

Creekside Community Church: "Imitating Jesus"
"Jesus and the Purpose of Scripture"
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John Bruce, Pastor

One question I hear a lot is, "How can I know God's will for my life?" And Christians typically fall into two camps. Some are like Joe. Joe is still waiting for God to show him what to do with his life. Sometimes he thinks he hears God's voice and begins to move in a direction but then something happens and he's not so sure and so he begins the process all over again; because Joe doesn't want to get ahead of God or disappoint Him in any way. There's nothing more important to Joe than being in God's will and he doesn't want to risk disobeying God. Jake, on the other hand, figures that God has already revealed His will for Jake's life in the Bible and so if the Bible doesn't address a decision, Jake commits it to God and moves forward on the information he has. Now which of those two Christians is more like Jesus? That's what we'll talk about this morning. When the Bible talks about God's will, it sometimes refers to God's will of decree. Nothing comes to pass except by God's sovereign decree and everything that God decrees will certainly come to pass. God's will of decree cannot be thwarted. That's why Jesus says, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from Your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.*" (Matt. 10:29-30) God works out everything - the big picture and the details - according to His own sovereign will. There are other times when the Bible talks about God's will that it refers to God's will of desire: what God desires from His creation, the things He commands. God will accomplish His will of decree but He's give me choice whether I will follow His will of desire. For example, in 1 Thess. 4, Paul writes, "*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;*" God's will is that I live a morally pure life but He has put that choice in my hands. The third way we use "the will of God" is to mean God's will of direction. What does God want me to do with my life? What job should I take? Whom should I marry? Should I buy a foreign-made car or one made in the USA? We're seeking to know God's direction and specific plan for areas where the Scriptures are silent. But does God really have an individual will for my life? The Bible answers yes. And Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* God is involved in every aspect of our life. So God does have an individual will for our life: where we live, what we do, who we marry and how long we live. The question is, does God expect us to discover this secret will before we make any decisions? I believe that the answer is no. As Proverbs 20:24 says, "*Man's steps are ordained by the LORD. How then can man understand his way?*" God has a plan for our lives. But he doesn't tell us that plan before it unfolds. Our responsibility is to do what we know to be God's will from the Scriptures. If we do, God will guide our steps in the areas where the Scriptures are silent. That's what Deut 29:29 means, "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.* God reveals His will for us in Scripture and if I concern myself with God's desires for my life, He will take care of the direction of my life. This is what theologians mean by the sufficiency of Scripture. Paul writes in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*" The Scriptures alone are sufficient to equip me to do every good work, to do God's will in every situation. If I'm doing what the Bible says to do, I'm in God's will, period. That's the purpose of Scripture; to reveal who God is and His will for our life.

And so what I hope to be able to show you this morning from the life of Jesus is that Jake's approach to knowing and doing the will of God- even though it doesn't sound as spiritual as Joe's approach - is much more Christlike than Joe's approach. This fall we're talking about imitating Christ. That's what a disciple of Christ is, an imitator of Jesus, learning to walk as He walked, to think as He thought and to do what He did. And our focus this fall is on imitating Jesus' relationship to His Father. How did Perfect Man walk with God? Remember that Jesus, even though He was God, became human - laying aside all of His power and privileges as God and took on our humanity with all our limitations in order to become the model human, the second Adam and our representative before God; both to live the life we were designed for but failed to live so that we could be credited by God with His righteousness and to teach us how God had designed humans to live. Jesus is everything God designed us to be, and by learning how He walked with His Father, we learn how we're to walk with Him. This month we're looking at Jesus and the Scriptures, how Jesus viewed the Scriptures, how He used the Scriptures, the place the Scriptures played in His life. So far we've seen how Jesus always placed Himself under the authority of the Scriptures and

how He interpreted the Scriptures. Today I want to look at how Jesus relied upon the Scriptures both to show Him what God wanted Him to do and to show Him what would happen to Him. For years when I read Jesus say things like, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.”* (John 5:19-20) I assumed that the Father was constantly talking to the Son, telling Him, “Go here. Do this miracle now. Speak this message.” Now I’m sure there was some of that because Jesus was a prophet and God told prophets what they were to say. However, if the Father was continually telling the Son everything He was supposed to do, then Jesus can’t be our example because we don’t have that kind of relationship with God. And Jesus would not have had to walk by faith. But if Jesus really did become like us in every way, then I have to assume that He had to get His marching orders from the Scriptures just like we do. He learned His Father’s will from the Scriptures just like we do. And I think we can see that in the gospels. So first we’ll look at how Jesus relied upon the Scriptures to know what God wanted Him to do, and then how Jesus relied upon the Scriptures to know what would happen to Him and why - because that’s God’s purpose of the Scriptures in our lives.

How did Jesus know what God wanted Him to do? He read the Bible. First, look at Matthew 4 and how Jesus decided where He would focus His ministry. Matt 4:12-16 *“Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; (Jesus begins His ministry in the southern part of Judea where Jerusalem is located when He is baptized by John the Baptist, meets His first disciples, and begins preaching and baptizing. However, once John is arrested by King Herod for rebuking Herod for stealing his brother’s wife, Jesus moves His base of operations north to Galilee. This would be equivalent to moving from the Bay Area to Porterville to begin your ministry.) “And leaving Nazareth, (Jesus’ hometown) He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. (which becomes Jesus’ base of operations for the next two years) So how did Jesus settle on Capernaum in the region of Galilee? “to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES— THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.”* Isaiah is contrasting the humbling of the northern part of Israel by the Assyrians who took the northern Israelites away as captives the great light of the Messiah who will arise from this region. The following verses are the familiar ‘For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and His name will be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace,’ a prediction that the Messiah will be God in human flesh. That’s why Jesus spends most of His public ministry in Galilee. Not only did Jesus determine where He would minister from the Scriptures, He determined how He would minister from the Scriptures. Let’s look at Matt 8:16-17 *When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES.”* This is from Isaiah 52 and part of a series of songs about God’s Servant - the Messiah who will be mocked and despised and killed, yet bring about justice and blessing, even for the Gentiles. Jesus spent His time healing because that’s what the Scriptures said the Messiah would do. He also applied the Scriptures to the way that He healed. Look at Matthew 12:15-21. *“Many followed Him, and He healed them all, and warned them not to tell who He was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ‘BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE.’”* Isaiah wrote that the Messiah will come in humility, not fighting to get His way nor attacking His opposition, but gently carrying out the mission of God. As a result, Jesus kept a low profile, constantly warning the people He healed not to tell anyone - even though they ignored Him and told everyone. Jesus looked to the Scriptures to tell Him what to do, how to do it, and how to teach. Look at Matthew 13: 34-35. *“All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.”* This is from Psalm 78, that the Messiah will speak in parables which hide the truth from the unbeliever but reveal it to the believer. There are many more illustrations of what Jesus did to fulfill Scripture. He enters Jerusalem on a donkey. *“This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, ‘BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU,*

GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN." Matt. 21:4-5. He cleanses the temple in Jerusalem, driving out the moneychangers and merchants, explaining, *"It is written, 'And My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a robbers' den."* (Luke 19:46) Time after time, Jesus determines what He will do by going to the Scriptures. Because that's the way we know God's will. The Scriptures are sufficient to show us what God wants us to do.

When I worked at Cal, a Christian friend announced one morning that God had shown him in a dream the night before that he was going to play football for the Chicago Bears and God would use his fame as a professional athlete to reach many people with the gospel. Well, when somebody says, "God told me," how can you argue with that? The fact that he had never played football didn't discourage him at all. God had promised. He went out for Spring football as a walk-on, convinced that he would soon be starting, have a couple of All-American seasons and then be drafted by Chicago. However, the weekend before Spring ball began, he broke his leg in a skiing accident and spent the spring sitting on the sidelines in a cast. Needless to say, he never played a down of football with the Bears - Cal or Chicago. It sounds very spiritual when people say, "God told me" or "God gave me a vision" or "God laid it on my heart." However, people in the New Testament don't talk like that. Look at what Paul writes in Romans 12:2. *"And do not be conformed to this world, (don't allow the culture to shape your values, the way you think, what's important to you, your behavior) but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* How do we know what the will of God is? By the renewing of our mind - by coming to the Scriptures and learning to think like Jesus thought. God appeals to our mind and to our conscience through the Scriptures. That's how He guides us. God's will isn't a destination. God's will is a lifestyle. And the Scriptures are altogether sufficient to reveal that lifestyle to us. A guy tells me he's really seeking God's will about changing jobs. He interviewed for a new position and the company just called with an offer and a big raise. He asks, "Don't you think that has to be God's will for me? I mean, God opened the door and provided this job." I ask him, "What does your wife think?" "Oh, she doesn't want me to take it. We're going through a rough patch in our marriage right now and she's always complaining that I'm never home. And she's afraid that this new job will just make it worse since I'll have to travel a lot more." Now what would you counsel him to do? Which takes precedence. An apparent open door? More money? Or God's command in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her?" It's a no-brainer. If an opportunity involves disobeying God, then that opportunity isn't from God. But doesn't the Bible talk about being led by the Spirit? It does. But in each case, being led by the Spirit doesn't refer to being led circumstantially. It refers to being led morally. It's not being led to choose the right college or the right car or the right job. It's being led to do the right thing. That's where we get confused about the will of God. When most Christians think about the will of God, they're not thinking about doing God's will in their marriage or at their job or in their neighborhood where the Scriptures are clear. They're thinking about decisions the Bible doesn't address. Where to work. Where to go to school. Whether to buy an import or an American-made car. Here's the rule. If the Bible is silent, you're free to do what you want to do. God's will is that you make the best decision you can. That's why the Bible emphasizes the pursuit of wisdom. James writes in James 1:5, *"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."* Wisdom is skill in decision making, the ability to use knowledge. We don't need wisdom if God simply tells us what to do in every situation. So the promise in James 1:5 is that if you ask God for the skill and the insight to apply the knowledge you have, He will give it to you. Let's take marriage. How do you recognize the person God wants you to marry? Do you wait until you hear the voice of God, "That's her over there. The one in the red top. Go ask her to marry you.!" If that's how it's done, God wouldn't have included so much information in the Scriptures about wisely choosing your mate, the kind of character you should look for, personality, values, conduct. Wisdom is being able to apply those principles to make a good choice in your life partner. So we know God's will of desire from the Bible. And when the Bible is silent about a particular decision, we pray for wisdom, commit our way to God, make the best choice we can, and trust God to guide our steps.

Does that mean that God never guides people supernaturally. Of course not. There are times in the Bible when people didn't have the information to make the right decision and God supernaturally got it to them. In Acts 16, Paul is trying to preach the gospel in Asia Minor - contemporary Turkey - and encounters closed door after closed door. Luke writes the Holy Spirit wasn't permitting Paul to preach. I don't know if that means nobody was interested in listening to what Paul had to say or what. But Paul knows that God has sent him to preach the gospel

and so he keeps moving forward, visiting village after village but without success. Finally, when Paul arrives at the port of Troas, he has a vision of a man from Greece who tells him, "Come over and help us." Paul concludes that God has called him to preach the gospel in Europe, gets on a boat to Macedonia, and continues his ministry there. God gives visions, He speaks audibly or in dreams. He sends angels to tell people what He wants them to do. But when He does, it's always a surprise. People aren't seeking a vision or to hear from God. When the doors were shut, Paul didn't sit down and say, "I'm not moving until You show me what to do." He just kept doing what he was supposed to do when God unexpectedly shows up. And these weren't common experiences. These were extraordinary experiences. And in them, God speaks. He doesn't lead by feelings or signs or open or shut doors. He commands. If you need more information than God has given you in His word, He'll get that to you. But for most Christians, it's at most a once or twice in a lifetime experience, not a daily occurrence. God showed Jesus what He was to do through the Scriptures and God will show us what we're to do through the Scriptures. And so, if you do everything the Bible tells you to do, will you be in the will of God? I believe so.

Not only did Jesus base what He did on Scripture. He saw everything that happened to Him through the lens of Scripture. He knew what would happen when He visited Jerusalem for the final time. Luke 18:31 *Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished.* He knew He would be rejected by Israel. Look at John 12:37-41 and John 15:25 *"But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him."* John 15:25 *"But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'* Jesus knew He would be betrayed. John 13:18 *"I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'* Jesus knew He would be deserted by His disciples. Matt 26:31 *Then Jesus *said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'* Jesus knew He would be arrested. Mark 14:49 *"Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures."* Jesus knew He would be executed with thieves. Mark 15:27-28 *"They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."* Jesus wasn't surprised by what happened to Him because He knew God's plan from the Scripture.

Well, that's fine for Jesus. He's the Messiah and there are hundreds of prophecies in the Scriptures about Him. But how does that apply to me? The Scriptures not only tell me what God wants me to do, it tells me what life is like in this world and what will happen to me. It tells me that in this world, I will have tribulations but that God will supply all of my needs. It tells me that I will be tempted but that with the temptation, God will supply a way to escape. It tells me that my outer man - my body - will decay but that my inner man - the real me - will be renewed daily and that one day God will change this temporal body of corruption into an eternal body of glory. It tells me not to be surprised at trials, slander, and rejection as though some strange thing were happening to me but to the degree I share the sufferings of Christ, I'm to rejoice because God is working all things together for good. I realize now that so much of my unhappiness in this life has been the result of unrealistic expectations and illusions - of thinking life was supposed to be one way when it turns out to be another. Imagining that my selfish ambitions were also God's ambitions for me. That if I did what was right, everybody would like me. That if I got what I wanted, I would be happy. But the more I've learned about life from the Scripture, the more at peace with life I've become. You see, the Bible not only reveals God's will, it reveals reality. How life really works. What you can expect from life. And because happiness and success depend upon living in reality, the Bible promises success to all who take what it says seriously - we'll talk about that next week. The purpose of the Bible is to reveal what we could not know otherwise. And if we're going to imitate Jesus, then we'll come to the Scriptures to discover God's plan for our life.

The purpose of Scripture is to show us the will of God. We looked at 2 Tim 3:16-17 already. Now let's look at the context. Paul writes, *"You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing*

from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:14-17) Notice that the purpose of Scripture is not just to tell you what God wants you to do. It is to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus. As we saw last week, the Bible isn't about us, it's about Christ and all that He has done for us so that we might be saved.

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