

# The Joy of the New Covenant

by Erlo Stegen

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*The new covenant is a new way of living, where God writes his laws in our hearts and minds, and we are able to live a new life in Christ.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 19:5, Isaiah 40:3-4, Jeremiah 31:31, Matthew 3:3, Mark 16:16, Romans 10:9, Hebrews 8:8

**Topics:** "New Covenant", "Christian Joy"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher tells the story of a young man named Stephen who was feeling lonely and empty in his life. He tried various things to fill the void, but nothing seemed to work. Eventually, he decided to visit his girlfriend Sophie, hoping that her company would bring him happiness. However, even that didn't make him happy. The preacher then introduces three Bible verses, Mark 16:16, Jeremiah 31:31, and Hebrews 8:8, which he will discuss further in the sermon.

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## Transcript

Lord, we thank you for this opportunity to gather here while soul and body are still intact. We know that the day will come where these things will part, separate. For the unbeliever it will be like hell and will mean hell, but for those that are believers it will be like heaven.

We pray, Lord, that you will be in our midst and that you will speak to us through your word. Amen. I've got three points which we find in the Bible, but I don't think it will be difficult for you to remember them.

Our first text is Mark 16 and verse 16. So it's easy to remember Mark 16 verse 16. And the second part of the Bible is Jeremiah 31 verse 31.

So who can forget that? 16, 16, 31, 31. And the third one is Hebrews 8 verse 8. So you don't even need to go to school for that one. It's easy to remember those.

So we'll start with the first piece of Scripture, Mark 16 verse 16. So we'll start with Mark 16 verse 16. It's easy if you learn the books of the Bible by heart, then it's easy to find them.

Mark 16 verse 16. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. It doesn't say that about the one who's not baptized.

Baptism doesn't save you in itself. If you go into the waters of baptism being unsaved, you'll come out the other side unsaved as well, like a frog just going into water and coming out on the other side. He who

believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Remember the thief on the cross. When he repented, the Lord said, today you'll be with me in paradise. And that was without being baptized.

So first comes faith, belief. You need to believe first and then be baptized. Now Luther, the Lutherans, they say that when a small child is baptized, there's already some faith in that child.

And that's why it's baptized as a baby. That was at the time of the Reformation. That's how they saw it.

In Geneva, they felt the same, and they said, look, that small child already has that faith in it, and that's why it is baptized as a baby. That's how they saw it. Calvin.

And then later, those children were confirmed. To confirm them in the faith. But we're not going to talk about that this morning.

That's just by the way. In the Old Testament, it was a law that all males had to be circumcised. And apart from that, they were not part of the nation of God and His people.

But in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit says that circumcision, or not being circumcised, is not the important thing. What is important is being a new creature, to become a new creation. I don't know in English, but in Zulu it says, it's nothing.

So even baptism without faith, without believing in Christ, is worthless. But of course, if you get baptized and you are not a believer, you don't live for Christ, then your hell will be twice as bad. And if you are baptized and you don't live a holy life that goes along with it, then your condemnation will be even greater.

You will be like dry wood in hell. Burn all the more. For Jesus Himself, when He was on His way to the cross, the women were crying and He said, Women of Jerusalem, daughters of Jerusalem, don't cry for Me, cry for yourselves.

For if this happens to a green tree, what will happen to a dry piece of wood? We find that word in Isaiah 40. Verse 3 and verse 4. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill brought low. The crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth. With the previous baptism services I heard about it on the Saturday, the Sunday before people will get baptised.

And I really wanted to get baptised. So I went to my father-in-law and I asked my father-in-law if I could also be baptised tomorrow. And he said no I can't because I haven't gone through the services.

And it hurt me very much. I thought but my father-in-law sees that I want to live for the Lord. He can ask my counsellor.

And I thought well Lord I'll leave it up to you. I'll leave it in your hands. And so eventually they called us and said well the services start now.

And we were told to run with God. And we had to see God's face throughout the whole day. In the morning while we were working, in the evenings we were looking for God.

We were seeking God to raise those valleys and to bring down those hills. And God started working. And eventually I thought I'm not a Christian.

God showed me sin after sin after sin after sin. In the evenings after I read my Bible and prayed. Almost every evening after I prayed.

And we switched off the light. I'd have to switch on the light again and write something down. Switch off the light.

And again a few minutes later switch it on write something down. And the list was growing. One incident I did when I was still in my old school in 1996.

We picked up a wallet and we took the money and shared it among friends, three of us. We took the wallet to the principal and said we found this. But the money we shared and bought stuff with it.

Did you tell the principal? No. And when I came to the school here and to the mission in 1997. I broke up all my friendship with it.

In fact I actually heard that this one of my friend actually died. And that started to bother me. I went to my counsellor and asked him to pray for me.

That God would make a way. And my counsellor didn't tell me how I should go about it. But he prayed that God would make a way.

I didn't know how I was going to make this right with him. How I would even find him. So eventually I went to my father in law and I said Papa I think I must go to Pretoria.

I remember where they used to stay. I thought well maybe I can start there. Maybe I can find other people there.

Maybe sit in the mall and just wait and hope and pray that maybe this person will walk past. I was worried. I was thinking how could I tell Uncle Dietmar I have to go up to Pretoria for so long.

And I went and I asked my father in law to pray. And then I remember that one of the friends his brother was with Victor my brother in school. I remember that one of the friends his brother was with Victor my brother in school.

I remember that one of the friends his brother in school. I remember that one of the friends his brother in school. And the other friend I got his number from another friend and he only SMSed it to me later in that week.

But that Monday I knew I could get both my friends. I didn't even have to go to Pretoria. I'd be at Umflali and my wife would read something out of a newspaper.

And just one word and I'd remember something I have to make right. Things which I never even would have thought about. Things that seemed so small in my eyes.

We were together those of us who went through the services. And we'd share how God worked in our hearts. And truly God works in mysterious ways.

Some have dreams. Some as myself they don't know how they are going to get there but they know they just have to go. And when they get there the doors just open.

And many sins were revealed to me and to us. Each one in his own way. And I can thank God now that I went through these services.

These services are there to help us. To guide us. It's not just going through this water.

We've been up early mornings and had late evenings. But our true challenge starts now when we go out of these waters. Our true challenges.

Because we publicly admit now that we are one with God. And we were warned that if we're not serious with this, that this baptism will be a curse on our lives. And it's our prayer and my prayer that in our lives it doesn't stop now.

When I sat next to Zwayne now he said, Valter it's like a dream come true, I can't believe it. In the beginning we all had doubt, we didn't think we were going to make it. Someone asked me, why can't you just go into baptism straight away? Why can't you just go into water immediately? But having gone through these services, having gone through all these trials, and having to go back to many years ago to apologize and make right for what we've done wrong, I can only say it's worth it.

And we can only say thank you to those who helped us and guided us. And to the counsellors who stayed up many evenings to counsel us, and that they were there to help us. And I almost want to say I recommend it and I want to leave this challenge with you.

For those who haven't been baptized, that it's not something small. And that we can really thank God that he helped us and showed us how to come closer to him and walk even a narrow road with him. Thank you.

Jeremiah 31 verse 31 Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin, I will remember no more. Thus says the Lord who gives the sun for light by day and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for light by night, who disturbs the sea and its waves roar, the Lord of hosts is his name. Firstly, this word is directly aimed at the children of Israel and Judah.

A covenant for them. They rejected the Lord and they crucified him, but the Lord has promised that in the end they will recognize him and turn to him. We will experience how the Jews will get converted and turn to Christ and this prophecy will come into fulfillment.

But it doesn't only mean that. It also refers to our repentance, our salvation and it's so wonderful that one can just jump for joy. That's why I'd also like to read from Hebrews 8 verse 8. Hebrews 8 verse 8 Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not continue in my covenant and I disregarded them, says the Lord. Hebrews 8 verse 8 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people. None of them shall teach his neighbor and none his brother, saying, Know the Lord.

For all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. In that he says, a new covenant.

He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Now just briefly, this is something wonderful.

When I think of this it just really revives and refreshes me. Hebrews 8 verse 9 Like the 10 commandments. But it didn't work, it wasn't effective.

For he said, do not steal, yet people steal. He said don't live immorally, people live immorally. Don't serve other gods but people do it.

Hebrews 8 verse 10 Just like Lot who was taken by the hand and led out of Sodom and Gomorrah and yet they did not keep his laws. He said just after a short while they broke God's laws. And God realised it wasn't working effectively.

And then he said I will enter into a new covenant, a new one now. And this will be the new covenant. I will put my laws into their minds, engraved into their hearts.

I will be their God. They shall be my people. Hebrews 8 verse 11 None shall say to his neighbour or brother and say know the Lord, for they shall all know the Lord.

God will have already written and put his laws into their hearts. Jeremiah 31 He says they say and they call me Lord, yet they don't keep my commandments. That's tragic.

Hebrews 8 verse 12 It's like in a service here today where you have so many people here and here and there you find one that is touched by what is said. The other he may say Lord, he may sing along, he may seem to be there but he goes on with his old sinful life. Hebrews 8 verse 13 But can you imagine how wonderful this new covenant is? This new way which the Lord has created where he puts the law into your mind, into your heart and you keep it there.

It's so wonderful one just doesn't know how to express oneself. I remember when we had just arrived here at Sizabantu. A Sangoma came to me and said I want to get converted.

I said okay, you need to cleanse your life, you need to come to Jesus with your sins. And she did it. And stayed over here.

And the next day it was the same thing. She accepted the Lord Jesus. And Jesus made us abode in her life.

We had a Sunday service. After the service she went home. It didn't take long and she came back.

She said Fundis I have a question. Is it wrong for a Christian to drink alcohol? I said why do you ask? She said well I've always been a drinker. I'm a sociable type of person so when I got home I went to visit my neighbours.

Just to be with them again and of course they served alcohol. But she says the strange thing is this time when I went home and I was there and I was drinking. Suddenly I got so ill, in fact right there I felt so ill I had to go outside and I was vomiting.

Eventually she says she thought her intestines would come out. That's how violent it was. Reminds me of another white person who was an alcoholic.

He was drunk every day. One day he went to the toilet. Even if he was a pig, in being an alcoholic he was like the pigs that go to the toilet.

He also would have always, had to bring up, so eventually his wife kept a bucket right next to his bed so it was easy. He didn't have to go outside anymore when he had to vomit. So that's how she was a help to him.

But of course it helped her as well because she didn't have to clean up the mess which he would have left otherwise. Now one day his brother visited there and he noticed what was going on and he felt sorry for his sister-in-law. And the brother said to his brother, listen brother you must watch out what you're doing, you can't go on like this, eventually you'll vomit so much your intestines will come out.

So then he secretly went and he slaughtered a chicken and then he also took the intestines he took the intestines out and he put those into this bucket. He thought well maybe that's the shock treatment his brother would need. So in his drunken state the brother got there and when he vomited it vomited into this bucket he suddenly noticed something extraordinary inside there and he thought what's this, took a wooden spoon and he started fishing around and then he noticed there were his intestines he thought.

And he got such a shock he quickly swallowed them again. And the next Sunday service he didn't miss for anything, he went they said to the pastor he said I have to say something to the congregation he got up he said I have to share something with you I've always been warned you know how much I drink and they've always warned me that I'd vomit my intestines eventually and it has and it eventually happened but he by God's grace and a wooden spoon I got them back inside again. So he thanked God that through his power he was there.

Are there people in our midst here that drink alcohol just put up your hands because nowadays it's not just the men the women drink as well. Now our brother there before he got converted he'd go to church and he'd take a case of beer along and loaded it onto his bucky at that time he still had long hair. So he went to the service and his crate of beers or pack of beers were on the bucky and after the service he'd invite he'd invited the the preacher he said well you want to join me and then so they'd have their beer together.

So there are some ministers that drink and also some Christians. But let's forget about this alcohol that swallowed the chickens intestines. So this Sangoma came and said Mfundis is it wrong for a Christian to

drink alcohol? Said why? Says because after I committed my life to Christ and I went and I tried it again I got as sick as a dog something which has never happened to me before.

I said well it is like that when we become Christians Jesus comes into our lives and he makes he changes and transforms everything and we can't go back to our old ways again. See that's the new covenant when Jesus writes something new into your heart and into your mind even if no one else has told you you will just realize this is not right for me anymore. Now I don't know as we seated here are you still living in the under the old covenant which is ineffective or are you already under the new covenant? The people that will go into the water today are those who testifying that Jesus has written something new in their hearts and in their minds.

And I was happy when some who were going to be baptized today came and they said no look we have decided we rather not be baptized today because there's still things which we need to go back home to sort out to make right there first we're not ready for it yet. Like Votav said he was unhappy when he couldn't be baptized the previous time But now he says he's happy he didn't because the Lord still revealed so many sins to him since that time. And that's what Baptist Church is all about.

That's what baptism is. It's that testimony that it's like a grave. Like the Lord who died and he was put in the tomb but on the third day he rose from the dead.

And so we testify that we have died and risen with Christ to a new life. That's the new covenant where it's not just a law that's written down and you're just keeping a set of rules but it's something that's written in your heart and in your mind. You want to do the right thing and you won't even need your brother to come to you and say Brother, don't you think you've made a mistake? Before he even says it, you will know that you've made a mistake because it's inside.

It's in your heart. And it's not like people who say well I can't do it because my church doesn't allow me to do it. They're on their way to hell.

No, it's people who have it written in their hearts. They do it because they know that's what's right for them. Just these days, three missionaries went to Turkey to share with the gospel there with the people.

They went, they were still young, just married not long ago with their wives and even some children. And just these days, the three of them were beheaded. And they say they gladly give their lives for the gospel.

They didn't deny the Lord. And their wives, they're saying we are privileged to have had such husbands. And the Christians in Turkey say don't even pray that the persecution stops.

Just pray that we remain faithful to the Lord. The Muslims don't want people to believe in Jesus. They don't allow religious freedom in the way that we know it.

We have, even here in Kronsopf, they have a place of worship, the Muslims. We allow that. It's freedom of worship.

But in their countries, they don't give the Christians that liberty. However, even here in South Africa, things have changed to the extent that you can't even pray publicly like in the school because they say there may be a Muslim child that will be offended. When I came back from Europe, I heard that there's talk now that they want to do away with Christmas as a holiday and Easter.

Remember how I always told you that when you vote for a government, make sure you vote for the right government. Now you can see which way things are going. A lah.

We're not busy evangelizing and spreading the gospel, but the Muslims are very hard at work. They have schools where they take African children and they make Muslims out of them. They dress the way they do.

They pray five times a day. They don't have much literature, just the Muslim literature. And if they want to further their studies they're taken from their place where they were staying, taken to that place where they study and returned again.

And they are sponsored by countries in the Middle East, also from Dubai and Sudan, which is in Africa. So they are investing a lot of money in Africa to get Africa converted to Islam. So they sponsor their outreaches, but maybe we don't even do that, maybe even we children, we go to the tuck shop, we buy our things, ourselves Coca-Cola and many other things, and maybe we even overdo it, we don't suffer from starvation here, we suffer from overeating, and we can't even take some of that money and bring it, and that it can be used in the furtherance of the Gospel.

But you can live that life, eventually you'll all end up in hell together. But even though it's dark in that way, we rejoice, it's wonderful to see how the Gospel is spreading, how the Lord is changing lives and touching people. For even the Bible says, those who are evil will become more evil, but those that are righteous must become more righteous.

And the Lord says, behold I will make a new covenant with them, I will write my laws into their hearts and into their minds, I will make it all new, it will be a new covenant. I just want him to share a story about Sophie. There was a young man, his name was Stephen.

And he had a girlfriend whose name was Sophie. Now one day this Stephen was very lonely. He got something to drink, and even when he had enjoyed that, it just didn't fill this gap in his heart.

He went to his friends, but there was always a gap in his life. And eventually he said, look there's this vacuum in my life, and maybe what I need to do is go and visit my girlfriend Sophie. So off he went, they didn't live far from the beach.

Now when he arrived, Sophie was very happy to see him. But after a while Sophie noticed that Stephen was not quite happy, there was something wrong. And she eventually started putting two and two together and thought, well maybe he's hungry, so she brought him some food to eat.

But it didn't help. She gave him something to drink as well, but nothing made him happy. And then she thought, well maybe he just needs my company, and she sat next to him and started chatting to him, but even that didn't make him happy.

And she remembered that he loved swimming in the sea, and she suggested that they go for a swim, and she was sure that that would make him happy. So off they went, they had to catch a bus just to get down to the beach. So they sat down in the seats, but just in front of them there were four young men sitting on the bench in front of them.

Now as they were driving along in the bus, these four young men were singing songs. And they sang one chorus which goes like this, that for years I've been wandering, lost in my sins, not knowing my Lord. But then God's word touched my heart, and I confessed my sins at Calvary.

And when they got to that point in that song, Stephen suddenly jumped up, and he was extremely happy. He jumped up for joy and he said, that's what I've been missing in my life, this is what I've been looking for, and he joined up with his four young men. When the bus got to the next stop, these four young men got off the bus there.

But Stephen got off as well, and so there were five of them now. Sophie was left on the bus, and that's how she was left on the bus. There's something far greater than the love of a girl.

I'm a fusel after girls, and drawn to them. It shows that in a spiritual sense, you like a goat. Overseas I spoke about God's love in some of the meetings, and Lord willing I'd like to share those thoughts with you.

That love which is above any other love in the world. Christians also love each other with this love of God. And David and Jonathan also had this love for each other.

It says their love they had for each other was greater than the love a man has for a girl. Nowadays, because of the times we live in, people have perverted me. They're saying that those two had a homosexual relationship with each other.

That's nonsense. No, these people had a godly love for each other. Jonathan was an amazing young man.

Because he could have seen David as a threat. Because Jonathan was to be the heir of the throne, but David was the one that would take the kingdom from him. But yet, Jonathan recognised what was from God.

People in the world today are very conscious about position. That's the most important to them. But these young men weren't concerned about position, they were just concerned about serving the Lord.

So the Lord says, if you love father, mother, brother, sister, or anyone more than me, you're not worthy of the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus will write these things into your heart and into your mind. And you will live for this.

And this is the way you will live. It's wonderful to be a Christian, a genuine Christian. So we're thankful that even while the devil's working, there are those that are being touched by the Lord and where the Lord is working and writing in their hearts and minds.

And so we wish those that will be baptised today that they will go and be a light and that they will spread the gospel wherever they go. If you don't do that, woe to you. But if you live for him daily, that will be wonderful.

So here they're testifying that they have repented, they've parted with sin. And here they're testifying that Jesus has written his law into their hearts and into their minds. And not just half of it.

Not that you say, well, I've got converted. But you still get angry, irritable. Just don't mess around with the gospel in that way.

I'm sick and tired of half-baked Christians, lukewarm ones. We don't want them, we don't need them. Go and join other churches.

Here we want people by day or by night to live right. In Jeremiah 31, we'll just turn to it because we don't see them here yet. Verse 35 God says he's put the sun there to shine by day and the moon and the stars by night.

That doesn't change and neither should it change with us. God writes his law into our hearts and minds. It should stay like that forever, never change.

Let's pray. Lord, we want to commit all these people that have been baptized, who through that have testified that they've parted with the old ways and want to live for you. We pray that you please help them that they'll always be on fire spiritually.

Amen.

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