

Title: Now What!?

Purpose: To encourage ABC to practice living in the new creation

Message: Live in anticipation of the New creation

Texts: Acts 1:6-8, 2 Chronicles 36:15-23, Ephesians 5:15-20

Good morning. He is risen! (He is risen indeed)

I'd like to start this morning with a little trivia. If you pick up a Jewish Bible it will contain all of the books that we call the Old Testament. All of the same books, but in a different order. Our Old Testament ends with the prophet Malachi, but the scriptures Jesus would have been familiar with, the ones he would have read in the order he would have recognized, end with Chronicles.

Now, Chronicles is kind of like a recap. It repeats a lot of material with 1st and 2nd Kings but it comes at the end of the Jewish scriptures because it kind of pulls everything else together.

So, let's take a look at the end here, found in 2nd Chronicles chapter 36. We see here on the last page how the people of God rebelled over and over again. They didn't listen to the prophets and so the Babylonian empire flattens Jerusalem like a pancake. We'll pick up the text in Verse 20

2 Chronicles 36:20-23

He [the king of Babylon] took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up...'" (mime turning page)

Wait that's it? Go up where?!

A lot of translations don't emphasize this, but I'm told that in the original Hebrew the book ends in an incomplete sentence. "Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up..." talk about a cliff hanger!

This is the scripture that Jesus would have known as the "ending". Of course, the point of the incomplete sentence is that this isn't the end. The people are left waiting, wondering, and

grappling with the gravity of their sin. In the 500+ years after the exile until the time of Jesus there is no resolution. The exile ended but the Israelites feel like they are still living an exile of sorts. They still feel separated from God. But there remains whispers of hope... that an anointed one – a messiah – would one day come to set everything right.

We know that Jesus does in fact come, that he lives, and dies and is raised from the dead. And yet even his own followers don't get what that means. What did they ask him? Acts 1:6 – *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

They are still thinking too small, right? They are thinking about their kingdom. Squashed so long ago by the Babylonians, Jesus is thinking about the whole world.

2000 years later and we, like the disciples are still so often confused about what we are supposed to be doing. Every year we celebrate Easter. Every year I think, surely this is the most important time of the year. Everything changed because of the resurrection. But then, on Monday, we go back to work or school. We keep living out our lives. The world is still broken, or so it seems. Our friends and loved ones still get sick, grow old and die. Maybe we still struggle with sin. We know that Easter happened, but now what?

The key question

How do we live in the tension of the “now what?”. How do we live when we are in between the triumph of the cross and the final victory?

The key, as you might suspect, is *anticipation*. We are to live now in anticipation of the day when Christ shall reappear and heaven and earth shall be one. In that day Christ shall reign over all the earth and those who are “in Christ” as Paul would say, will be his Lieutenants, his leaders and caretakers of the glorious new creation. If we are to take guidance from scripture about how to live in the present moment it should be to live now, in the present, in anticipation of the future.

One way to think about this is to imagine that we are musicians, practicing the scales that help us learn how to play our instruments, and then practicing the songs until we know them by heart, until finally, when we are together with the rest of the band, we can play our parts beautifully for the glory of our king.

Another way to think about it is to say that we should start living now, as best we can, the way we will live in the new creation. Many of you know our family has a baby on the way this summer. It has been a frequent conversation with our three kids that we need to start practicing now, for instance, how to walk softly down the hall, and use inside voices... something we all

struggle with from time to time... because someday very soon, there will be a baby asleep in the next room and we don't want to wake them up.

We need to practice the good habits NOW so that it is easier LATER to live in the house with a baby. In the same way, when we practice the fruits of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control – when we practice being these things now, we are preparing to live in the house that will be the new creation, when heaven and earth are joined in the glory of Jesus.

If we are taking this seriously, we should pretty quickly realize that this is going to be... well... hard. It is easy to live in the world as it currently is. We have been doing that our whole lives. Living differently, living in anticipation of the new creation is hard. It's like being a foreigner in an unknown country. Our actions might not make sense to the people around us, and we will face constant temptation to fall back into old habits.

It turns out that a good portion of the New Testament – particularly a lot of Paul's letters, are written to help us live with that tension. So for the rest of our time today we are just going to unpack one passage and see where that takes us.

Ephesians 5:15-20

So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Right away we should see that this is a conclusion – it's toward the end of Ephesians – Paul is summing up what he has been saying for several pages. SO, be careful how you live... Boy, doesn't that sound like a feeble one liner out of a fortune cookie? Be careful how you live!? What is that supposed to mean Paul?

I'm glad you asked... because Paul goes on explain by pairing three negative statements (don't do this) with three positive statements (do this instead). These are all designed to help us understand what Paul means by "be careful how you live."

1.) Make the most of every opportunity (don't live like fools).

Some translations would say "redeem the time" here. As in – save time that might be wasted and use it for something worthwhile. There is ton to say about time – more than we, well, have

time for today... so let's just say that this is about more than just keeping your calendar clean or choosing not to binge watch an entire season of your favorite show. Although that would probably be classified as foolish! It's about viewing time as a gift from God rather than something we own.

It's interesting to me that in English we often talk about spending time, having time, "you're on my time now" as if time is something we can use, sell, or buy. In Spanish, instead of saying have a good time, you might say *passatela bien* – which means – "Pass it well". It emphasizes the fact that time is something that happens to us whether we want it to or not. We can't "have" or "own" or "collect" it - time just passes.

Wisdom says pass that time well, or as Paul says " *Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.*" It's about knowing that every moment is a gift from God, and letting the Holy Spirit guide and direct us... which brings us to:

2.) Understand the Lord's will (don't act thoughtlessly)

In other words, live intentionally; seeking God's will through prayer and study of his word. We all have decisions to make, let them be guided by our relationship with our Creator. Of course, we can't just do this on our own. We need help and Jesus knows we need help so:

3.) Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

This is in contrast to being filled with drink, or, in our day and age, any addictive substance or practice. If we are filling – that is, finding meaning or purpose – if we are filling our lives with or through anything other than God then we are on a path to destruction. Instead we need to be filled with the Spirit. It is interesting that Paul calls on us to do this musically – because music amplifies everything we do. When we fill our souls with the songs and hymns of our faith we are teaching our hearts how to make sense of the world through God's eyes. It circles back around to the illustration I used earlier – Let us teach our hearts to sing the songs they can sing forever in the praise and worship of our God and savior.

4.) AND Give thanks for everything

This is Paul's conclusion – his wrap up thought. It applies to each of the three other points. Pass your time well – and be thankful for the opportunities you have, understand God's will – and be thankful for God's guidance and God's peace as you discern the right path, Be filled with the Holy Spirit – and be thankful for the spiritual gifts that God imparts.

Conclusion

It's as good a place to end this morning as any. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! Thanks be to God! But now let us go out this week and begin to live differently. This will look different for each of us. The Holy Spirit will nudge you toward the areas in your life that need to change. God is patient, and will guide and direct us if we are willing to follow. Honestly, getting to the point where we are humble enough and willing enough to be led is the hardest part – I know I can only take wobbly steps, and fall down too often... But God delights in our wobbly steps just like a parent delights in the 10 month old's first trembling steps. God sees a future where we run and play and work and live in a new and beautiful world. So let us walk toward that new creation. Let us live in the present in light of the future. The resurrection changed everything. May it change us too.

Would you stand and pray with me. This is an old prayer.

Almighty God, who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity: Give your people grace so to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Benediction

As we depart today, let me remind you that there is a prayer corner here by this window. If you need to talk or pray with someone about anything today please make your way up here. And now may the God of new creation and new beginnings meet you as you go. May he give you grace to live now in anticipation of the coming day when He shall make all things new. New creation is coming, let's go out and be a part of it.