory, and the spoils of victory are shared out.

[41 : 01] That is Jesus having conquered the grave. The spoils of his victory shared out to his people. Verses 18 to 19. You ascended on high, leaving a host of captives in your train, and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

These verses are quoted in the New Testament in regard to Christ's resurrection and then ascension. You ascended on high. Why did he ascend on high? To receive gifts for men, the gifts especially of the Holy Spirit and the gifts that come in God's salvation.

And then verse 28, a couple more verses. Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us. You see, there's David's prayer as he comes to seek that power that God has displayed as he marched ahead of his people and gave them victory.

He wants that power to be displayed, to be summoned again for his benefit and for his people's benefit. That's your prayer today, surely, as a Christian, that Christ would summon the power by which he rose from the dead, by which he ascended to glory, and that that power would come into your life increasingly day by day for your benefit.

And then at the end of the psalm, in verse 35, awesome is God from his sanctuary, the God of Israel. He is the one who gives power and strength to his people.

[42 : 35] Blessed be God. And where better do you see that than the likes of this passage in Luke where Jesus leads his people out, these disciples out to Bethany, where under his direction he comes to lead them into blessing, where his power is operating on their behalf and for them and in them and through them.

As we begin this new year, or as it's just newly recently begun, is this not our concern? Is this not our burden? Is this not how you would like your life to be lived?

To be lived willingly led by Christ. Willingly led so that the power of Christ comes day by day into your life, into your experience, into your circumstances so that through him you are able to proceed, you are able to prevail, you are able to go on, you are able to conquer the sin in your own life, you are able to conquer temptation, you are able to glorify him in the life you live, you are able to accept the difficulties that are as possible in your life, the unexpected events, the illnesses, the bereavements, the losses, the sorrows.

He led them as far as Bethany. And secondly, you find a life secure within Christ's intercession.

Now how do we come under his direction? How do we come to benefit from his leading of his people? How do we come to have ourselves actually in that situation?

[44 : 19] Well, of course, it is through trusting in him. And trusting in him means entrusting your whole life to him, giving your whole life over to him to be ruled by him, to be directed by him, as we saw in the first point, willingly.

There's such a thing nowadays as adaptive cruise control in some cars. And adaptive cruise control means that the car, when you set, it automatically keeps the right distance between you and the car in front.

So if that one slows down, it automatically slows your car down as well. And if that car in front of you stops, then the system applies the brakes in your car as well, and your car comes to a stop.

And it is so, so difficult, until you get used to the system, to keep your foot off the brake and just let the adaptive cruise control take control. Because your tendency is, when you see the car in front slowing down, your tendency is, push the brake just to make sure that your car is going to stop.

And that cuts out the adaptive cruise control. And that's, I think, a really useful illustration, I hope, of the challenge and the difficulties of handing your life over to Jesus.

[45 : 34] Because our tendency is to want to keep control, and at least keep a measure of control, over our own lives. We just don't have the willingness of ourselves to give our whole life over to Him.

But that's really what it has to come to. He doesn't want your, this little bit or that little bit of your life. He doesn't want you to hand over certain aspects of your life, and then keep control of the rest yourself.

That's not going to be of any use to us. You have to hand your life over to Him. For Him to willingly come to lead you through the issues of life, through death itself, and on into eternity.

And as He led them as far as Bethany, then lifting up His hands, He blessed them. It's a life secure within Christ's intercession. Now, why do I say intercession? Because there's nothing specifically mentioned there about intercession.

And yet I think that the language there, lifting up His hands, He blessed them, that language is indicative of the language of the Old Testament with regard to the priestly blessing or the high priest blessing of His people.

[46 : 47] Think of Numbers and the words in Numbers chapter 6 from verse 22. We often sometimes use them at baptism. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace, His peace. They're words of blessing in a priestly setting. They're words by which God has said the priest would put Aaron and his sons, would put His name upon the people of Israel, God's name.

In other words, they come under the security and the safety of God's name. And where is that fulfilled? It's fulfilled in Jesus and in His intercession. Because Jesus is still active on behalf of His people in heaven and He's active especially in making intercession for them and bestowing His blessing upon them.

You see here, lifting up His hands, He blessed them. They come under the blessing under the uplifted hands of Jesus. The blessing of His people takes place and continues to take place.

And the blessing of Jesus flows into your life and my life as a Christian from Jesus in heaven. Now His hands are still lifted up, as we'll see in a minute, in that sense of still blessing His people actively as their high priest.

[48 : 09] Everything you find in number six and from verse twenty-two is fulfilled. All of these elements that were mentioned in these verses are actually fulfilled in the blessing of Christ as the high priest of His people.

And what is the intercession of Christ really? It's a big subject worthy of much more study than I can give it in a couple of minutes. What is the intercession of Jesus?

What does intercession mean? What does intercession mean? Is it just that Jesus is praying for His people, just as you would imagine Him praying for His people here while He was on earth or ourselves praying for God's blessing?

Well, I'm not saying there's not that element in it, but the intercession of Jesus is basically the presenting of Himself and His finished work of atonement, His death that fulfilled all that was necessary for His people, for their sins to be forgiven, the presenting of that to God the Father.

I remember when people came to arrest Jesus in the garden, that Jesus said something specific at that point.

[49 : 20] If it is I you are seeking, if it's me you are seeking, let these, He mentioned the disciples, let these go their way. And you know, you can take that text really and say that's applicable to the intercession of Jesus because He took what we deserved in the death that He died, in enduring the wrath of God which we were liable to for our sins.

And Jesus is really the one who in Himself, as it were, fulfills that great statement that He spoke. If it is me that you're seeking, since I'm the one you're seeking, let these go their way.

I'll take their place. I'll take the penalty. I'll take what's due to them and they can go free. Now you see, that's within Christ's intercession.

That's what's happening. Because God the Father, as God the Father looks upon God, the Son beside Him, the One who entered this world and died and rose from the dead and was exalted to glory, as God the Father looks upon Him and sees His people in Him, He regards them as fully acceptable to Him in Jesus.

And Christ's presenting of the case for their security, for their everlasting security, for their forgiveness of sins to be, His forgiveness of their sins to continue.

[50 : 48] It's all in Jesus. And His intercession for them is an intercession that keeps presenting the worth of His own death, the merit of His own death, the power of His own death, the achievement of His own death.

And that goes on constantly in heaven for His people. And you notice this, while He blessed them, He was parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

You see there, Luke is really recording the thing exactly as it happened. While He was blessing them, He was parted from them.

In other words, the last thing they saw of Jesus physically in this world was Him with His hands uplifted being carried up into heaven. It wasn't that they saw Him lifting His hands and blessing them and pronouncing a blessing and then His hands went down and then He was lifted up.

He was still in the act of blessing them as He left them. He was still in the act of pronouncing that priestly blessing from Himself that He was actually involved in at the time.

[52 : 00] and it was like that that He was taken into heaven. He was actually still in the act of blessing. In other words, their conclusion from that and our conclusion as we read that is that the blessing was going to continue.

As He went into heaven, He continued to bless them. As He entered heaven, He continued to bless them. As He sat at the right hand of God, He continued to bless them. And we still have Christ's priestly blessing as our privilege as Christians today.

And if you are in Him today and if you've embraced Him and if your life is willingly led by Him, this is actually what's happening on your behalf. This is what's happening in heaven through the intercession of Jesus Himself.

His hands, as it were, are still raised over you, pronouncing you blessed, pronouncing you in favor with God. That's where our security lies.

You remember how Hebrews, that book in the New Testament that speaks so much about Christ's high priesthood, how in chapter 7, among many other things, it says this, from verse 23, contrasting Jesus with the former priests of the Old Testament, the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but He holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever.

[53 : 32] Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them.

It is the Hebrews version, if you like, of what we're saying here from Luke's Gospel. The continuing life of Jesus for His people is a life of continuing blessing for them under His priesthood, under His direction, under His own intercession.

A life willing to be led by Christ, a life secure within Christ's intercession, a life rejoicing in worshiping Christ. You notice how the passage ends.

They worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God. They were not downcast that He had left, that He had disappeared from sight.

They were not afraid that there were just such a few people surrounded by so many opponents. They returned with great joy. Here's the question for you and for me today.

[54 : 43] Am I joyful in the worship of God? Am I joyful in my faith in my following of Christ? Am I joyful in my being led by Him?

Do I know this joy as something not only that I want to find in my life but I want to see increased in my life? They returned with great joy, not just joy but great joy.

They were rejoicing in worshiping Christ. Is our worship a joyful worship? If it is, do we want that joyful worship to spill over that others will experience it as well?

Surely we do. And let's pray that as we go through this year and seek to follow the leadership of Christ Himself that more and more we will actually enjoy worshiping Him.

That we will rejoice in worshiping Him. That we'll have this great joy that these disciples had as they worshiped Him and as they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

[55 : 44] I mean being led by the risen Jesus and being safe and secure under the intercession of the risen exalted Jesus.

Surely that should be the source of our joy that our life is lived under His direction and safely and securely under His intercession.

What is there to fear? Why should we be afraid of the world? Why should we be afraid of the world seeing us rejoicing in Christ? Of course we shouldn't.

And isn't it today our privilege not only to worship Jesus but to worship Him joyfully. To express our joy through reading the Word of God.

Through hearing the Word preached and through preaching it. And to especially express that in prayer and in the singing of His praises that we will do it in a way that shows that we are joyful in worshiping God in worshiping the Savior.

[56 : 51] And you see continually they were in the temple blessing God. And what's that saying to us? It's saying to us that there they were having seen Jesus having been spoken to by Jesus having been blessed by Jesus having seen Him departing with His hands and blessings still lifted over them.

they returned with great joy and in that rejoicing they were continually in the temple. In other words they were committed they were committed to His service committed to His worship to continue with His worship.

Luke has a volume 2 of the account of Jesus' life. And volume 2 of Luke's account is in the book of Acts. The book of Acts is a continuation really of the story of Jesus as told by Luke.

And it's still the story of Jesus even though you might think of the book of Acts as to do primarily as it is with the church and the increase of the church and the way the gospel through the church of the time then spread out into the Gentile world.

Yes, but it's still the story of Jesus. He is the one who through His blessing and His blessing of the gospel is actually behind that great increase in the number of believers and in the effectiveness of the gospel through them.

[58 : 12] And so volume 2 of Luke's account continues the story of Jesus. The story of the risen Christ. The Christ who died and rose again and was taken up to glory.

And in that gospel in the Acts rather chapter 1 and verse 8 He said to them just before He left them and again He's saying to them that they were going to be His witnesses in that local area Samaria, Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.

That means you and I that we are to be the witnesses for Jesus who are led by Him in our lives who are secure within His intercession who rejoice in worshipping Him and that we communicate that to the world in which we live.

That's why we exist in this world as Christians as believers in Christ not only to rejoice in Him and to enjoy Him for ourselves but to commend Him and to speak of Him and to present Him to the world around us to the ends of the earth.

That is now our task. So as this year goes by may we be more and more willing to be led by Jesus.

[59 : 37] May we have more and more comfort from knowing of a life secure under the intercession of Jesus. And may we be more and more a people rejoicing and worshipping Jesus and seeking to make Him known even to the ends of the earth.

after all we have His own other other words in the other Gospel of Matthew we have His words with which the Gospel of Matthew closes having given direction and command to make disciples of all nations given that He has been given all authority in heaven and earth go and make disciples of all nations.

He makes the converts we make the disciples. Discipleship is part of the way in which the church's evangelism is carried out making of disciples.

It's not our business or our ability to convert people but it is our privilege and our business to make disciples to gather people under the headship of Christ.

And what did He say? How did He finish? what is it especially that encourages us more than anything else? Lo, behold, I am with you to the end of the age.

[61 : 05] The Jesus who leads His people, the Jesus whose intercession brings security to His people, the Jesus who is worshipped joyfully by His people, is the Jesus who assures them, I am with you.

And when He is with you, it doesn't matter who's against you, who's seeing you, who's disagreeing with you, if He is with you, it is well with your soul.

Let's pray. eternal God, we give thanks today for the gospel. We give thanks for that gospel that brings to us such a message of hope.

We bless you that at the beginning of this new year, we are able, through your own word, to realize the importance of being led by you. Lord, we pray for willing hearts.

We pray for hearts that will be willing to serve you, to worship you, to be witnesses to you, to be led by you, to be safe under your own intercession.

[62 : 17] Help us, Lord, to be glad in you, and help us to commend you to the world around us as the only one in whom we can find the satisfaction for which you created us.

So hear us, we pray now, and continue with us throughout this day, pardoning our sin and accepting us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, our final psalm is Psalm 68, psalm we quoted from, read part of earlier.

Psalm 68, verses 18 to 20, on page 303, so it's in the Scottish Psalter, singing to Tune Sheffield, Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious, ascended up on high, and in triumph victorious led captive captivity.

Thou hast received gifts for men, for such as did rebel, yea, even for them, that God the Lord in midst of them might dwell. Psalm 68, verses 18 to 20.

Amen. Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious, ascended upon high, and in triumph victorious led, captive, captivity.

[63 : 45] Thou hast received gifts for men, for such as did rebel, yea, yea, in for them that God the Lord in midst of them might dwell.

Blessed be the Lord who is to us of our salvation God, who daily with its benefits as plenteously doth Lord.

He of salvation is our God who is our God most strong, and unto God the Lord from death he is used to belong.

After the benediction, I'll go to the main door. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more.

Amen. of the el Lord the loving of the son of the more.

[66 : 15] Thank you.