

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 18 & 19 – Why Does My Life Look Nothing Like the Bible?

Growing up in the Church, I would often read the stories in the Bible, and think, “Why isn’t it like that today?” Look at what the Bible says life looks like when you know God:

Enoch was taken up into heaven.¹ Noah survived a worldwide flood.² Abraham defeated four kings, he was visited by angels, and he saw fire come from heaven and destroy entire cities.³ Moses demonstrated God’s power in Egypt with ten powerful plagues, he parted the Red Sea, he gave water to the Israelites from a rock, he gave them food in the middle of a desert, and God said that he spoke to Moses face-to-face.⁴

Joshua parted the Jordan River, he defeated Jericho by shouting and blowing trumpets, and he commanded the sun to stand still in the sky and it obeyed him.⁵ Gideon defeated a massive army with only three hundred men.⁶ Samuel prophesied, and not one word he said failed to come true.⁷ David defeated a giant, he overthrew kings, and he was rescued from death on countless occasions.⁸

Elijah stopped the rain for three years by praying, he called down fire from heaven, he raised the dead, and he was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire.⁹ Elisha made an iron axe head float on water, he healed the sick, and even after he died a dead man was raised from the dead when his body simply touched Elisha’s dead body.¹⁰ Isaiah saw God’s throne room.¹¹ Daniel survived a lions’ den and repeatedly interacted with angels who told him the future.¹² His friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego survived being thrown into a blazing furnace.¹³

The apostles and the early Church healed the sick,¹⁴ saw thousands saved,¹⁵ raised the dead,¹⁶ had visions and dreams,¹⁷ and were taken up into heaven itself.¹⁸

Over and over again the Bible is filled with incredible stories about how the people who know God see him work in mighty ways, defending them, empowering them, and providing for them. Then we look at the modern-day Church, and we think, “Well, we had a cool worship service today.”

¹ Ref. Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5-6

² Ref. Genesis 6-9

³ Ref. Genesis 14, 18, 19:23-29

⁴ Ref. Exodus 5-14, 16-17; Numbers 11

⁵ Ref. Joshua 3-4, 6, 10:1-14

⁶ Ref. Judges 6-7

⁷ Ref. 1 Samuel 3-25:1, 3:19-21

⁸ Ref. 1 Samuel 17, 18:5-7, 23:1-6, 19-20, 23:7-29, 24, 26, 30

⁹ Ref. 1 Kings 17:1-9, 17:10-24, 18; 2 Kings 2:1-12

¹⁰ Ref. 2 Kings 5:1-19, 6:1-7, 13:14-21

¹¹ Ref. Isaiah 6:1-8

¹² Ref. Daniel 6, 7-12

¹³ Ref. Daniel 3

¹⁴ Ref. Acts 3, 8:5-8, 9:17-18, 9:32-35, 14:8-10, 28:7-9

¹⁵ Ref. Acts 2:41, 2:47, 6:1, 9:31, 9:35, 9:42, 11:21, 11:24, 13:43, 14:1, 16:5, 17:4

¹⁶ Ref. Acts 9:36-43, 20:7-12

¹⁷ Ref. Acts 2:17, 7:54-56, 9:10-16, 10:9-20, 16:9-10

¹⁸ Ref. 2 Corinthians 12:1-6

Something's wrong!

Christianity today is missing something. The power of God seen all throughout the Bible seems to be almost absent from the Church today. For many years, I saw this, and I always had the question: Why? Why do our lives look so different today? Why don't we see God move in power like we read about in the Bible?

The life most Christians experience today is so vastly different than anything we read about in the Bible. God seems distant. He seems far away. He seems uninvolved in our lives. We sing songs to him, we say prayers, and we try to convince ourselves that we know him, but we often don't really feel like we have a personal relationship with him.

We often go to church only because we feel like we have to or because our friends are there. We read our Bibles because we know we should. If we spend an hour reading the Bible each day, we're kind of secretly impressed with ourselves. If we read through the entire Bible every year, we're considered devout, because so few Christians read through the Bible at all.

When we ask for things in prayer, we try to muster up as much faith as we can. Jesus promised us that we can ask for whatever we want, and as long as we have faith, we will receive what we ask for.¹⁹ Yet despite how hard we try to believe, the sick often don't get healed, the dead don't get raised, the lame don't walk, and the blind don't see. The miracles are absent, and the only prayers that seem like they get answered are the minor ones that honestly probably would have happened even if we hadn't prayed at all.

When we read these grand promises in the Bible and then look at Christianity today, it's really no surprise that so many people are leaving the Church.

I personally know many, many people who have walked away from Christianity entirely. They read the Bible, they see what the Bible says true Christianity looks like, and they're just honest – the Bible does not describe what we see in the Church today. The closest thing to “miracles” that are happening in the Church today are often easily explained with no need for a “miracle” whatsoever.

These aren't the kinds of miracles we see in the Bible! The miracles in the Bible were undeniable. They were obvious. No one could question it – even those who wanted to!²⁰ Most of the “miracles” seen today fall so far short of what the Bible describes that many people are just too honest with themselves to pretend like it's the same thing.

No one who knew God in the Bible experienced life like most Christians do today. No one in the early Church experienced Christianity like this. The Bible describes something so very different than anything most people see happening in the Church today.

So, a lot of people decide the Bible must not be true.

They leave.

Why? Why does the Bible describe something so different than what we experience? Why does the Bible promise things that don't happen? Does this mean the Bible is not true? Does this mean Christianity is all a lie?

Most Christians either give up on Christianity, or they push these questions away because they're afraid that they're doubting. They ignore these questions and they ignore the fact that their lives don't look like the Bible. They think that *faith* means being blind to facts. They think that *faith* means thinking something is true despite the fact that they can see with their own eyes that something is wrong. They think that *faith* means never asking any questions.

But as we said in an earlier video, that's not the right response. Peter told us to make every effort to be certain that we are called and chosen.²¹ Peter was saying this is the most important thing,

¹⁹ Ref. Matthew 17:20, 21:18-22; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 17:6; John 14:12-14, 15:7, 16:23-24

²⁰ Ref. John 9:1-34; Acts 4:14

²¹ Ref. 2 Peter 1:10

so work really hard and make every effort to make sure that you are truly walking in the light. We're not making every effort to be certain that we're called and chosen if we just ignore the fact that our lives don't look like what the Bible says Christianity should look like!

Christians are afraid to ask questions. But that's entirely irresponsible! Asking questions is not what it means to doubt. Asking questions is how you learn!

The Bible warns us that many people will be deceived – they will think they are Christians when they really are not. They will think they're following Jesus, when they're not. They will think they're alive, when they're really still dead. They will call Jesus "Lord" and he will say, "I never knew you."²²

They are deceived.

How do they become deceived? Because when the deceivers came, teaching a Christianity that didn't at all line up with what the Bible said, they told people not to ask any questions. They told people that asking is doubting, and the Bible says not to doubt. But when the Bible says not to doubt, in the original Greek, it doesn't say *doubt*. It says *waver*. It's saying "don't waver" or in other words, "don't go back and forth between two different things." It's not talking about what you *believe*. It's talking about your *loyalties*. It's talking about *fidelity*. It's talking about your *reliability*.

As we've been talking about throughout this series, *faith* in Ancient Greek didn't mean *faith*. It meant *fidelity*. It meant *loyalty*. It meant *believing* and *obeying* at the same time. *Faith* and *faithfulness*. It wasn't about what information you believed to be accurate, it was about who you both trusted and obeyed.

So, you're allowed to ask questions! Asking questions isn't wavering. Wavering is when you want both God and this world at the same time, and you're going back and forth and you can't decide which one you're going to live for. It's when your loyalties are divided. But asking questions is not wavering. Accusing God is wrong, but asking a question isn't wrong. Asking is simply when you want to learn. If you're asking God a question because you trust that there's an answer that you simply don't understand, you're not doubting! You're demonstrating more faith than most Christians have! Most Christians are afraid to ask because deep down they're afraid that maybe the Bible is not true.

So, ask away! Feel free to ask God questions. Ask him what's wrong. Ask him what has to change. Ask him, "Why does the Bible make promises and say that my life should look a certain way, but it doesn't, and no one I know that calls themselves a Christian has a life that looks the way the Bible says it should? Why does Christianity today lack the power of God that we read about in the Bible? Why does Christianity today seem so different?"

As it turns out... the Bible has that answer.

Not only does it have the answer, but it told us ahead of time that this would happen. The fact that Christianity today seems void of the power of God is actually proof that what the Bible says is true. When Paul described the apostasy that he said would one day fill the Church, when he was saying that the Church would fall away and the Church would live for themselves and they wouldn't be true Christians. This is what he said:

"Remember this! In the last days there will be terrible times, because people will love themselves, love money, brag, and be arrogant. They will say evil things against others and will not obey their parents or be grateful or be holy. They will not love others, will refuse to forgive, will gossip, and will not control themselves. They will be cruel, will not love what is good, will be traitors, and will be reckless. They will be conceited, will love pleasure instead of God..."²³

Throughout this series, we've already talked about how this description is a description of the

²² Ref. Matthew 7:15-27, 13:19; Mark 13:5-6; Acts 20:29-31; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18-27; Jude; Revelation 3:1-2

²³ 2 Timothy 3:1-4

Church – it’s not a description of the world. Paul concluded this whole paragraph by saying “avoid these people,”²⁴ and he wrote elsewhere that whenever he told Christians to avoid certain people, he was not talking about those in the world. He was talking about those who call themselves brothers or sisters, yet live that way.²⁵ So here, when Paul gave this description and then said to avoid these people, he was saying that people who call themselves brothers and sisters will live this way. In other words, this whole description is a description of Christians.

Throughout this series, we’ve already talked about how the Church today is full of people who love themselves, they love money, they’re not holy, they don’t love others, they don’t love what is good, and they love pleasure instead of God. Their definitions of all these words are wrong; they don’t think it describes them, but it does. And, it’s the majority of Christians. It’s the majority of people who will watch this series.

If we understand what the Bible says these things mean, and what God says they mean, it’s clear that this whole description Paul gave is a perfectly accurate description of the Church today – not from our perspective, but from God’s perspective. He wasn’t describing some end-times scenario that is still going to happen someday. He was describing our current reality. We tend to not see it because we tend to not recognize that things haven’t always been the way they are now. We were born into this reality, so we fail to see that Paul was describing a change that took place before we were even born. We read about the early Church, and we associate ourselves with them despite the fact that our lifestyles, our love, our holiness, and our priorities demonstrate that we’re nothing like the biblical description of the early Church. Paul’s description in this passage perfectly paints the picture of how God sees the modern Church:

Their lives are about themselves. Money is their priority. They talk bad about each other. They don’t demonstrate the radical love of Jesus taught in Scripture. They often don’t forgive. They gossip about one another. They lack self-control. They don’t love what God says is good. They love pleasure instead of God. And when Paul described this terrible state of the apostate Church, he added at the end: “...having an appearance of godliness, but will not have its power.”²⁶

The Church today lacks the power of God that we read about in the Bible because the Church today doesn’t have the same relationship with God that we read about in the Bible. The Church today is apostate.

So many Christians want to see the power of God that we read about in the Bible. They want to see the Spirit move. They want to see miracles. They want to encounter God in incredible ways. They want to experience the promises in Scripture. They want to experience the life Jesus promised to those who follow him. But they don’t know where to start. They don’t know where to start because they don’t know what’s wrong. They know something’s wrong, but they don’t know how to fix it. They know something’s wrong, but they can’t figure out why! It’s because their whole perspective is wrong. They read the Bible from the perspective of a modern Christian in the Western world, and not from God’s perspective.

They don’t recognize that it’s not just the “lack of power” that’s wrong. It’s everything.

If Christians truly want to see this change, they need to be willing to tear everything down and build from scratch. They need to reject American Christianity. They need to reject modern Christianity and everything about it – all the comforts and all the things that modern Christianity tells us it’s okay for us to have. They need to reject all the things that we’ve come to accept as “true Christianity” that the early Church never did, and would never have done in a million years. We need to stop giving our money to buildings and staff, and we need to give our money to the poor. We need to stop putting

²⁴ Ref. 2 Timothy 3:5

²⁵ Ref. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

²⁶ 2 Timothy 3:5

our money towards “projects,” Christian art, Christian film, and Christian music, and we need to give our money to those who are in need. That’s what the Bible teaches. We need to be willing to reject everything about modern Christianity. We need to be willing to walk away from it. We need to recognize that God says our modern Christianity is apostasy, that it is honoring him with our lips while our hearts are far from him.²⁷ If you do not do what he wants, you do not love him. That is not true Christianity.

If Christians want to see the power of God, they need to be willing to tear everything down and build from scratch.

They need to forget all the things men have taught them, and all the religious traditions of men. They need to recognize that Paul said that this lack of power is a symptom of apostasy. Therefore, it requires a fundamental change. It requires Christians to go to Scripture instead of teachers and ask God to show them everything in their lives that must change. It requires Christians to transform from “an appearance of godliness” to actual godliness.

Throughout the rest of this video (and coming videos), we’re going to look at the kind of life Jesus promised. We’re going to look at what the Christian life is supposed to look like, and we’re going to look at what the Bible says we must do in order to have that kind of life.

Jesus said, “I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their message. Father, I ask that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I ask that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me.”²⁸

Notice what Jesus said here. First, he clarified that he was not just praying about his disciples. He was praying for everyone who believes in him because of the message of his disciples. That means he was praying for us.

He prayed to the Father, “As you are in me and I am in you, I ask that they can also be one in us.” That means that just like the Father is one with Jesus, and Jesus is one with the Father, Jesus prayed that we would be one with him and the Father.

Jesus was saying that we are supposed to be one with him in the same way that he is one with the Father! That’s an incredible request! Jesus wants us to be just as united with God the Father as Jesus himself is! This is why Jesus also said, “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you don’t come from me, but the Father abides in me and does his own work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or believe because of the works themselves. I tell you the truth, whoever believes in me will do the same things that I do. Those who believe will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”²⁹

Here, Jesus said that we can know that he is one with the Father because of all the things that Jesus did. But more than that, Jesus said that everyone who believes in him will do all the same things that he did – and even greater things! Why?

Because we are supposed to be one with him and the Father, too! We are supposed to be one with him in the same way that he is one with the Father. Our Christian lives should look like the life of Jesus – the kind of life where we are one with God, like Jesus was, and like the first Christians in the early Church were.

Jesus promised life in abundance.³⁰ Jesus promised that those who come to him will never be

²⁷ Ref. Matthew 15:3-9

²⁸ John 17:20-21

²⁹ John 14:10-12

³⁰ Ref. John 10:10

thirsty again.³¹ He promised to live in us.³² He promised to answer our prayers.³³ He promised that if we believe in him, we will do even greater things than he did. He promised that we should be one with him and the Father in the exact same way that he is one with the Father.

But most Christians don't experience this kind of life.

They are thirsty for more. Their prayers go unanswered. The power of God is absent. The clearest prophecies they hear are extremely vague. The "accurate" prophecies that seem to come true were honestly really likely to happen anyway, and anyone making an educated guess could have said the same thing. No one is walking on water. No one is feeding five thousand. No one is cursing a tree and watching it wither up. No one is raising the dead. No one's shadow is healing people. The "life in abundance" that we were promised seems to be no different than the lives of the unbelievers around us. The "Holy Spirit living in our hearts" seems to be so unnoticeable that one of the biggest questions many Christians have is whether or not they've even received the Holy Spirit. The Bible says the Holy Spirit is our guarantee that we will receive an inheritance.³⁴ Yet most Christians don't even know if they have the Holy Spirit. What kind of guarantee is that?

We're supposed to be one with God in the same way that Jesus is one with God. This isn't what Jesus' life looked like! And this isn't what anyone in the early Church experienced. Everything used to be different.

Christians need to start asking God what's wrong. Christians need to stop accepting the status quo. If Christians really want God, they need to stop accepting anything less than what they read about in the Bible. If they really want God, they should prove it by how wholeheartedly they refuse to stop searching for the truth – even if it turns their whole world upside down.

If Christians really wanted God, they would never have accepted modern Christianity in the first place – because it looks nothing like what the Bible describes.

To begin addressing this issue, we must start by addressing what most Christians think it means to have a relationship with God.

Most Christians think that having a relationship with God means we read our Bibles, we pray, we talk to God and try to listen for his voice, we sing songs to him, we remember that he's near, we call him "dad," and we spend personal private time alone with God. Yet many Christians would also describe their relationship with God as feeling "dry" and "empty." Church seems boring. Being a Christian seems boring.

They go to church because they feel like they have to. They read their Bibles because they feel like they should. But really, they're looking forward to the football game after church. They're looking forward to the new movie coming out. They're looking forward to their upcoming vacation.

This relationship we have with God is supposed to be the kind of relationship where we can't get enough of God – not where we have to force ourselves to spend time with him. The hardest part of our day should be when we put down our Bibles – not when we pick them up.

Many Christians feel like their relationship with God is a chore: they read their Bibles because they have to. They go to church because they have to. They know it shouldn't feel like a chore, but it does. But they choose to do it anyway because they know it's important. They want to be close to God. They want to please God.

The problem is that Christians have come up with their own definition of what it means to have a relationship with God. It doesn't mean reading your Bible. It doesn't mean praying. It doesn't mean singing songs to him. It doesn't mean calling him "dad." It doesn't mean spending personal

³¹ Ref. John 4:10-14, 6:35, 7:37-39

³² Ref. John 15:4-5

³³ Ref. Matthew 17:20, 21:18-22; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 17:6; John 14:12-14, 15:7, 16:23-24

³⁴ Ref. 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:14

private times alone with him. A true relationship with God is about what you're doing with your life – not what you're doing for an hour every morning.

As Christians, we live our lives looking forward to that day when we'll hear Jesus say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."³⁵ But we think of our "Christian duties" as things like spending time with God instead of things like selling our possessions, giving to the poor, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving to everyone who asks, welcoming strangers into our homes, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and all those other things that Jesus commanded us to do.

We've replaced the commands of God with human traditions.³⁶ We reject the commands of God, and we replace them with religious duties like reading our Bibles, going to church, and praying. We've decided that that is what God wants us to do – even though the Bible tells us what the commands of Jesus are, and they're something completely different.

What exactly are we expecting him to say "well done" for? "Well done, you forced yourself to spend time with me even though you really didn't want to"?

Jesus wants a real relationship with us – a healthy relationship! What other relationship in your life would you think that you love someone who you have to force yourself to spend time with against your will? You know you don't love that person! So why do we think we love God when we treat him the same way? If it's really so hard to spend time with God, then just don't. What I mean is – if it's that hard for you to simply spend time with God, then you're not gaining any rewards or treasure in heaven by forcing yourself to do it anyway.

He's not looking for people who just spend time with him. He wants people who love him. And he said, "Those who know my commands and obey them are the ones who love me..."³⁷

Jesus isn't going to say, "Well done, you spent time with me." He's going to say, "Well done, you did what I said to do! You loved me!" The reason Christians struggle to spend time with God and be passionate about him is that they don't really love him. That's the real problem. Those who love him won't just read their Bibles, they won't just pray, they won't just sing songs to him, they won't just talk about him – they'll go do the things the Bible tells them to do – the things that God cares about. They will devote themselves to it, and it will consume every single aspect of their lives and take priority over everything. Jesus drove this point home a few sentences later by saying again, "If people love me, they will obey my teaching..."³⁸

John reiterated this when he said, "Loving God means obeying his commands."³⁹

Part of the problem is that Christians are reading the Bible and spending time with God for all the wrong reasons! They do it to feel good. It's all about themselves. They want a pick-me-up, so they go to a familiar passage or a Christian devotional or some other Christian book, and they read some encouraging words that make them feel better. They think they've had an encounter with God when they read something that makes them feel good... even if it doesn't at all change the way they live the rest of their lives.

But this isn't what our relationship with God is supposed to look like. Often, we end up missing what the Bible is really saying because we think it's just there to give us warm fuzzies and help us feel better about God. But there is no Scripture that was written for the purpose of giving us warm fuzzies and making us feel good!

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right. Using the Scriptures, the person

³⁵ Ref. Matthew 25:21, 23

³⁶ Ref. Matthew 15:3-9

³⁷ John 14:21

³⁸ John 14:23

³⁹ 1 John 5:3

who serves God will be capable, having all that is needed to do every good work.”⁴⁰

We live in the world, but we’re not from this world. We’re in enemy territory during the greatest war that has ever raged in all of history – the spiritual war that has continued to rage since the beginning of time. God isn’t trying to just give us warm fuzzies! His Scripture has a purpose, and that purpose is to teach us, to show us where we’re wrong, to correct us, to instruct us in how to live right, and to equip us, making us capable of serving God by doing good works.

If we read Scripture just looking for a pick-me-up, we’re going to entirely miss what it’s actually saying. And honestly, we’ll often find ourselves believing that we can get by without it, because we won’t feel the need for a morale boost on that particular day. But this isn’t what Scripture is for. The purpose of Scripture is to teach us how we should live. Our relationship with God isn’t about reading our Bibles for the sake of reading our Bibles. It’s not about praying for the sake of prayer. It’s not about spending time with God just for a morale boost at the beginning of the day.

God wants us doing the things the Bible tells us to do. And in order to do those things, we need to know what it actually says. We need to know what the commands of God are – and we need to be doing those things.

That’s why we should read the Bible – to know what God wants us doing.

That’s why Jesus repeatedly said, “Those who know my commands and obey them are the ones who love me,” and, “If people love me, they will obey my teaching.” He didn’t say, “Those who read the Scriptures and pray are the ones who love me.” In fact, Jesus said the opposite! He said to the Pharisees, “You carefully study the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. They do in fact tell about me, but you do not want to come to me to have that life. I don’t need praise from people. But I know you – I know that you don’t have God’s love in you.”⁴¹

Jesus said that he knew they didn’t have God’s love in them. Why? Because John said that if you don’t love with God’s radical love then God’s love doesn’t live in you.⁴² The Pharisees did the exact same thing many Christians do today! They carefully studied the Bible because they thought it gave them life. Christians today often read the Bible because they think it gives them strength for the day, or because it encourages them. Christians say they need to read the Bible to “feed” themselves. But that’s not the purpose of reading the Bible. (And, as a side note, it’s taking the “man does not live on bread alone” verse completely out of its original context! The original context for that verse is in Deuteronomy.⁴³ It’s talking about how God fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna from heaven, and it’s saying that you need to remember that you don’t live or die based on whether or not you have food – you live or die based on whether or not God keeps you alive. It’s not even talking about reading the Bible.)

In short, you don’t read the Bible to gain life; you read the Bible to learn what God wants you to do. Reading the Bible in and of itself does not give us life, strength, or food. That was never the purpose of Scripture! The purpose of Scripture is to teach us what to do! That’s why James said, “Do what God’s teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves. Those who hear God’s word and do nothing are like people who look at themselves in a mirror. They see their faces and then go away and quickly forget what they looked like. But blessed are those who carefully study God’s perfect law that makes people free, and they persevere in it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God’s teaching says. Those who do this will be blessed.”⁴⁴

If our relationship with Jesus has us trying to read our Bibles and get excited about God

⁴⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

⁴¹ John 5:39-42

⁴² Ref. 1 John 3:16-18

⁴³ Ref. Deuteronomy 8:1-3

⁴⁴ James 1:22-25

without actually doing the things Jesus said to do, we shouldn't be surprised when we keep finding that we're not really all that excited to spend time with him.

Why?

Because we don't love him.

Reading the Bible and spending time with God is something we will *want to do naturally* when we actually love him. But if we're not obeying him, then we know we don't really love him. When Jesus says, "well done" to people, he's saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." But why would he say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant" to people who never actually went out and did any of the things he told us to do?

If we want to be good and faithful servants, we need to do what he asked. This shows whether or not we really love him. Because as Jesus said, the only ones who love him are the ones who obey him, and the ones who obey him are the only ones who love him. Therefore, the ones who do not obey him don't actually love him – even if they read their Bibles, pray, call him "Lord," go to church, sing worship songs, and do their best not to sin.

A true relationship with God is not about reading our Bibles and praying. It's not about spending time with God in the mornings. It's not about having our "devotionals." It's about obeying God in the rest of our lives. It's about doing what we read in the Bible. It's about obeying his commands.

So that's the first issue we need to address: what it means to have a relationship with God. The second issue we need to address is related. It's built on understanding what a true relationship with God looks like. The second issue we need to address is that the amazing promises in the New Testament are given to those who have a *true* relationship with God. They are not promises for just anyone who calls themselves a Christian.

At the beginning of this video, we mentioned many people in the Bible who lived incredible lives because of their relationship with God. Many Christians today deeply want to see their own lives look like the kinds of stories we read about in Scripture. They recognize that something is wrong, but they're not sure how to fix it. They want to see the power of God. They want to hear the voice of God. They want to be led by the Spirit of God. They want to see miracles. They want the life that we see in the book of Acts.

But if we want to see the power of the Kingdom and the movement of the Spirit like we can see in the book of Acts, then we must first start by addressing all of the other differences between us and the Christians of the early Church.

Why should Christians expect to have the same power that we see in the book of Acts when they refuse to live the lifestyle that those people chose to live? Why should anyone expect to see their lives look like that when they prove through their actions that they don't even love Jesus?

Christians make this assumption that the life and power we see in the Bible is available to anyone who calls themselves a Christian. But that's not what the Bible says. The Bible says being a true Christian means we obey Jesus. It's not about what you call yourself. It's not about what you say you believe. It's not about the information you accept to be true. It's not about who you say you love. It's about what you do.

Many Christians read the amazing promises throughout the New Testament, and they just assume those promises are for them. They assume that they are in the same category as the Christians that the apostles wrote to. But if loving Jesus means obeying his commands, then are those promises really for those Christians who ignore the radical commands and lifestyle that Jesus and the apostles all taught?

Much of Christianity today looks at different promises in Scripture and ignores the fact that those promises come with a condition:

if A, B, and C, then X, Y, and Z

A conditional promise means that God didn't just promise, "I will do this." He promised, "If you do this, then I will do that." It has a condition attached to it (the *A, B, and C*). You are required to do something to receive that promise. Here are some examples of conditional promises:

"For if you forgive others for their sins, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive others, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins."⁴⁵

Notice the condition here: *if* you forgive others, *then* God will forgive you. But *if* you don't forgive others, *then* God will not forgive you.

Now, that one is fairly easy to spot because it's clearly framed as an "If...then..." statement. But here's another one:

"Not all those who say to me 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants."⁴⁶

The condition here is: *if* you don't do what God wants, *then* you will not enter the kingdom of heaven, even if you call Jesus "Lord." But, *if* you do what God wants, *then* you will enter the kingdom of heaven.

"I tell you the truth, you must accept the kingdom of God as if you were a little child, or you will never enter it."⁴⁷

The condition here is: *if* you don't accept the kingdom of God as if you were a little child, *then* you will never enter it.

"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then you will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God... Don't judge others, and you will not be judged. Don't condemn others, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you... The standard you use with others is the standard God will use with you."⁴⁸

The conditions here are: *if* you love your enemies, do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back, *then* you will have a great reward and will be a child of God. Also, *if* you don't judge others, *then* you won't be judged. *If* you don't condemn others, *then* you won't be condemned. *If* you forgive others, *then* you will be forgiven. And *if* you give to others, *then* God will give to you. God will treat you the way you treat others.

"Command those who are rich in the present age not to be proud. Tell them to hope in God, not in their uncertain riches. God richly gives us everything to enjoy. Tell them to do good, to be rich in doing good deeds, to be generous and ready to share. By doing that, they will be storing up a treasure for themselves as a strong foundation for the future. Then they will be able to take hold of the life that is true life."⁴⁹

The condition here is: *if* a rich person is not proud, hopes in God, is rich in doing good deeds, and is generous and ready to share, *then* they will have treasure in heaven and *then* they will be able to take hold of true life.

These are just a few examples.

Most Christians don't even recognize that many of the promises in the New Testament have conditions attached to them. They might think it's an Old Testament thing – that in the Old Testament people had to do certain things to receive God's promises. But they think that in the New Covenant,

⁴⁵ Matthew 6:14-15

⁴⁶ Matthew 7:21

⁴⁷ Mark 10:15

⁴⁸ Luke 6:35, 37-38

⁴⁹ 1 Timothy 6:17-19

we receive all the promises with no conditions attached other than believing in Jesus.

That's simply not true.

As of right now, I've counted 170 separate conditional promises in the New Testament alone. And I strongly encourage everyone to read through the New Testament and keep an eye out for them – see them for yourselves because it will give you understanding about what the Bible actually says, and you will see that these promises are not promises that are for anyone that just calls themselves a Christian and says they believe in Jesus.

Most Christians don't even recognize that conditional promises exist for us in the New Covenant, they tend to focus on the X, Y, and Z side of the promises, or in other words, "what is God going to do for me?" But they ignore or often don't even notice the conditional side of the promises – the A, B, and C side, or in other words, "what is God asking of me?"

Most of the time this comes from the "faith alone" idea, where they don't understand that real faith includes action. They think they're saved just by believing something is true. And because they think they are saved only from believing something is true, they end up re-interpreting what Scripture means when it says, "if A, B, and C."

After all, if Scripture gave conditions to some of these promises, then those promises *aren't* founded on belief alone – they're founded on action. And that goes against the false doctrine they believe.

As we've been discussing, Jesus made it clear that those who *obey* him are the ones who truly love him. But that's not all those verses say! Both of those verses we've been discussing also come with an incredible (albeit, conditional) promise:

"Those who know my commands and obey them are the ones who love me, and my Father will love those who love me. I will love them and will reveal myself to them."⁵⁰

The condition here is: *If* you know my commands and obey my commands, *then* you truly love me, and *then* my Father will love you, and I will love you, and I will reveal myself to you.

"If people love me, they will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."⁵¹

The condition here is: *If* you love me, *then* you will obey my teaching. And *if* you do, *then* my Father will love you, and we will come to you and make our home with you.

If you look at the rest of this section, it's clear that when Jesus said, "I will reveal myself to them," and "we will come to you and make our home with you," he was referring to the Holy Spirit.⁵² Essentially, Jesus was telling us that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for *real* Christians. It's not for people who say with their lips that they love Jesus but prove through their actions that they don't.

Jesus makes his home with us, through the Holy Spirit, *if* we obey his commands.

This shouldn't come as a surprise. We've been told by the Church time and time again that once we believe in Jesus, we can have fellowship with him and draw near to God. And that is true – but as we've seen all throughout this series, *repentance* is when you change your actions and start obeying. *True faith* is when you believe and obey. It's when you have loyalty. It's when you have fidelity. It's when you're reliable.

That means *true Christians* are those who repent of their old life, stop living that way, and start living their life in obedience to the radical commands of Jesus. Anyone who doesn't do that isn't actually a Christian – even if they call themselves a Christian, even if they think they're a Christian,

⁵⁰ John 14:21

⁵¹ John 14:23

⁵² Ref. John 14:16-17, 14:26, 15:4, 15:26, 16:7-15, 17:20-23

and even if they call Jesus “Lord.” That’s what the entire book of 1 John taught.⁵³ Being a Christian means you obey. And Jesus only makes his home in the hearts of those who obey. Anyone else is what the Bible calls “deceived.”⁵⁴

That’s why the early Church looked so different than the Church today. The early Church was marked by obedience. The early Church was full of people who died to this world and this life, and lived their lives with one goal and one priority – obeying and pleasing the Lord. They shared everything in common, they met the needs of others, they made the Kingdom their only focus.

If Christians today want to experience the kind of life the early Church lived, they must first change the way they’re living and prioritize the lifestyle that Jesus taught. This is where everything will begin to change in our relationships with Jesus. Those who love Jesus enough to actually obey him will get a real, personal relationship with God! It won’t be one of just “feeling good” and “pick-me-ups.” It’s the kind of relationship where Jesus reveals himself to you. It’s the kind of relationship where God the Father and the Son come and make their home with you and live with you, and you become one with them in the same way that Jesus is one with the Father. It’s the kind of relationship we see the early Church walking out in the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament.

This is where the extreme cost of following Jesus begins to be easy. The cost is huge when looking at it from a natural point of view. But when you realize what Jesus offers to those who accept this cost – it hardly seems like a cost at all. Jesus himself – the Son of God – the one who defeated death itself and is seated on the throne in heaven – wants to be your friend. It’s not just Jesus – the Father himself will come make his home with you. Jesus also said, “In that day you will ask the Father for things in my name. I mean, I will not need to ask the Father for you. For the Father himself loves you. He loves you because you loved me and believed that I came from God.”⁵⁵

When we begin to actually obey Jesus and prove our love for him through our actions instead of just saying we love him, we gain a personal relationship with God himself. Our actions show whether we really love Jesus. Do we love him enough to accept the cost? This is what Jesus was talking about when he gave the following parables:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. One day a man found the treasure, and then he hid it in the field again. He was so excited that he went and sold everything he owned to buy that field. Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found a very valuable pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.”⁵⁶

Jesus’ commands are for us to give to the poor, help the needy, give up our excess, sell our possessions, stop loving this world, stop loving money, stop living for this life, and show his radical divine love to others through our actions. Is it any wonder then that this is exactly what the man in the parable did when he found the treasure that represents the kingdom of heaven? He went and sold his possessions. He gave up everything he had so he could get it.

This is what Jesus was saying in this parable. The cost of following him may be great – it may cost you everything you have – but once you begin to understand what it means to have God come make his home with you, you will see the far superior value of what God offers instead of what this world offers. It becomes a no-brainer! Of course I’ll sell my possessions and give to those in need! I not only get to show love toward others, but I’ve tasted and seen that God is good! He is so unfathomably good and worth every sacrifice and every bit of suffering.

Christians today make the mistake of thinking they already know what it’s like to have God

⁵³ Ref. 1 John 1:5-7, 2:3-6, 2:9-11, 2:15-17, 2:24-25, 2:29, 3:4-11, 3:14, 3:16-18, 3:23-24, 4:7-8, 4:9-12, 4:16, 4:19-21, 5:1-3, 5:18-20

⁵⁴ Ref. Matthew 24:4-5, 24:11; Ephesians 5:6-7; Colossians 2:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-22, 3:17; 1 John 2:26, 3:7; 2 John 7

⁵⁵ John 16:26-27

⁵⁶ Matthew 13:44-46

make his home with them. They think they've already experienced Jesus revealing himself to them. They think they've already tasted of the Holy Spirit. But their lives don't look anything like what we read about in the Bible. Our lives are supposed to look like what we read in the book of Acts.

Because they think they've already experienced it, they're hesitant to accept the extreme cost of obeying the commands of Jesus. First of all – they don't think they have to, because they think they're saved by believing and not by obeying. Second – they don't want to, because they think they already have that relationship with God.

They don't want God because they think they already have God.

They don't recognize that what God offers is so much more than anything they've experienced in “religious Christianity.” Everything they read about in the book of Acts is available to them. It's available to you. The relationship that Abraham had with God, that Moses had, that the prophets had, that the apostles had, that the early Church had – that relationship is available to us, through Jesus, through fidelity to Jesus and obedience to his commands, through living the life he commanded us to live because we love him.

This relationship with God is what Paul was talking about when he said, “Those things were important to me, but now I think they are worth nothing because of Christ. Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him, I have lost all those things, and now I consider them worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ and to be united with him.”⁵⁷

Paul was saying the things it cost him are worth nothing in comparison to what he gained! Jesus often listed out things it will cost us to follow him, but Paul demonstrated that those things really are worth nothing when you see what you gain by giving them up! Paul saw the value of the Kingdom of God, and he went and sold everything. He gave up everything to have it. He gave it all up because he saw that everything else was worth nothing compared to the Kingdom – compared to knowing Jesus personally.

And did you notice the conditional promise hidden there in what Paul said? It's the same thing Jesus said. Paul obeyed the commands of Jesus, he gave up everything, he considered it all worthless compared to knowing Jesus – and he said that doing this allowed him to have Christ and be united with him! This is exactly what Jesus said! He taught people over and over to give up everything in order to follow him,⁵⁸ and he promised that if we obey him, he will come to us, make his home with us, and we will be united as one with him in the same way that he is united as one with the Father!

Paul understood the value of the kingdom of God! He understood that the benefits of Christianity are not just that we get to go to heaven someday. We gain a relationship with God right now! And Paul showed us that this was only possible for him because he gave up everything in order to get that pearl – in order to gain the Kingdom of God and be united with Jesus and the Father!

This is why he prayed for the Ephesians, saying, “I pray that Christ will make his home in your hearts by faith and that your life will be rooted and grounded in love. And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to comprehend the greatness of Christ's love – how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is. Christ's love is beyond comprehension, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God.”⁵⁹

Paul prayed for the Ephesians (and for all of God's people) that we would have Christ come and live in us – he even used the same words as Jesus – that Christ will “make his home” in your heart! It's no surprise that he prayed that their lives would be rooted and grounded in love – that's the

⁵⁷ Philippians 3:7-9

⁵⁸ Ref. Matthew 6:19-25, 10:34-39, 16:23-26, 19:21, 19:29; Mark 8:33-38, 9:35, 10:29-31, 10:42-45; Luke 9:23-26, 9:57-62, 12:13-21, 12:32-34, 12:49-53, 13:25-35, 18:22-24, 22:25-27; John 12:24-26

⁵⁹ Ephesians 3:17-19

command of Jesus we're supposed to obey! This tracks right with the promise Jesus made in John 14. If our lives are rooted and grounded in love, Christ will come make his home in our hearts.

And what a tremendous promise that is! His love, his presence, his friendship is beyond comprehension! But Paul prayed that people would really know that love so they can be filled with the fullness of God. That's another (related) conditional promise – if you want to be filled with the fullness of God, you must know the love of Christ that is beyond comprehension.

Why? Because Jesus commanded us to love others “as I have loved you.”⁶⁰ If you don't know how Jesus has loved you, then how can you obey his commands to love others with that same love? And if you're not obeying his command, then he will not come make his home with you, and you won't be filled with the fullness of God! Paul was saying the exact same thing Jesus said.

But, if we are rooted and grounded in love, loving one another with the same incomprehensible love that Christ showed for us, then we can be filled with the fullness of God. Think about what that means. The “fullness of God” means all of God living in us.

Just. Like. Jesus.

We can be one with God in the same way that Jesus was one with God. That's what Jesus said,⁶¹ and that's what Paul said here. This is the kind of relationship we can have with God! He wants to talk to us! He wants to lead us! He wants intimate friendship with us! He doesn't just want us to go to church, read our Bibles, pray, memorize Scripture, and try not to do bad things. He wants people who love him so much they drop everything – their comfort, their singleness, their marriages, their time, their money, their possessions, their careers, their relationships, their dreams, their projects, and even their lives. He wants people who are all-in like the original Church in Acts was.

And when we live this way, we get to experience him! The fullness of God. There's no way to put a value on that. Is that not worth giving up everything for?

Jesus gave us another related conditional promise that many Christians are familiar with, but they don't understand:

“Abide in me, and I will abide in you.”⁶²

The conditional promise is fairly obvious: *If* you abide in Jesus, *then* he will abide in you. When we read this today, most Christians think it means, “Spend time with me, talking to me, and reading my word, and I'll spend time with you and be with you.” So many Christians talk about how we need to abide in him, we need to build our relationship with him, we need to talk to him and spend time worshipping him. They turn it into this inward-focused thing where it's all about me and God, me and God, me and God. But that's not what Jesus meant! Just a few verses later, Jesus said, “...if you obey my commands, you will abide in my love.”⁶³

According to Jesus, *if* we obey his commands, *then* we abide in his love. But is abiding “in his love” the same thing as abiding “in him”?

Yes, it is. John wrote about the concept of *abiding* quite a bit in the book of 1 John. John said, “Be sure you abide in the teaching you heard from the beginning. If you abide in what you heard from the beginning, you will also abide in the Son and in the Father...”⁶⁴

So, while Jesus said, “Abide in me, and I will abide in you,” John said, “If you abide in the teaching you have heard from the beginning, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.” Therefore, according to John, abiding in Jesus (the Son) means abiding in the teaching you have heard from the beginning.

⁶⁰ Ref. John 13:34, 15:12

⁶¹ Ref. John 17:21-23

⁶² John 15:4

⁶³ John 15:10

⁶⁴ 1 John 2:24

If you abide in the teaching you have heard from the beginning, then you abide in Jesus. What is that teaching? John told us:

“This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other.”⁶⁵

So, when Jesus said, “Abide in me, and I will abide in you,” according to John, if we want to abide in Jesus and have him abide in us, we need to obey his command to love one another. And, just in case there was still any confusion about this, John clarified a few more times:

“This is what God commands: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love each other, just as he commanded. *The people who obey God’s commands abide in God, and God abides in them.*”⁶⁶

“...if we love each other, God abides in us, and his love is made perfect in us.”⁶⁷

“God is love. Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”⁶⁸

When Jesus told us to abide in him, he wasn’t talking about just spending time in Scripture, singing worship songs, and praying. He wasn’t talking about an internal thing that’s just quietly between us and God. He wants us to live our lives for him! He wants us to give up everything for him. He wants it to be outward. He wants us focused on others.

This is how we’re *supposed* to worship him!⁶⁹

Abiding in him means we obey his commands, not just that we read our Bibles and pray. When we obey his commands, we will come to really know him. This is when we will mature in him. This is when our relationship will deepen. This is when he will come make his home with us and abide in us. God becomes everything. He becomes more important to you than anything or anyone else. Once you start living for him, you will taste how good he is, and there’s no stopping what you would be willing to do for him. You become like the man in his parable: you excitedly sell everything you have to get that pearl.⁷⁰

This is the source of your ability to live seeking first the Kingdom.

God is so good. He is the one we were made for. He is the only satisfaction we can ever find. If we start living for him, we get to have him, tangibly! If we really give ourselves to him, we can experience him – not just as some feeling we get when we sing an upbeat worship song with flashing lights. That’s a temporary experience that fades when the music ends and the lights stop flashing. But the encounter with God we can have when we start living for him in everything we do – that’s an encounter that fills you up and overflows. It doesn’t fade after a couple of hours – it consumes you. It overwhelms you. It gives you that abundant life that Jesus promised!⁷¹ He comes and lives in you. He abides in you. The fullness of God. All of God living in you. You can be just as united with God as Jesus was with God.

Why would you say no to that?

In the Church today, most Christians read the stories in the Bible, and they almost seem like fairy tales compared with our lives. The people in the Bible knew God personally. God was moving. God was winning their battles and defending his people. Thousands were getting saved. The dead were being raised, the sick were being healed, the lame were walking, the blind regained their sight, the deaf could hear, the mute could speak. God’s Kingdom was on full display for the world to see. Paul even went so far as to say:

“My teaching and preaching were not with words of human wisdom that persuade people, but

⁶⁵ 1 John 3:11

⁶⁶ 1 John 3:23-24, emphasis added

⁶⁷ 1 John 4:12

⁶⁸ 1 John 4:16

⁶⁹ Ref. 1 Samuel 15:22-23; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Romans 12:1-2

⁷⁰ Ref. Matthew 13:44-46

⁷¹ Ref. John 10:10

with demonstrations of the Spirit and of power. This was so that your faith would be in God's power and not in human wisdom."⁷²

Paul didn't go around with persuasive arguments to try to convince people. He demonstrated the power of the Kingdom of God so that people would put their faith in God, and not in Paul's arguments. But this is the exact opposite of what the Church does today. Today, countless books are written with arguments and reasons why people should believe that God exists and that the Bible is true. We have a whole sphere of Christian education called *apologetics* where Christians learn how to reason with people and convince them to believe in God. And beyond evangelism, the Church today is itself filled with people who often don't even believe in the power of God.

The power of God is absent from the Church today.

Many Christians are hungering to see God move in incredible ways. They want to see the Spirit do amazing things. People are questioning why our lives don't look like the Christians in the book of Acts. People are searching for the answers, changing how we format our meetings, stirring up emotions with loud music and flashing lights, strategizing about how to plan the perfect revival – and when there *is* some kind of "revival," it consists of emotional experiences where people go to have an encounter, but it lacks real transformed lives. At the end of the "revival," as the experience begins to fade, it becomes apparent that no lives were changed. Everyone goes back to living as normal, living as Americans, and they don't ever get to the point where they look like the book of Acts.

There's a huge movement happening today where many people are leaving the traditional institutional Church to start house churches, meet in small meetings, and have everyone participate in the meetings. Many people are hoping that this new structure will hold the answer to that question, "why do we not see God moving in power like we see in the early Church? Why do we not see the Holy Spirit doing things like we see in the Bible?" As much as I'm a huge fan of the house church movement – and it is so much closer to how things were done in the book of Acts! – it's not going to be the answer most Christians are looking for. Jesus told us what the answer is. Most Christians miss it either because it contradicts the theology that men have handed down to them, or they miss it because it's so uncomfortable they're not willing to accept it.

The early Church looked so different from the modern Church for one reason, and one reason alone: Jesus revealed himself to them, and God made his home with them. They were united with God and filled with his fullness.

The Church today doesn't have that – even though they think they do. Changing the structure of our meetings isn't going to fix this problem. Jesus didn't say, "If you meet together in homes and have everyone participate in your meetings, then I will reveal myself to you and come make my home with you."

He didn't say, "If you have prayer meetings and worship services and get together all the time to meet, then I will reveal myself to you and come make my home with you."

He didn't say, "If you put together the perfect meeting with perfectly performed music, flashing lights, and get everyone excited, then I will reveal myself to you and come make my home with you."

He didn't say, "If you have 24-hour prayer services, then I will reveal myself to you and come make my home with you."

Christians keep trying all these things because they're holding onto the false belief that Jesus said, "If you believe in me, then I will reveal myself to you and come make my home with you." So, they're convinced that because they believe in Jesus, they must be in the same category as the early Church. This is exactly the reason they don't understand why things look so vastly different today. Jesus didn't say any of those things. He said, "if you obey my commands, then I will reveal myself to

⁷² 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

you and come make my home with you.” The one biggest difference between the modern church and the early Church can be seen in the description of the early Church in Acts:

“All the believers were in close fellowship and shared everything. They would sell their land and the things they owned and then divide the money and give it to anyone who needed it... they ate together in their homes, sharing their food with joyful and generous hearts.”⁷³

“The group of believers were one heart and mind. No one said any of their possessions was their own. In fact, everything was held in common... There were no needy people among them. Because from time to time those who owned fields or houses sold them, brought the money from the sale, and gave it to the apostles. Then the money was distributed to anyone who needed it.”⁷⁴

Why were they selling their possessions and giving to those in need, not living in excess, thinking more about one another than they were themselves, and making sure there were no needy people among them? Because those are the commands of Jesus! ⁷⁵ They were obeying the commands of Jesus. And as a result, Jesus came and made his home with them. It’s no wonder that when Luke wrote this description of the early Church, he included the following descriptions intermingled right in the midst of the sentences I just quoted earlier:

“The apostles were doing many miracles and signs, and everyone felt fear for God... Every day the Lord added those who were being saved to the group of believers.”⁷⁶

“With great power the apostles gave testimony that the Lord Jesus was truly raised from the dead. And great grace was on all of them.”⁷⁷

In the New Testament we see many stories of God’s power and we see an unstoppable Church that was going out into the world and crushing the kingdom of darkness. The stories we read about them are so vastly different than what we see in the Church today for one reason, and one reason alone: they obeyed Jesus.

Because they obeyed Jesus, God came to them and made his home with them.

Christians today need to stop thinking that they’re saved just by believing something is true. They need to stop thinking that being a Christian is just about believing the facts. They need to stop thinking that if they can just plan the perfect event then God will show up. They need to stop thinking that if they just pray more, then God will move in power. They need to stop thinking that if they meet in homes, their lives will suddenly start looking like the book of Acts. They need to stop thinking that if they continue to ignore the commands of Jesus they can still have the Spirit of God in the first place.

Christians today are so quick to have the mindset of Paul when he said, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.”⁷⁸ But they reject the other mindset of Paul in that same exact verse: “I want to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death.”⁷⁹

Christians want the power without the suffering. They want the power without becoming like Jesus in his death. Jesus said that if we want to follow him, we must take up our own cross and follow him to death.⁸⁰ We must let go of everything. We must stop living for ourselves. We must die with

⁷³ Acts 2:44-46

⁷⁴ Acts 4:32-35

⁷⁵ Ref. Matthew 5:42, 6:19-25, 7:12, 8:20-22, 13:22, 16:23-26, 19:21-24, 22:39-40, 23:11-12, 24:45-47, 25:31-46; Mark 4:18-19, 8:33-36, 9:35-37, 10:21-25, 10:29-30, 10:42-45, 12:31-34; Luke 6:20-25, 6:27-36, 6:38, 8:14, 9:23-25, 9:48, 9:57-62, 10:25-37, 11:33-36, 11:41-42, 12:13-21, 12:22-44, 14:11, 14:12-14, 14:21, 14:25-35, 16:11-15, 16:19-31, 17:33, 18:22-24, 18:29-30, 21:1-4, 21:34, 22:25-27; John 5:28-29, 6:27, 12:24-26, 13:3-17, 13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17; Acts 20:35

⁷⁶ Acts 2:43, 47

⁷⁷ Acts 4:33

⁷⁸ Philippians 3:10

⁷⁹ Philippians 3:10

⁸⁰ Ref. Matthew 10:38-39, 16:23-25; Mark 8:33-35; Luke 9:23-25, 14:25-27, 17:33; John 12:24-26

Jesus and rise into a new life with him.⁸¹ If we want to know the power of his resurrection, we must first die. If we want to see the power of God, be united with God, and do even greater things than Jesus, then we must live the life Jesus lived.

Jesus gave up everything. He humbled himself and became a slave. He gave his life as a ransom. He came to serve. When he was here, he lived his life doing what was best for others. He was homeless – he had nowhere to lay his head.⁸² Everything about who he was and how he lived was about what was best for others, and not what was best for himself. Following him means we do the same.

You can't have the power of Jesus without living the life of Jesus.

If the promises of Scripture don't seem to be true in your life, it's not because the Bible is wrong. It's because something is wrong with your life. Those promises in the Bible had conditions – conditions that require Christians to live like the early Church in Acts instead of like American Christians today. Those promises require true Christianity – the kind of Christianity where people truly love Jesus, so they give up everything and obey him.

God makes his home, through the Spirit, with those who obey Jesus. That is what Jesus so very clearly taught. And that is why the modern Church looks nothing like the early Church. Those who do not obey the radical and costly commands of Jesus will not receive the Spirit of God.

However, if we abide in him by obeying his commands, then he will reveal himself to us, he and the Father will come make their home with us, we will be filled with the fullness of God, and God will abide in us and we will be one with Jesus and the Father in the same way that Jesus is one with the Father. Jesus said, "I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be in perfect unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me."⁸³

When we are in perfect unity with God the Father and with Jesus – one with him in the same way that he is one with the Father – then we will also be in perfect unity with one another. The book of Acts described it as "having one heart and one mind."⁸⁴ It meant that they shared everything in common and no one was in need among them. That is what it means to be in perfect unity – you live your life, looking out for one another rather than yourselves.

Jesus said that when we do that, the world will know that the Father sent him, and that the Father loves us just as much as the Father loves him.

What an incredible promise.

The world will know. That's why thousands got saved in the book of Acts. That's why Luke described more people being added to their number every day while also describing how they shared everything in common.

This conditional promise is what Christianity is all about! This conditional promise is what defines the true Christian life – the kind of life we see in the book of Acts. This conditional promise is where everything changes. When you understand what God offers in this conditional promise, you'll stop seeing the cost of following Jesus as something you *have* to do, and you'll start seeing it as something you're *happy* to do, because like Paul, you'll see that everything else is worthless compared to truly knowing Jesus.

In the next few videos, I want to look at a few more examples of some conditional promises found in the New Testament. As we've seen, Jesus said, "If you obey my commands, then I will reveal myself to you," and, "If you obey my commands, then I and the Father will make our homes with you," and, "If you abide in me (which means obeying his commands), then I will abide in you."

⁸¹ Ref. Romans 6:1-14; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 2:19-20, 6:14-15; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 2:11-15, 2:20-23, 3:1-4, 3:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 2:14

⁸² Ref. Matthew 8:19-20; Luke 9:57-58

⁸³ John 17:23

⁸⁴ Ref. Acts 4:32-35

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However, most Christians think, “If I believe in Jesus, he will reveal himself to me,” and, “If I believe in Jesus, he and the Father will make their homes with me,” and, “If I abide in him (which means praying and reading my Bible), then he will abide in me.”

In the same way, there are a number of other promises in Scripture that Christians tend to look at and completely miss what it actually says. However, most (if not all) of those promises are built on the foundation of what we’ve talked about in this video – if we obey his commands, then, and only then, will we truly know him and experience him like we see in the Bible. Because if we obey his commands, then, and only then are we true Christians as defined by Scripture.