

What are Your Plans?

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you so much, Alice. With those verses open in front of you, I wonder if we could have a show of hands. Put your hands up if you made any New Year's resolutions. Okay, there's more than just one. Come on, hands on the air if we made some New Year's resolutions.

One person in this whole church made New Year's resolutions. Right, well, I was going to get you to turn to your neighbor and speak about your New Year's resolutions, but we'll just miss that one, shall we? Here are the top five New Year's resolutions that people in the UK made last year, and let's see, if you're not going to admit it publicly, let's see if these privately resonate with us, okay? Top five New Year's resolutions that people made. Number one, get into shape. Okay, anyone join the gym this year? Used to work with a guy called John in this church before me who joined the gym every January, and by every February, had given up. Nobody's joining the gym. What about number two? Eat healthier. Did Santa buy anyone a cookbook this year? Yes, one. I see one nod. Eat healthier. Two nods. Number three, travel more. Anyone got any exciting plans to go abroad or visit new places this year? It's in the calendar. One at the back. Excellent. Number four, spend more time with family. I guess that's maybe one for all of us, isn't it? Number five, learn a new skill. Anybody taking up a new hobby this year?

New hobbies. Anybody wants to take them up? Nobody's taking up a new hobby. Well, we are flat this morning, I tell you. New Year's resolutions. If we're not going crazy for them, our world is going crazy for them. Just think about the things that people, I just think of some of the things that people have told me that they're planning to do this year. But here's what I want to do.

As you think about the plans that you have for this year, maybe not resolutions, but what are some of the things that you're hoping are going to happen this year? What goals and what ambitions do you have for 2018? Just with those in your mind, here's the question I want to ask you that I think this passage is going to ask us this morning and God through his word would ask us this morning.

is, does Jesus feature in your plans? Does Jesus feature in your plans? Because this morning's message, it comes with a warning and it's that Jesus is, this morning, going to make a claim on our plans.

[2 : 3 3] And we're going to see him this morning demonstrate once again who he is and demonstrate once again what he's about. And we're going to see him interact with some different people.

And as he interacts with these different people, we'll see that these different people, as they consider their lives and as they consider their plans, they respond to Jesus in two very different ways.

If you've got your Bibles there, we'll pick it up at verse 31 of chapter 18 of Luke's Gospel. And here is the first reaction to Jesus, verses 31 to 34.

Jesus, your plan is not our plan. So here in Luke 18, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and we pick up the narrative with Jesus taking his 12 disciples aside and he's taking them aside for a little pep talk.

And he's telling them expressly for the third time in this Gospel, his plan. And you'll see the plan from verse 32.

[3 : 39] He'll be delivered over to the Gentiles. So that word that just describes non-Jews. He will be mocked. He will be shamefully treated. He will be spat upon.

He will be flogged. He will be killed and he will rise again. So that's the plan. That's how it's going to go down in Jerusalem for Jesus.

Now what kind of a plan is that, you might be asking? Let me just draw your attention to two words in these verses that hopefully are going to help us understand what is going on here. And here is the first words, verse 31, that Jesus uses.

It is written. You see the plan of what is going to happen in Jerusalem. It's not something that Jesus just concocted up in his own head. This plan is no accident.

This plan will not be the result of Jesus just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. This plan will not be the result of God dropping the ball. You see what Jesus is telling his disciples here and what Luke is conveying to his readers is that this plan has been the plan all along.

[4 : 50] In fact, the plan of the cross is the climax of the grand plan of redemption hatched by God's grace in eternity past. God's master plan to save and make a way for sinful men and women to be both forgiven and to be reunited with the God who made them and loves them.

And it's the plan that's been foretold by the Old Testament prophets down the ages. Now you can look these up in your own time. Let me just draw your attention to two places that it talks about Jesus' suffering.

Psalms 22. David inferring that there would be one who would come after him, who would be the righteous sufferer par excellence, who will be mocked, who will be insulted, and who will be harmed, but who will lead God's people in praise of him.

Isaiah 53, Isaiah speaking, foretelling of the suffering servant who will bear the sins and the griefs of his people. And so here is Jesus declaring to his disciples that the Old Testament prophets all along have been looking forward to him and have been looking forward specifically to this moment.

Now just take a step back. Do you see what this is telling us? That so powerful is our God that history dances to his tune.

[6 : 18] That so sovereign is our God that human events go down to the T exactly as he planned them to go down. And so wise is our God that his plan, his wise plan, it makes a mockery of all human wisdom.

As somebody pointed out to me recently, and I think this is pretty cool, that this year, 2018, Easter Sunday falls on the 1st of April.

So Easter Sunday is April Fool's Day. Now if you think about that, that is a beautiful irony. That so wise is our God that even as the world looked at Jesus, even as the world looked on the plan of the cross, and as the world laughed, and as the world mocked, it's almost as if God on Easter Sunday, he declares to the world, with his son risen from the dead, having paid for our sins, having conquered the grave, that who's the fool now?

Do you see, so wise is our God that even man's worst is nothing other than his best? That's the plan. It is written.

And here's the second word, the one that Luke uses to describe how this plan, how it goes down with the 12. Verse 34, and it's the word hidden.

[7 : 49] Now if you quickly scan your eye over verse 34, you'll notice that Luke essentially says the same thing three times. Right? It's essentially the same thing three times. Now why has he done that?

Well he's done it to underscore his point. Now what's his point? Well as we say in the West, the disciples didn't have a scooby. Right? Didn't have a clue about what was going on here.

Didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. And it's not as if Jesus has sat them down and he's told them a riddle. Okay? It's not like you might have played at your Christmas. It's not like charades. It's not like Jesus is playing charades acting this one out and they just cannot guess what the answer is.

He's talking in plain language. It's not so much that they can't understand what Jesus is saying. It's more so that they won't buy into what Jesus is saying.

You can imagine their hearts, their minds at this point. Why does this need to be your plan, Jesus? Why does it need to be this way? I mean we've seen you in action. We've seen you in action.

[8 : 49] Your life could be one of popularity. Your status could be one of celebrity. You could go down in history as the one who has toppled the Romans and set his people free.

Why does it need to be like this? Your plans do not match up with our understanding of who this Messiah King is going to be. Why does it need to be like this Jesus?

You're God's promised mighty king. So why would you subject yourself to everything that you've just told us? Here's what we need to see here. It's just the third time in this gospel that Jesus has told them this plainly.

What's going on? They're not thinking spiritually. They're thinking worldly. Jesus, your plan is not our plan.

Let me ask you, is that the confession of your heart this morning? As you think about your own plans. Jesus, your plan is not my plan. Maybe you're here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian.

[9 : 54] As you look at Jesus in action here, let me ask you, do you understand the plan? Do you see the great love that God has for you as one of his image bearers, one of his precious created beings that drove Jesus to this plan?

Do you know the depths of the sin in your own heart that meant that there was no other way for you to be made right with God except the plan for Jesus to die in your place for your sin?

Here is Jesus. See in Jesus, a man with a wonderfully unexpected yet unparalleled plan. But I've been reflecting on this plan this week and here's what's challenged me the most.

I haven't massively got issues with the plan. But I, in my heart, what I do have issues with so often is the pattern that Jesus sets here.

Because this cross-shaped man calls all who would follow after him to a cross-shaped life, to a life of denying ourselves, to taking up our cross, and to following him.

[11 : 12] You see, Jesus, the one worthy of creation's eternal place, he made his life not about the pursuit of his own glory. He made his life about the pursuit of God's glory. And so he calls all who would follow after him to the same pursuit.

And so I hear that call of Jesus. We've seen it time and time again as we're journeying through Luke's gospel. I hear that call. And the inclination of my heart is, Jesus, I don't want your plan. I want my plan.

And so I found myself again and again and again this week coming back to the words of that old hymn that we sing so often here. Let me look at it.

Prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. I feel it. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God that I love. And so what's my prayer?

It's been, Lord, here's my heart. Take and seal it and seal it for your courts above. The inclination of my heart is not that way, it's that way.

[12 : 14] Lord, would you help me? Lord, would you help me? There's the first confession. Jesus, your plan is not my plan. Well, from considering some men who can physically see but who can't spiritually see, we move to consider a man who can't physically see but who can spiritually see.

All of a sudden now, maybe we're beginning to understand that Luke's put this together with a purpose. Jesus and the twelve, you see, they continue on their journey and we learn at verse 35 that they reach Jericho.

So this little town that's located about 18 miles east of Jerusalem and Jericho is a well-to-do kind of place. I mean, if we were here, we'd all want to live in Jericho.

It's a well-to-do kind of place and it sits on the travel route that the pilgrims would take on their way to Jerusalem. So it's on the highway and given that it was part of Jewish law to give alms to the less fortunate of society, it's little wonder that on this travel way, sitting by the roadside begging, is this blind man.

And what do we learn about this man? He's blind. And it's this man that as we read of him encountering Jesus at verses 35 to 43 who shows us a different reaction to Jesus, one that starkly contrasted to that of the disciples previous.

[13 : 36] And here it is on the screen. Jesus, my plan is your plan. So in the previous section we considered two words.

In this little section we're going to consider two questions. Now here's the first question in verse 36. It's the one that the blind man asks to the crowd. What does he ask? What is happening?

What is happening? Now Jesus is making his way into Jericho. That's what's happening. And a crowd are rushing to meet him. And clearly somebody from this crowd reports to the blind man that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

Now this is what happened to me this week. I read of this blind man and because I'm quite into soul music, two people that I instantly thought of my favourite artists. Ray Charles, anyone who loves Ray Charles?

A few people. Blind from the age of seven. And Stevie Wonder, blind from birth. Now back in 2014 there was a study done by scientists in the US and it found that when it came to their music, actually their disability, it enhanced their music because it enhanced their sense of hearing.

[14 : 50] Now I've got no idea how they found that out. I've got no idea whether that or not is the case for Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder but it certainly seems to be true for this man that we meet in Luke 18 because he's not seen Jesus, he's not clapped eyes on Jesus but he's clearly heard a lot about him.

Let's try and get into the narrative here, into the picture, picture him by the side of the road. If he has sat by that spot every day given that it's a busy route, he's clearly listened and he's heard a lot of people talking about Jesus.

He's perhaps overheard people waxing lyrical about this man from the north, about how this man from the north is challenging the religious elite, about how he's healing the unclean, about how he's associating with the lowly and as he does those things how he's turning the whole region upside down.

And you may have even heard specifically about the incident at the synagogue in Nazareth that Luke describes for us back in chapter 4. If you remember you can check it out later that Jesus takes the scroll of Isaiah and he reads it in front of all the people that the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind. Jesus rolls up the scroll and what does he effectively say?

[16 : 23] the Messiah figure that Isaiah is talking about is me. I'm that guy. Whatever this blind man has heard is evidently enough to convince him that Jesus is God's promised saviour and God's promised king.

And that explains I think his shout at verse 38 Jesus what does he call him? Son of David. In other words God's promised king have mercy on me.

Now he's clearly I love this he's clearly making a scene isn't he? Because the crowd tell him to be quiet. I love this what does he do? Does he be quiet? Not a chance. He keeps at it what does Luke tell us?

He shouted all the more which I think is just a polite way of saying that he turned up the volume he kept on shouting. I love this you can imagine the crowd looking at one another would somebody just wrestle him to the floor?

Or at least would somebody just get some duct tape and just put it over his mouth because quite frankly he's embarrassing the lot of us but is this man going to shut up? Not a chance because the man who he's been hoping to meet and the moment that he's been hoping would happen is here.

[17 : 40] And Jesus has clearly heard him. Jesus is on his way through. Remember Jesus has got the cross eminently in his mind. Is Jesus going to ignore him? No.

Now notice the compassion of Jesus Christ at this point. He calls this man over and here's the second question of these verses this time from Jesus to the blind man verse 41.

What do you want me to do for you? Now is it just me or is that a strange question? A strange question. Is it not kind of obvious? You mean this man who's sitting by the roadside with his eyes closed?

Jesus, you're asking him what he wants? Now what is Jesus up to here? He's drawn this man out. He's testing if he really believes that Jesus is who he says he is or is he simpler using words to flatter Jesus into getting him to help him?

What do you want me to do for you? It's kind of like that moment in Aladdin. Aladdin. You can tell what we were watching over Christmas time. Aladdin finds the lamp.

[18 : 49] He rubs the lamp. Now it comes the genie who sings that song that I'd love to tell you. I don't know the words to but I do. Mr. Aladdin, sir, what will your pleasure be? This is this man's Aladdin moment, is it not?

What Jesus says, what do you want me to do for you? What will he say? Money? Friends? A home?

A career? A wife? What would you say? Because you see, unlike the disciples who were thinking worldly, this man is thinking spiritually.

And he offers Jesus the briefest of answers, which I think is an indication of the fact that he's probably rehearsed this scene in his mind before. Lord, in other words, Master, I want to see.

And the truth is, behind the curtain of his confession is a heart that says, Jesus, I don't want things.

[19 : 52] Jesus, I don't need stuff. What I need most and what I want most is you. And Jesus, seeing his faith, he heals this man.

And the word is suggestive there of more than just healing. This man, because of his faith, has been saved. And what did he do? He followed. So he made his life all about Jesus.

He made the pattern of his life cross shape. Jesus, where you go, I'm going. And you see in the context of Luke's gospel how this man stands in stark contrast to the rich young ruler who Luke has told us about only a few verses previously.

The rich young ruler who has everything, who comes to Jesus, Jesus tells him, go and sell everything and follow me. He rejects Jesus. And this man who worldly has everything, leaves spiritually with nothing.

But this blind man, who knows he has nothing, who knows he is nothing, he comes to Jesus, Jesus have mercy on me, throws himself in the mercy and the grace of Jesus.

[21 : 05] Puts his faith in Jesus, he accepts Jesus, he's got everything. See, here is Jesus, the one who has come to reconnect human beings to the very reason why they were created in the first place.

And that's to worship God and enjoy him forever. This man has been turned from a beggar into a worshipper. It's a common slogan in our day, isn't it, that seeing is believing.

To see, Luke is telling us here that when it comes to faith, that believing is seeing. Jesus, my plan is your plan. So let me ask you, just as we work towards a close, what are your plans for this year?

What are your goals? What are your ambitions for 2018? You know, last week we had some great fun in the snow. I say we, I had some great fun in the snow.

We were staying at my parents' through in Glasgow and we woke up on Saturday morning. If you remember last Saturday morning, it just snowed. So we got up, went out to the garden, pristinely covered in untouched snow.

[22 : 16] I mean, honestly, I felt about five again. This was incredible. So the four of us go out and we start building and I'm one of these people that when I commit to something, I really commit to something. So I'm showing our little girl Chloe how to roll up snow.

And I'm rolling up the snow and she's away getting acorns for the snowman's buttons and his eyes. And so I'm rolling up the snow and I'm compacting it really tightly so that it's going to last.

I am shaping it in a way that's meaning that the wind is not going to batter it down. I really need to get out more, don't I? But this is what I'm doing to this snowman. And then it suddenly occurs to me that why would we stop at one snowman?

Why can't we build a snow family? So, do you want to see our snow family? Okay, not that one. That one. There we go. Now look at it, isn't it lovely?

You even get hats. It's not very that impressive is it? Really. But what happens that night? Tips it down. Tons and tons of rain.

[23 : 21] We wake up the next morning, do you know what my first thought is? What's happened to my snow family? What's happened to my snow family? And actually those three snow people have turned to three snow lumps.

Now give it another 24 hours, give it another bit of rain and those three snow lumps totally disappeared. Now here's where I want us to finish this morning. When it comes to our plans for the year ahead, here's what God is asking us from his word this morning.

As a community, as individuals, friends, are we investing ourselves in things that will be here today and gone tomorrow? Will we this year invest ourselves in things that will last for eternity?

Will we be those like this blind man who don't think worldly, who think spiritually? Will we be people who put it all on Jesus Christ? Will our plans for the year ahead be cross-shaped?

Will our ambitions for the year ahead be kingdom driven? And will our plans for the year ahead, will they be God's glorifying? So just as we close, let me just read to you the words of this lovely poem by C.T.

[24 : 35] Studs, who was a famous English cricketer turned missionary. He wrote this about his life. Two little lines I heard one day, traveling along life's busy way, bringing conviction to my heart and from my mind would not depart.

Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Amen. Just before we move on, why don't we just have a moment of silence?

Well, let's just maybe reflect on what God has been challenging us on this morning. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Jesus, all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever hope to be.

All my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands. Dear Father, thank you so much for this new year, fresh with opportunities. Father, we're so aware as we step into this year that we do not know what's coming.

But Father, thank you that you who hold the world in your hands do. And so we ask that you would help us all today to focus our hearts and our minds on the one who gave his life for us.

[26 : 08] And would you help us this year to be people who are marked by the fact that we seek first your kingdom. So Father, thank you for this time together. We pray that you'd be with us now as we move into this time of communion, as we remember your son. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.