

Our spiritual battle

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[0 : 00] Well, if you've been living in Cape Town or anywhere around Cape Town for the last week or so, you'll know that we have been affected by a lot of fires.

You've seen the fires recently? You've probably looked up and you could see the smoke of the most recent fire last night. Even there was a fire on Signal Hill. Almost all of Signal Hill was on fire, apparently.

And in the past week, just the last sort of five days, there were some really big fires in Simonstown and Glencairn. You probably know about those. If not, you probably saw the helicopters flying over with their water buckets.

And these fires, as with all fires, would have caused much devastation, much loss of life and property if it wasn't for the brave men and women of the Cape Town fire services. I mean, we can really be thankful for all that they've done and all that they go through and the sleepless nights that they go through in order to fight fires for us.

And we, especially in a season like this, when all the vegetation's dry and there's so many things that can settle fires, we really are greatly blessed to have those men and women to fight the fires for us.

[1 : 07] And I was thinking about them and I was thinking that in our world, there's a lot of fighting of things that threaten us that are done for us by other people, if you think about it.

Just like those fires. You know, fighting that we would normally have to do ourselves. Like, you know, we have these trained and equipped firefighters who have all the necessary training and all the necessary hose pipes and fire trucks to fight the fires that we would have, without them, we would have had to fight on our own.

And back in the day, in the olden days, before you had fire services, if you saw a fire coming to threaten your house, you would have to fight it by yourself. No one is going to come help you unless you go and knock on your neighbor's doors. Maybe you'll get a few people to make a bucket line or so.

But it was up to you to fight fires back then. Just like we have trained and equipped police and security services to fight crime for us and to fight the criminals on our behalf.

Well, back in the day, if you wanted to walk to the market or the shop, you would have to carry your own weapon because no one is going to fight the criminals for you. You would have to deter bandits by yourself.

[2 : 12] In the same way, we have other people to fight all kinds of battles in our lives. We've got lawyers to fight our legal battles. We pay doctors to fight our medical battles with their expertise and their medicines.

You see, we live in a society where we can pay other people to fight our battles for us, don't we? And so it becomes easy to think, especially in our modern world, it becomes easy to think that we can avoid fighting altogether in life and live in relative peace and comfort.

That is what the culture wants you to think. If you've got enough money, you can pay for all your fights to be fought for you and you can have comfort and peace. Well, I want to tell you that's not the case. And it's important to say that, especially as we head into a new year, because there are battles that you're going to face in this life that no one else will fight for you.

Still, battles that you can't avoid and battles that you will need to fight. I can assure you about that because the Bible says there will be battles.

And I'm talking about the spiritual battles that you face and that you will face on your way to eternity. Because let me remind you, and I assume that you're in church because you know that we're all on our way to eternity.

[3 : 26] Okay, this life is just the beginning. We're on our way to eternity. We're headed to eternity. And we're given this 80 or 85 or 90 or however many years to prepare ourselves for what's to come.

And that's why I'm glad you're at church, because this is one of the ways that you prepare yourself for eternity. But on our way to eternity, we will face battles. We will need to fight.

And the fights you face on your way to eternity, the spiritual battles, are the most important fights you will face in your life. More important than physical warfare.

More important than medical battles. The reason is because the outcome of these spiritual battles, quite literally, will determine where you end up in eternity. And so we need to put on the agenda to ready ourselves to fight the battles we're going to face.

And I want to ask you this morning, are you ready? As we begin a new year, are you ready to fight the spiritual battles you're going to face? Or are you just going to be a victim of your enemies?

[4 : 25] You've got to ask that. And again, one of the reasons we come to church, one of the reasons we gather together as Christians is to prepare ourselves and to help each other to fight those battles. And I, as your pastor, am passionate about helping you and equipping you to fight those battles.

I don't want you to be taken down by the enemy. And so I want to equip you to do that. And that's why we're picking up Joshua again, the book of Joshua. Because in many ways, this Old Testament book of Joshua prepares you to do just that.

It prepares you to fight the battles that you're going to face. And so we're going to pick it up again from where we left off last year. And if you were here last year when we started Joshua in the third term, you'll remember some of the stuff that we covered, I hope.

So Joshua records the entry of the people of God at the time, which is Israel, the nation of Israel. It records their entry into the promised land, the place that God was preparing for them and the place that God had been promising them for generations.

But before they could live in that land and take the promises of God, they needed to fight the enemies of God who were trying to stop them from entering that land.

[5 : 37] That's really what the book of Joshua is about. And while it describes the battles that Israel faced, the story of Joshua is actually meant to be a picture of something much bigger that happens in every age.

As each one of us head to eternity and in this life face our enemies, which are the sin inside us and the forces of evil outside. Enemies that we need to fight if we're going to find life and enter our land of promise one day in eternity.

And so to prepare us to do that this morning, let's continue Joshua from chapter 8 this morning. Now, so chapter 8, where we are, which I hope you have in front of you in your Bibles, it follows, this is after, two important battles that took place in chapter 6 and 7 that we looked at last year.

Anybody remember what those battles were? Anyone? Jericho, okay, the famous battle of Jericho. And the other one? I, or AI, or however you pronounce it, it's a weird word.

But yes, thank you. The rector's warden gets ten points. Jericho and AI. Now, each of these battles taught us some important lessons. As you can see behind me, the battle of Jericho, remember the battle of Jericho is a pretty bizarre battle.

[6 : 52] God told his people to take the ark and the priests and all the soldiers and march around the city for seven days. And then blew trumpets and the walls fell down and they entered the city.

Now, that battle, we'll remember last year, taught us that God promises to lead his people and give them victory in their battles as long as they trust his instructions.

Crazy as those instructions might be, even when we don't understand what God's instructions are. The point of that battle was that God will give his people victory. God will fight for his people. But they need to follow his instructions to the letter.

But then, in the very next chapter, we read about the battle of AI. Now, that was the first battle. There were actually two battles of AI. The first one is the one we looked at last year. We're going to look at the next one next week.

But the first one they lost. And it showed us, that battle showed us, that in contrast to Jericho, it showed us what happens when Israel don't follow God's instructions. They lose.

[7 : 49] They were defeated. They were soundly defeated. They were whipped. And so, these two battles are meant to contrast each other. And they're meant to make the clear point, which is this.

The clear point of these battles is that to enter the land that God promises his people, they must obey his word. To enter the land that God promises his people, they must obey his word.

You can't escape that conclusion from reading these accounts. And the reason for that is simple, okay? The reason that in order to enter the promise, they must obey God's word is because God is not interested in people inheriting his land, his promised land, if they're not going to listen to him and live his way.

What's the point? So, you know, that's why before Israel entered, God made an agreement with them. What was called a covenant.

You'll hear that word quite often in the Bible. A covenant, which was an agreement that God gave his promises to his people, but he also told the people their responsibilities in order to gain those promises.

[8 : 52] That's what a covenant is. It's a set of promises and a set of responsibilities that are necessary in order to gain those promises. And so unless they carried out their covenant responsibilities that God gave them in his word, they would not inherit the covenant promises.

And so now that's where we are. That's what we've learned so far from Joshua. And we're at the end of chapter 8. And so here at the end of chapter 8, what they do, what Israel and Joshua do is that they stop and they have a special covenant ceremony to remember not only God's promises, but also their responsibilities.

That's what they do. That's what the ceremony at the end of chapter 8 is all about. It's God's people stopping to remember God's promises and to remember their responsibilities. Now, it's a bit of a strange ceremony.

I want to take you through it. It starts fairly normally. Joshua builds an altar at the top of a mountain called Mount Ebal, which is one of the mountains above the city of Shechem, which, by the way, was quite an important place, Shechem.

It was the place that God appeared to Abraham when he first entered this area. And so effectively, Shechem was the place where Israel's relationship with God began.

[10:04] And so that's why this is a significant area. And just above Shechem, on this mountain, Mount Ebal, they have this ceremony. And this behind me is a picture actually of modern-day Shechem with the mountain above it.

And I'll talk about it in a second because I want to tell you about that other mountain too, but not yet. So, they're at this significant place. And they do their ceremonial sacrifices, which were quite common in the life of Israel and necessary for their relationship with God.

Because you'll know by now if you've been coming to this church and you've read the Old Testament, that God required sacrifice in order to pay for sin. The price for sin is life, represented in blood.

And so, in order for people to have any kind of relationship with God, they needed sacrifice. They needed payment for sin. And so they make these sacrifices. But that's not all they do because after these sacrifices, Joshua goes on to do something quite strange.

He goes and writes on the stones of the sacrificial altar, he writes the laws of the covenant, the covenant responsibilities of the people. And he does it to make a point.

[11:16] He's basically telling the people, listen, if we want to have a relationship with God, if we want to enter his covenant promises, we can't forget these laws like you've just done in the battle of Ai.

You see, he's trying to make a point by writing these laws as a kind of a permanent thing on this altar. In fact, the altar that they built was found by an archaeologist in the 1960s, I think it was.

I just researched it this week. It's amazing. You should look it up on the internet. They still have the stones of the altar there thousands of years later above Shechem. Anyway, so Joshua writes these laws on this altar because he wants to say to the people, you know, yes, we sacrifice to the Lord.

But no matter how many sacrifices we make and no matter how many religious ceremonies we have, if we're not actually doing what God wants us to do, then what's the point? You know, you can be as religious as possible.

But if you're not actually listening to God and living the way he wants you to, then what is the point? That's what he wants to tell these people. And so he displays these instructions, these covenant requirements, in a prominent place to remember them.

[12:28] You know, it was up on the mountain. People would look up on the mountain. They would see this altar and they would remember what's written on it. And if they forgot, they could hike up there and have a look. And so it was there to remind people of the importance of God's words and their covenant requirements.

But that's not all that happened. It gets stranger still. Something else happens at the ceremony. After Joshua writes these laws on the stones, what he does next is he gets the whole Israelite nation to divide themselves into two groups of six tribes each.

And the one group has to hike up to the opposite mountain, which is called Mount Gerizim. So here's a picture of modern-day Shechem, as I've introduced. And the mountain on the left is Mount Ebal and the mountain on the right is Mount Gerizim.

And these mountains, as you can see, were quite close together. And they needed to be close together because what the tribes were to do next was to shout to each other across the valley. That's what these tribes did. So the six tribes went to Mount Gerizim.

The other tribes stayed on Mount Ebal. And they shouted across the valley to each other. And we know this from Deuteronomy 27 because it's there that Moses originally gave these instructions for what must happen at this strange ceremony.

[13 : 40] And so what they were to shout was the blessings and the curses of the covenant. One group was to shout the blessings to the other group. And the other group was to shout back the curses of the covenant.

In other words, what would happen if you obeyed God's law was the one group's responsibility. And what would happen if you disobeyed God's law? Now, it's quite a bizarre thing.

It must have been quite a scene. You know, you can imagine these thousands of people on these mountains shouting these curses and blessings at each other. I was thinking it actually reminds me of my school days.

You know those school sports days you used to have? When you would sit and you would chant these chants to the other school. You know what I'm talking about? How did it go? We got the Spirit.

Yes, we do. We got the Spirit. How about you? Remember that? You know, well, it happened in my school. But except in Israel's case here. It was similar like this chanting, but they were kind of going, we got the blessings.

[14 : 36] Yes, we do. We got the blessings. How about you? Or we got the curses. Yes, we do. And so they were shouting these blessings and curses to each other. Now, why do this? Why do it in such a weird, elaborate way?

Well, it was to help people remember. You know, you're not going to forget this anytime soon, are you? And the kids growing up and observing this, they're not going to forget seeing their parents and their cousins and their uncles and stuff shouting these blessings and curses at each other.

The whole point is to put it into their memory. To remember the requirements of the covenant they had with God. To burn it into their memory. What the consequences are of disobeying God's law and the blessings for obeying it.

They had to remember that every day. And just to emphasize to them that stringent obedience to God's law would determine whether or not they won the battles that they were about to face as they headed for the promised land.

And one other thing is also important to notice that it was the people of Israel telling each other this. That's another important fact. They didn't wait for the priests to come and tell them.

[15 : 41] They didn't wait for Joshua to tell them. They had to remind each other of God's law. And that has a very important implication for us today, which I'll tell you later. But it's important to notice that it was all the people involved in the exercise of remembering God's law.

Remembering to obey the law was a community responsibility. And the community gathered to remind each other of these truths. And then one final thing happens at the ceremony.

After that we see in verse 34 to 35 that Joshua ended off the ceremony by reading the entire law of God again to the people. And what's interesting to notice in these verses is how many times the word all appears.

I'm going to actually read the ESV, the English Standard Version, which is closer to the original text. And you can see it more clearly. It goes like this from verse 34. And afterwards, Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel and the women and the little ones and the sojourners who lived among them. Okay, so the point is quite clear, isn't it?

[16 : 59] First of all, all of God's revealed words were necessary and important for the people to hear. Not just some of them. Unlike today, people back then didn't cherry pick what they wanted from God's law just as a boost for the day or to make them comfortable.

They had to listen and understand and adhere to all of it. But secondly, it was all the people who needed to hear it. Not just the religious types, not just those who were interested, but all of the people, the women, the children, the foreigners, nobody was left out.

You see, the fact is that all of the people needed to do all of what God's word said if they were to have any hope of inheriting the land.

That was the covenant requirement. And that's how the ceremony ends off. But what does that mean for us? What does this whole ceremony back in Joshua 8,000s of years ago mean for us today as we journey towards eternity?

Well, I want to tell you this morning, it means exactly the same thing. The point for them is the same point for us. And the point is, if we are to inherit God's covenant promises, his new world that he is making without sin, without pain, without suffering, without death, this life in a new world, if we are to inherit that, we must adhere to God's covenant requirements.

[18 : 24] And not some of them, some of the time, but all of them all of the time. All of God's laws, without exception, there is no, you know, the standard is no less than that.

The reason is because God's not interested in filling his new creation with people just doing their own thing. Because then it would be no different to his old creation.

And we would be in the same mess that we are today. God's not interested in filling his new creation with people who aren't going to obey his laws, and all of them, all the time.

The requirement for entry into his perfect eternal world, after we leave this one, the requirement for entry is nothing less than complete obedience to his covenant requirements.

And if you doubt that, listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5. He says, you therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. That's the requirement to enter God's perfect new world.

[19 : 29] Perfect obedience. To his ways and his laws. Now, I don't know about you, but that makes me feel quite bad. Because no one's perfect, you'll say.

You know, how can God's standards? Come on, how can God's standards be so high? You know, surely he'll let us cut some corners. He knows I'm not perfect. So he'll let me in.

That's what lots of people think. Lots of people think, oh, God's going to be reasonable. He'll be fair. You know, and it's unreasonable to say that we have to be perfect to enter the perfect new creation.

But actually, that is the most reasonable thing. It's unreasonable to say that we should enter God's perfect worlds with anything less than perfection. You see, we need to get this.

God's not going to lower his standards to match our failures like we think he will. He didn't for Israel back then, and he won't for us today. He's not just going to say, oh, okay, you can come to heaven as you are.

[20 : 26] Then that wouldn't be heaven. It would be the same as this. And so his standards don't change. That's what we've got to understand. God's standards don't change from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

It's not like, you know, Israel failed, which they did. And God says, oh, you know, maybe my standards are a little bit too high. Maybe I should, you know, change them a bit. Maybe I should. No, God didn't do that.

God didn't change his standards from the Old Testament to the New Testament. And yet, at the same time, God knows that we are unable to reach his standards by ourselves.

We're unable to fulfill all his laws, good and right as they are. I mean, I'm sure if you look through God's laws, like the Ten Commandments, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet, you'll agree that they are good and right.

And yet, we fail to keep them. So we know the law is good, and yet we fail to keep it. And God knows that about us too. And, in fact, that's what the whole Old Testament shows us.

[21 : 25] God's people who know God's law still failing to keep it. And so you know what God did, knowing that? Knowing that he can't lower his standards, but also knowing that we can't keep them.

God sent his son Jesus to the world to come down for us. And not only to be the sacrifice that pays for our sins, but also to keep God's standards on our behalf.

That's what Jesus came to do. And then, by his Holy Spirit, to change us from the inside out, to make us fit for eternity one day.

And that is the glorious gospel that the whole Old Testament points towards. As we read the Old Testament, as we see God's standards, and as we see human failure to keep them, all of that is actually just preparing us to understand the significance of what Jesus did when he came to earth, which was that Jesus kept, he came to fulfill all the covenant requirements necessary for you to enjoy God's covenant blessings in eternity.

I'm going to say that again because that is the most important message you will ever hear. God, Jesus, came to earth 2,000 years ago to live the perfect life, to fulfill all of God's covenant requirements, and he did that for you, for you to enjoy God's covenant promises.

[22 : 46] And he died to take your sins away so that you can enter that new world one day, if you trust and follow him. That is the requirement, to trust and follow Jesus.

Because if you do that, if you trust Jesus in this life, if you understand and believe what he did for you, and you follow him and you listen to him, then the Bible says his obedience will be counted as yours, and the way to eternal life will be opened.

And that's why Jesus ushered in what's called the new covenant, you know, the night before he died, we remember at communion he took bread and he took wine, and he said this is, he essentially was saying this is the new covenant that I'm starting right now.

A new covenant, as opposed to the old covenant of the Old Testament that Israel were under in Joshua. But Jesus came with this new covenant not to replace the old covenant, but to fulfill the old covenant.

It's important you understand that. And so we are still under a covenant. The old covenant and the standards of God's law are not done away with. There's still a covenant requirement for God's people today in order to gain the promises.

[24 : 03] So the principle remains in order to gain the covenant promises, we must adhere to the covenant requirements. But our covenant requirements under the new covenant are not to obey all the old covenant laws, but rather to trust and follow the one who has obeyed them for you.

See the difference? The old covenant is not done away with, it's not destroyed, the standard is still as high as it ever was. But your new covenant requirement, if you are a believer in Christ, is to trust and follow the one who has obeyed all those old covenant laws on your behalf.

And that is the requirement of people today, anybody, if they want to enter eternity, if they want to avoid God's wrath and his justice for their sin, if they want to enter the land of promise in a new beautiful world, which deep down inside we all yearn for, if you want to enter that, the requirement is to follow the one who has obeyed the covenant requirements for you.

Not to ignore Jesus in your life, but to follow him, to give your life to him, to be his disciple. And the battles that you will face in this life, the enemies that you will fight in this world, are all those things, therefore, that will attempt to take you away from Jesus.

And there are lots of them. And you will face lots of them this year. Things that will try to take you away from trusting and following Jesus every day.

[25 : 27] And so, as we head into a new year, as we face those battles, how will you prevail? How do you know that you will prevail against all those enemies that will attack you this year?

How will you continue to fulfill the covenant requirements of trusting and following Jesus? Well, I'll tell you. You will do that the same way the Israelites continue to fulfill their covenant requirements.

And they did that by taking God's word deadly seriously. That's the point of this whole ceremony. They took God's word seriously. Firstly, and we ought to take God's word seriously, by writing the gospel of the new covenant on our hearts.

That's the first thing we've got to do if we're going to continue to follow and trust Jesus this year. Just as the Israelites wrote the laws of the old covenant on those stones on top of Mount Ebal so that they didn't forget those laws, so we need to write the gospel on our hearts every day so that we don't forget it.

We need to bring God's word, and God's word, the whole Bible which tells us about Jesus, we need to bring it into our daily lives and put it in a prominent place in our lives.

[26 : 40] Just like, you know, that altar was in a prominent place at the top of the mountain. We need to make place and space in our lives and in our schedules for God's word. We need to put God's word in a prominent place in our lives, whether that's the first thing in the morning or in the evening as you come home or wherever it is.

You need to make time for God's word so that you can constantly remember it and learn how to follow Jesus. You know, we can't just treat God's word as a hobby or as kind of occasional advice for life when we need a boost.

No. We can't just dip into it from time to time. Unless you take seriously, I want to say this with all seriousness, unless you take listening to Jesus seriously and following Jesus seriously, you will lose the spiritual battles that you are set to face this year.

I don't want you to do that. And so write the gospel on your heart and give God's word a prominent place in your life. Secondly, we learn that we take God's word seriously by reminding each other of it.

Remember the Israelites shouting across the valley? All right, just as they shouted the requirements of the covenant to each other, we need to remind each other of the requirement to repent and follow Jesus every day.

[27 : 58] Because you will be attacked. You will struggle in following Jesus. You will be led astray. And it's then that you need Christian brothers and sisters to come around you and to spur you on just as you need to do for them.

You see, remembering the word and following Jesus is a communal responsibility for us today just as it was for Israel back then. You can't rely on me for your relationship with Jesus.

We've got to rely on each other. We've got to help each other. Every one of us has a responsibility to spur each other on. That's what we read in Hebrews earlier. Jean read from Hebrews 10. I'll read it again.

From verse 24, it says, Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.

And all the more, as you see the day approaching, see, all the more, as you see the promised land coming, into sight, you need to be encouraged and encourage one another.

[29 : 02] Are you going to spur people on and you've got to be spurred on to carry on going, to not be distracted to the left or the right, which is so easy to do. But you see, we can't do that.

We can't spur each other on and we can't keep each other following Jesus unless we meet together regularly, unless we make time for each other. Primarily, yes, at church, but also not just at church, daily.

You know, contacting each other on our phones, messaging each other, asking how it's going, meeting up for coffee, chatting up, you know, after the squash game, wherever it might be in your life with other Christians.

You make time, meet with other Christians so that we can speak the gospel to each other, that we can remind each other of the promises of the gospel, that we can spur each other on to love and serve Jesus.

That is what we need to do as a church community. We need each other. I need you. And thirdly, finally, we take God's word seriously by reading all of it. That's the other important lesson that comes out of this ceremony.

[30 : 05] We can't pick and choose what we read from God's word based on what's comfortable or maybe what's easy. You know, there's really difficult parts of the Bible. I'll just leave those out. I'll just read the fluffy Psalms or, you know, the New Testament epistles or something that's easy to understand.

No, every word in the Bible, Old and New Testament, is inspired by God and necessary in order to live the way God wants us to. We can't leave bits out. And that's why it's so important to sit under biblical preaching like you're doing now.

At least once a week. But more if you can. And with the internet and technology, we can actually get a lot of access to sermons that people have preached in the past. Sit under preaching because, you see, a preacher's job, my job, is to help you through all of Scripture, to help you understand all of Scripture, to understand the difficult parts, to tackle the uncomfortable parts, and to understand each passage in light of the whole of Scripture, the whole big story.

That's my job. And so use me for that. If you don't understand a passage you read, phone me, come to me, send me an email. It's my job. So make use of that. And if you can't, and of course, the primary way I do that is through preaching and through showing you and unpacking the Word so you can see the significance of it.

And that's why we also preach through books systematically. We don't pick and choose based on, you know, what we want to hear. We just say, okay, this is a book we're going to go through, all of it. Even the difficult parts. And let me tell you, in Joshua, there's some really difficult parts coming up in the next couple of weeks.

[31 : 32] But I'm sure God has something to say to us through them. So please come back. And if you can't make Sunday for some reason, then download the sermon on our website. That's why we have it.

So you can listen to it as you drive to work. I mean, I don't know about how many of you commute to work, but it's such a waste of time just sitting in the traffic for 40 minutes, 50 minutes, whatever it is. You can make such good use of that time by whether it's on an MP3, in your car, whether it's on your phone.

We've got smartphones. You can just put sermons on your phone. You can download it from our website directly onto your phone and listen to it. Make use of your dead time to invest in God's Word. And read good books.

Yes, you read novels, all those fluffy stories that sort of, before you go to bed, but maybe make a point this year or this term or this semester, the first half of the year, to read through a good, meaty book on the Bible.

And I can give you lots of recommendations if you come to me. Because we need to get to know God's Word, all of it. Okay? Every one of us needs to take seriously getting to know all of God's Word and use every opportunity to do that.

[32 : 43] You know, if your loved one writes you a letter, you're not just going to scan through it and pick out the bits you want to read. No, you're going to read all of it because you want to know the entire message that your loved one has for you.

How much more should we do that with our Creator who has given us a message in His Word? Also, it's not just all of God's Word that must be heard, but all people must hear it.

Children, too. Parents, if you are a parent, will you ensure that you are using this small window of opportunity that you have to build into your child's life before they grow up, which is over far too quickly.

I'm often convicted as a parent that, you know, my kids are growing up so fast and I've only got this window of opportunity to invest in the foundation of the rest of their lives.

Am I using it? Are you using it if you're a parent to expose your child to all of God's Word, to spur them on to trust and obey Jesus for the rest of their life so that they, too, can fight the battles that they'll face on their journey to eternity?

[33 : 46] That is your responsibility as a parent. Are you doing that? Are you using that time? So in closing now, and I will close, I will finish now, but I have two things to say, two final things.

First of all, it is possible that as you've been listening this morning, you realize you're still living on your own terms.

You haven't trusted and followed Jesus. Maybe you've come to church for many years. Maybe, you know, you read the Bible from time to time, but you know that you're actually living your own way, not following Jesus.

You're not His disciple. He's not your Lord and Savior yet. And if so, I want to tell you, you must change. You must come to Him.

You must repent of your sins. You must put your faith in Him. That is the only way that you can avoid punishment for sin and gain eternal life. You need to come to the one who died to save you and who fulfilled all of heaven's requirements for you.

[34 : 49] You need to come and put your faith in Him and follow Him and turn around and live your life according to His instructions. You know, it's a simple illustration. It's like giving up the driver's seat in your car.

You can't drive along in life going where you want with Jesus in the passenger seat. That is not what it means to follow Jesus. What it means is to pull over, to stop, to pull up the handbrake, to get out of the driver's seat, to go around and let Jesus take over so that you can sit in the passenger seat and you can go where He wants you to.

That is what following Jesus is. Have you done that? Have you really done that? Ask yourself. And if you haven't, come speak to me or speak to the person who brought you here this morning.

And more importantly, speak to God when you get home today. Just make some time, close the door and get right with God through Jesus before it's too late. And then secondly, the second thing I want to say, and I want to say this to everybody this morning, we at St. Mark's want to help you to take the Bible more seriously in 2017.

And so to begin that, one of the things we're going to be doing from this week, you'll see in your notices, if you have a look at them that you would have received on your way in, there's a new item at the bottom, is at the bottom of the back page.

[36 : 05] It's in a black box. It's called the weekly family catechism, which is a big fancy word. But this is something that you can do each week by yourself or with your family, with your children if you're a parent.

And it's a way of, we're going to go through these questions and answers throughout the year to nail down some of the core truths that the Bible teaches us with a verse that comes with each that you can read during the week so that you can just get to know the whole Bible and the whole Bible's message better over time and that you can share that with your children.

Now to find out how to use it, there's a guide that you would also have received, a guide to catechisms. And you'll see what the word catechism means and you'll see what the point is and how to use it. I really encourage everyone at St. Marks to make use of this.

It's really simple. It doesn't take a lot of time. But it will really help you to get to grips with some of the great truths of Scripture. And then that's not all. Finally, in this coming year we'll be holding evening services.

We're going to start evening meetings where we'll help you to get to know God's Word more intimately. We'll be doing something special where you can get to grips with God's Word more to prepare you for the rest of the week to read it and engage with it.

[37 : 18] But more of that in the coming weeks. Right now, I'm going to stop and I'm going to pray for us. Let's bow our heads. Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you've sent your message from heaven to earth.

and that you've been speaking to people for thousands of years and revealing yourself in your Word, the Bible, and ultimately through Jesus Christ.

We thank you that you sent him to fulfill all of the requirements for heaven on our behalf. Lord, I pray for everyone here. I pray that you would help them to truly trust and follow Jesus, to give him the driver's seat, to follow him into eternity, and to listen daily to what he has to tell us through your Word.

Help us to read the Bible seriously. Help us not just to pick and choose what we want to read, but to read the whole Bible. Help us, Lord, as we embark on these catechism questions.

Just speak to us through them as we read the verses that come with them. As we memorize the questions and answers, would you just minister to us? Would you help us not just to remember these ourselves, but to be able to explain these truths to others, great truths that you've given us in your Word to guide us in life.

[38 : 36] And so we pray for this year. We pray that you would continue to speak to us and build us up in the knowledge of the truth through Jesus Christ and by his sacrifice for us, we pray.

Amen. Amen.