

Kneel

at the
Cross



SEARCH PROGRAMS

April 2018

Topics subject to change without notice

APRIL 1 – WHY JESUS DIED

Jesus died on the cross for many reasons, but His focus was to bring us to the Father. He who knew no sin was made to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

APRIL 8 – THE SACRIFICE

Throughout all the ages, God has asked men to offer sacrifices for sin. In Christ, God himself offers up His Son Jesus upon a cross as a sacrifice. His body and blood were given so that we might be right with God.

APRIL 15 – ENDURING THE CROSS

How was Jesus able to endure the cross? What enabled Him to do the Father's will and remain upon the cross until He died? If we can possess some of the same strengths Jesus had, we too can remain faithful in times of challenge.

APRIL 22 – SALVATION AND THE CROSS

Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). We were rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

APRIL 29 – THE CALL OF THE CROSS

Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." (John 12:32). The cross of Christ cries out to us all to come to Christ and take up our own crosses as we follow Him.

Why Jesus Died

Was it really necessary for Jesus to be crucified? Jesus suffered and was crucified, and today we'll see why. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Scriptures teach us about God, His love for us, and His provisions for our salvation. If God had not given us His Word, we wouldn't know about His mercy and grace. We wouldn't know to what great lengths He's gone to demonstrate His love and to win our hearts.

What is the dominating value in your life? What motivates you? When you have to make life choices, what one thing becomes the most important in your decisions? You might say all kinds of things: career or family, a hobby, or perhaps a bucket list of things to do. The apostle Paul answered that question, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). That was his dominating focus in life, preaching Christ and Him crucified. He never wanted to get away from the cross of Christ.

I can understand why. The cross is what draws us to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who loves us, who forgives us, and who gives us eternal life! The world is beautiful, but it's filled with many mixed messages that may distract us from an eternity with God. First John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

Our reading today comes from the prophet Isaiah 53:3-6. He talks about the suffering of Jesus, the Messiah. Let's read.

He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not
esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet
we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was
pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The
chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the
LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

You can find the details of the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross in all four gospel accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The preaching of the cross dominates the book of Acts and permeates the epistles. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the most important events of all history. All that came before His death and resurrection pointed to it, and all that follows His death and resurrection makes sense because of it. It is no wonder Paul said, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The Scriptures give more than 50 reasons why Jesus bore the cross. I want to explore five reasons why He died. First, Jesus suffered on the cross to demonstrate His great love for us. Romans 5:6-10 explains: "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled,

we shall be saved by His life.”

This passage describes God's love for us: and it's an amazingly kind love, a graciously forgiving love, and a deeply committed love. There are four adjectives used in this passage that describe the spiritual condition of humanity and reveal the greatness of His demonstrated love.

First, humanity is spiritually helpless or weak, incapable of saving itself by itself. We needed the spiritual help of God. Humanity without the Lord Jesus cannot find salvation or gain eternal life. The Lord Jesus blessed the helpless who desperately needed him.

Second, humanity was helpless and ungodly. An ungodly person is irreverent and has no respect or fear of God. An ungodly person may not think about God at all. Consequently, he lives on his own terms, never caring whether God is pleased and often acting against God. God loved you, even when you never gave Him a second thought, even before you knew He existed.

Third, a helpless and ungodly humanity is made up of sinners. Sinners have no relationship with God at all. They weren't interested in keeping God's laws; and, as a result they were outsiders without God and without hope.

Fourth, because they were helpless, ungodly, and sinners, they were also enemies of God and hostile to Him. According to James 4:4, befriending the world makes one an enemy of God. When a person chooses to follow the ways of the world and ignore the teaching of God, God regards that person as hostile.

Neither the Father nor the Son was content to leave people in a condition of being hostile enemies. They wanted them to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4). They loved people in spite of their thoughtless and hostile ways. The Lord Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). His incredible love shown on the cross draws people. If He was willing to make this great sacrifice for you and me, how could we not love Him? Jesus suffered on the cross to show the depths of His love for us. The world thinks little of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They have forgotten the great price that He paid. Does it matter to you? No one has ever loved you to the extent that Jesus loved you.

Second, Jesus suffered on the cross to atone for our sins. The word “atone” is actually an old word made up of two small words, the word “at” and the word “one.” Jesus died so that we could be at one or united with the God, the Father. John said, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (one). (And) He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

The word “propitiation” refers to Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His sacrifice made it possible for us to be “one” with the Father, to be in a right relationship and in His grace and favor. Sin had spiritually separated us from God and caused us to be people who were against God. In order to restore a right relationship with God, Jesus had to pay the penalty for our sins. He was the righteous One dying for the unrighteous. Isaiah 53:5-6 prophesied, “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus suffered the cross to bear our sins, so that He could bring us to God. That is what propitiation is all about.

Second Corinthians 5:19-21 reminds us: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him (that is, in Christ) we might become the righteousness of God." Forgiveness means that God was no longer counting our trespasses against us. Jesus suffered for us, so God could forgive us. This opened the door to reconciliation, that is, making friends again, with God.

First Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." Even though sin placed us far away from God, the blood of Jesus allowed us to be brought near. Even though we were strangers to the covenant of promise outside of Christ, the blood of Jesus allowed us to become fellow citizens with the saints in God's kingdom and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Because of Jesus, we can become sons and daughters in God's family!

Third, Jesus suffered on the cross in order to be an act of obedience to His Father and as an example of obedience to us. Hebrews 5:7-9 says, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He was crucified, He spent three hours in prayer. He knew the Father's will that He suffer many things and be crucified, and that is a most painful death. He was troubled and sorrowful to the point of death. He fell on his face and He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus chose to obey and suffer out of love for the Father and for us.

Paul used this example of love and obedience to teach the church at Philippi. He said, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). Just as Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient, so we are to be obedient. Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him.

Fourth, Jesus suffered the cross to be a ransom for many. In ancient times when people were enslaved, kidnapped, or captured in war, they would live very harsh lives. Someone who loved them often paid a ransom to free them. The Lord Jesus said about Himself, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). He came to ransom us from enslavement to sin. Peter explained, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Jesus could have instantly manufactured all the gold or silver that He wanted with just a word, just as He multiplied the loaves and the fishes. But gold and silver was no cost to Jesus. No, He paid the dearest price that He could pay. He paid with His life and with His blood.

Your ransom price was not cheap! Paul wrote, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: and therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Have you considered what a great price the Lord Jesus paid for your salvation?

Fifth, Jesus suffered on the cross to heal us spiritually. God didn't merely want to forgive us. He wanted to transform our lives, to make us righteous, so that we could become like His Son, Jesus. First Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." Healing in this passage is not physical healing but spiritual, and each of us needs healing spiritually. For a long time, I've believed what is most needed by Christians today is a very long look at the cross. If we're ever to heal spiritually as individuals, as families, as a church, or as a country, we must come to the cross and obey the will of God.

The way of Jesus is abundant. The Lord Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The Christian life truly is abundant; it is truly the best way to live. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." The way of Christ lifts men up, makes them better, and blesses all of society. Without Christ, this world would be harsh and chaotic, confused, a place filled with the worst that man has to offer. But with Christ, we have hope of something better. Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." When you look at all the sinfulness in the world, you must admit we need the salvation that Christ provides. We need His love, grace, forgiveness, and hope. Without Christ, this world would be a sad, sad, sad place indeed!

One cannot look long at the cross and remain unmoved. The cross reveals the worst of men and the best of God. I'm amazed at how far selfish, sinful men will go to preserve their power. I grieve at how cruel people can be, and how they can do horrible things to others. The cross reveals man at his worst, condemning an innocent man. Yes, Jesus endured the worst that men could do to Him, while He did what was best to bless them.

The cross reminds us that sin is real and it matters to God. God hated what sin does to people enough to send His Son to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus revealed the ugliness of sin. The cross also speaks to the ugliness of my sin and yours. The Lord laid upon Him, that is Jesus, your sins and mine. Jesus paid the ransom price for us. First Corinthians 6:20 says, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." We must understand: I don't belong to me anymore, and you don't belong to you. We belong to the Lord.

The blessing of Christ's sacrifice comes to those who obey Him. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Second, turn from sin to righteousness; this is repentance. Luke 13:3 says unless you repent, you will perish. Third, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Fourth, be baptized into Christ Jesus and into His death, so that your sins will be done away with! When you're crucified with Christ in baptism, you're no longer a slave to sin. You're redeemed and a child of God (Romans 6 and Galatians 3). So, my friend be obedient today!

The Sacrifice

Because of a great sacrifice given long ago, you and I have the hope of forgiveness and eternal life. Today, we're examining the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Word of God opens for us a door of love and understanding about God. The Bible helps us to see what great lengths God has gone in order to save and bless us. No one will ever love or bless you to the extent the Father and His Son, Jesus, love you. No one has sacrificed so much to forgive your sins and to give you the hope of eternal life. To have Christ in our lives means everything.

A sacrifice is an offering up of something precious to God. Throughout history, God demanded that His people give their best in their sacrifices. In ancient times, the patriarchs and the Israelites sacrificed gift-offerings, thank-offerings, peace-offerings, guilt-offerings, and sin-offerings to God. Sometimes they offered oil, wine, or grain; and at other times, they offered animals. They offered sacrifices when they made a covenant with God, and when they pleaded for God's help at time of battle, and when they realized that they had sinned. The Law prescribed exactly what God expected from them, what He accepted, and what He rejected. To be pleasing, Israel offered only what God prescribed.

The Law of Moses prescribed the offering of the blood of animals for sin. The one who offered the animal would confess his sins. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would lay both hands on the scapegoat and confess the sins of the people. This was a means of transferring the guilt of these sins upon the sacrifice. We today are under a new covenant ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ who is the sacrifice for our sins. He paid an awful and a painful price for our sins. Today, we want to look at His sacrifice.

Our reading today comes from Hebrews 7:23-28. The Hebrew writer is contrasting the gift of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice as compared with the sacrifices under the law of Moses.

The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

Under the Law of Moses, the Israelites offered up animal sacrifices, but God had a greater plan than animal sacrifices. He sent His Son to be our sacrifice. From the beginning, God had planned for His Son, Jesus, to redeem man and to destroy the works of the devil. But for Jesus to be a sacrifice He must have a fleshly body. The angel of the Lord told Joseph that Mary would be with child, conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:21 says, "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." John speaks of Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Then verse 14 explains, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him and he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

The New Testament clearly reveals that the purpose of Jesus coming into this world was to take away the sins of the world so that we might be saved. This clearly requires a body for sacrifice. Hebrews 10:1-10 explains the difference between the Israelite offerings under the Law of Moses in the Old Testament and the offering of our Lord Jesus as a part of a new covenant. It says:

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He (that is, Jesus) comes into the world, He says (this is a quotation from Psalm 40:6-8), "Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God.' After saying above, 'Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have not desired, nor have you taken pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' And He takes away the first, (that is, the first covenant), in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The birth of Jesus and His becoming flesh took place so that He might have a body to sacrifice for our sins. Because Jesus became human and lived a perfectly sinless life, He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself when He went to the cross. This was a voluntary sacrifice because of His love for you and for me. The Lord Jesus said, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17-18).

The Lord Jesus knew the horror and the pain of going to the cross. He knew the Romans reserved this punishment for the worst of people. The Roman Seneca, who lived from 4 BC to 65 AD, was a tutor and advisor to Emperor Nero. In a letter to Lucilius, Seneca asked a serious question about the Roman practice of crucifying people. "Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly weals on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? Oh, He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross." The Lord Jesus was willing to die just that way, to sacrifice Himself for you and me, out of love.

Let's remember what Jesus went through from the time of Gethsemane until He died upon the cross. Jesus prayed at Gethsemane with His face upon the ground. Peter, James, and John were with Him but sleeping. His closest disciples couldn't stay awake to pray with Him. He knew what lay ahead. Hebrews 5:7 says he prayed with "loud crying." He prayed for the cup to pass from Him; but ultimately, He prayed that the Father's will be done.

Jesus saw the crowds with swords and spears coming for Him. Judas, his own familiar

friend, betrayed him with a kiss. His disciples scattered. He was arrested and bound, and taken away like a criminal. They falsely accused him in a series of three illegal trials, but could find no sin. In the end, they condemned him for blasphemy, because He admitted that He was the Son of God. Matthew 26:67-68 says, "Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, 'Prophesy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?'" One of his closest disciples, Peter, denied him three times just as Jesus prophesied. During the third denial, it was in the very presence of Jesus.

They took Jesus to Pontius Pilate who could find no reason to put him to death. Four times Pilate said that He was innocent, but the Jews would not accept that. They called out for His crucifixion. The people who earlier had praised Him as their Messiah now denied Him as their king. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, whose soldiers mocked Him, and treated Him with contempt, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate.

Matthew 27:27-30 says, "Then the soldiers of the governor (that is, Pilate) took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head." When the Jews insisted Jesus be crucified and Barabbas be released, Pilate had Jesus scourged. They bloodied his back and shoulders and chest and may have wounded other parts of his body. Scourging was a beating that was so bad, that he would not have enough strength to fight them when they crucified Him.

They forced him to carry the very cross of his destruction through the streets to shame Him. When He could hardly go further, they forced a stranger to help Him. In the presence of all, they stripped Him of His clothes. They took large nails and drove them through His hands and feet. They suspended Him on the nails and left Him to die. He watched the Roman soldiers gamble for His prized tunic.

While He was on the cross in anguish, the Jews mercilessly mocked and spurned Him. They despised and rejected Him. Luke 23:35-37 says, "And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!'"

Jesus became the guilt offering, and God laid the sins of the whole world for all time upon Him. Jesus was the sinless sacrifice. Only a sinless sacrifice of one who had a body could receive the punishment for the guilt of mankind's sins.

In agony, Jesus called out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" God had to allow a sinless sacrifice to bear the guilt and the punishment of the sins of others so He could redeem humanity from their sins.

The sun was darkened, the earth quaked and shook the foundations. The veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. According to Josephus, that veil was 60 feet high, 30 feet wide, and four inches thick. Only God could have torn that veil.

Jesus spent six long hours on the cross, trying desperately to catch His breath. In the end, the physical punishment caused his heart to fail and He perished. After He died, a Roman soldier pierced His side, and out came both blood and water (John 19:34). In keeping with the prophecy, not a bone of his body was broken.

Our Lord Jesus died for our sins; He was innocent and pure. The Father laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:10-11 says, "But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He (God) will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities." The Righteous One bore the punishment for the guilt of our sins, so that we could enter into a right relationship with the Father. First Peter 2:24 says, "and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Everything He sacrificed, He sacrificed for our benefit.

The death of Jesus on the cross was personal. He gave His head to a crown of thorns, His face to spit and slaps, His shoulders and back to scourging, His side to a spear, His hands and feet to be nailed to a cross, and His body and blood for our sins.

Jesus endured the hatred and jealousy of the Jews. He endured the shame and mockery of both Jews and Gentiles. He endured the betrayal of a friend, Judas, the denial of His disciple Peter, and the scattering of the other ten. He endured the despondency of His disciples at His death. He rebuked them for not believing the testimony of the women that He was raised from the dead. His suffering was as personal as can be.

If Jesus took your salvation personally, shouldn't you? If your salvation was such a serious matter to Him that He would give up everything to save you from sin, shouldn't it be a serious matter to you? No one has ever sacrificed so much so you could be delivered from the consequences of your sins than Jesus. He bore the punishment that we deserved. As a result, He freely and graciously offers to us freedom from sin and an eternal inheritance with Him in heaven. How can anyone ignore such a great salvation? There's no such hope from any other source. If we reject the Lord Jesus, no one else can save us.

Many people don't like to hear about sin, but we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). I confess I am but an old sinner saved by the grace of God. If it were not for the blood of Jesus Christ, sacrificed upon the cross for you and me, I would have no hope of forgiveness or eternal life with Christ. Without the blood of Jesus, I could only expect to pay for my sins myself.

Hebrews 10:26-27 says, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." If we know of the cross but ignore it, we're ignoring the only hope we have of forgiveness or eternal life. Why not come to the cross in faith and embrace the love and the grace of the Lord Jesus?

Remember what your sins did to the Lord Jesus. He willingly bore the guilt and punishment for your sins, so you wouldn't have to. Don't you love Him for what He's done for you? If you love Him, place your faith and trust in Him and in what He's done for you. He sacrificed for your sins; and so you sacrifice your sins, you give them up; and you live for righteousness. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized, that is immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized into Christ and into His death, His sacrificed blood cleanses you from sin and gives you newness of life (Romans 6:3-7). When you're baptized, the Lord makes you His child (Galatians 3:26-27) and He adds you to His church (Acts 2:47). In Christ, you have all spiritual blessings and the hope of eternal life. So, come to Jesus.

Enduring the Cross

The day Jesus went to the cross must have been the hardest day of His life. Today, we're going to consider how Jesus endured the cross. Tough times come to us all, and doing the will of God can sometimes be most difficult. Jesus certainly endured the harshest suffering at the cross. God's Word teaches us how to live in good times and bad. It gives us hope and promise that helps us sustain our faith when the dark days come. This is why we need the Lord's wisdom to help us. This is why we go to God's Word.

I've often wondered how Jesus was able to bear all the struggle, humiliation, pain, and shame of his last hours before his death. Jesus had amazing patience; that is, the "ability to endure under pressure." He was aware of His suffering and death that would happen at Jerusalem. He knew at Gethsemane of all the things that would take place hours later. He knew that Judas would betray Him; He knew Peter would deny him three times; He knew His disciples would scatter; He knew He would face mockery, trials, beatings, blasphemies, scourging, crucifixion, and death. He heard the crowd call for Barrabas to be released, and the cry "away with Him!" He saw Pilate wash his hands and declare Himself innocent. Jesus felt the crown of thorns upon his head, the whip on His body, the weight of the cross upon his bloodied back, the nails through His hands and feet, and the torment of the crowds at his crucifixion.

Jesus could have stopped it at any time, but He never did! He willingly suffered the worst men could do to Him and didn't even complain about it. I marvel at His love, His strength, and His willingness to do the will of His Father for you and me.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel of Matthew 26:51-54. Jesus has just finished praying at the Garden of Gethsemane and the people had come to arrest Him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"

Jesus said His suffering and crucifixion must happen. The Old Testament prophesied it. Jesus Himself prophesied His suffering and death. For Jesus the cross was necessary. Matthew 16:21-23 says, "From that time Jesus Christ began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'" The death of Jesus was God's will! God intended for it to happen. Peter told the Jews in Acts 2:23 "this *Man* (that is, Jesus) delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."

When I consider all that Jesus willingly suffered and endured, I marvel from a human standpoint how He managed to remain faithful through His suffering in the trials and on the cross. Never once did He give up or give in. What were these inner sources of Jesus' strength? Where did he get the courage and the fortitude? Where did His power to

endure come from? How did He have the self-discipline to do what He must and remain on the cross? If we can understand his sources of power and if those sources are available to us, perhaps we can win the battle of faithfulness in our own struggles.

I want to suggest three non-miraculous resources that Jesus had and that you and I can have. First, He drew assurance from the fact that He was not alone. The Lord Jesus said, "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me" (John 16:32). Throughout His suffering, Jesus was doing the will of the Father, and the Father was with Him. He could say, "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). The Lord Jesus faithfully did the Father's will even in bearing the guilt and punishment for the sins of the world.

Peter describes what Jesus did on the cross and how we should act when we suffer unjustly. First Peter 2:21-24 says, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Jesus did not spew out hateful words or threaten those who reviled and abused Him. This goes against the angry human response of wanting to strike back and curse them. Rather than getting even, Jesus endured by continually "entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

Jesus began and ended His time of suffering and the cross with prayers. He handed His troubles over to the Father. When he was sorrowed and troubled to the point of death at Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Oh, He wept loudly and He prayed fervently and ultimately determined to do the will of God. Pray when you face trouble.

As they were crucifying Him with nails through His hands and feet, Jesus was praying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The verb here suggests that He said this more than once. He was thinking about those who were ignorantly causing His suffering and death, both the Jews who insisted and the Romans who acted. This prayer is answered by offering His blood, which was shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Then, about the ninth hour, close to His death, the Lord cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). This was indeed a cry of pain and suffering. The sun had darkened. I don't believe it was an accident that Jesus said this at this point. Jesus actually was quoting David in Psalm 22:1. Psalm 22 is the most Messianic of all the psalms. I would urge you to read the whole psalm. David at the end of this psalm in verses 25-31 praises the Lord and declares His righteousness. Jesus could see the will of God being done in the cross.

Just before He died, the Lord Jesus declares, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus died committing His spirit to the Father! He remained the Father's Son and fully committed to His will. When we suffer, we can do the same thing. First Peter 4:19 says, "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God

entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

The second way that Jesus was able to endure was His consuming passion for His mission. Jesus came into this world to save men from their sins. He said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Later, the Lord said, “whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27-28). Paul said, “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

While He was on the cross, Jesus showed His love for people. He prayed that the Father would forgive those who were crucifying Him. The Lord Jesus was also gracious to the thief on the cross. The thief said “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” The Lord responded in Luke 23:43, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” While innocently hanging on the cross, Jesus cared enough about this true sinner to promise to see Him in Paradise. Jesus came to save!

Today, under the new covenant, Jesus saves sinners when they respond to the gospel message in love, faith, repentance, and baptism. Peter said to guilty souls at Pentecost, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Don’t seek to be saved like the thief on the cross. The old covenant has passed; our salvation is in the blood of Christ shed in the new covenant. So, respond to the gospel.

I wonder sometimes if Jesus on the cross could see the multitudes of people who would follow Him. Jesus died for people in every generation. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” I’ve often thought about what joy was set before Him. The joy of people who would come to know and love Him! The joy of sinners repenting and serving Him! The joy of heaven with His loved ones! We too can keep the joy of heaven in our hearts to strengthen us and keep us faithful!

Third, Jesus demonstrated His undying, unfailing, and stubborn love for His Father and for us. John 13:1 says, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” Jesus never quit loving the Father who sent Him to the cross. Nor did Jesus stop loving the people whose sins He bore!

It almost seemed Jesus challenged the Jews to do your worst to me, and I will still love you. To His disciples He could say, “Scatter, deny me, or betray me, and I will still love you!” Jesus loved the very people who crucified Him and hurled abuse at him. He prayed for them, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost about His death and resurrection, the people were pierced to the heart; yet the Lord in His love still offered them forgiveness of sins! First Corinthians 13:7-8 says, love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” The love of Jesus never failed. He never gave up on us. Love means doing what is best for others at all costs—and that’s what Jesus did for you and me.

Jesus took you from where you were in sin and by His blood brought you near to God. Ephesians 2:1-5 says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Jesus loved you enough to bring you out of death to life, out of sin to righteousness, and out of wrath to the blessing of eternal life. No one has ever done so much for you.

Even to this day, Jesus is interceding for you with the Father. As Christians we still sin. We wished we didn't, but we still fall short. We still need the blood of Christ to cleanse us. First John 1:8-9 says to Christians who have already obeyed the gospel in faith and baptism, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You, as a Christian, may have wandered away. Did you know that you can come home? The Lord Jesus still loves you and He'll forgive you and He'll cleanse you, if you'll come back to Him. Don't wait! Don't put off coming back home. Come home to the Lord, today! Do what is right. Love Him and serve Him. Don't let anything else keep you from coming back to Him. Put away those sins and love the Lord with all your heart.

The suffering of innocent Jesus bearing our sins reaches into our hearts. He endured suffering because He loved us to the depth of His being. He loved us when we were helpless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies. He endured suffering for the people who didn't know or care because He wanted them to be saved and know the truth. He endured suffering to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). He endured suffering to transform our lives, so that we might leave sin and embrace righteousness.

How do you respond to the cross? Does it matter? Does the love of Christ mean anything to you? It should matter. Our response to His love is to love Him. First John 4:19 says, "We love, because He first loved us." Love for Him will motivate us to leave what harms for what blesses, to leave sin for righteousness. Second Corinthians 5:14-15 says, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." To live for the Lord means we die to self. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Won't you become a Christian? Love and believe in the Lord Jesus. Repent, and turn away from sins that destroy. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized (that is, immersed in water) in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you do, God will forgive you and make you His child!

Salvation and the Cross

Do you know someone that needs the saving blood of Jesus Christ to forgive them? Do you need the salvation of Jesus? First Corinthians 15:1-4 says, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Our salvation is of "first importance" to God, and it should be to us. Have you responded to the gospel, and are you saved by the blood of Jesus?

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was no small matter. Revelation 13:8 in many versions calls Jesus the "Lamb that was slain from the foundation (or creation) of the world." The Lord Jesus himself predicted His suffering and death. Matthew 16:21-23 says, "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'" Peter loved Jesus. He didn't want Him to die, but Peter didn't understand God's purpose in sending Jesus to the cross.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Letter to Titus 3:3-7 dealing with a lot of the problems that took place on the island of Crete. He talks about the nature of people and our salvation.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Like Peter, I sometimes wonder how this suffering and cruelty and crucifixion could happen to the Son of God who was so good and so loving. I want to say, "NO, this shall never happen to you!" But God had a bigger plan than Peter could see. I criticized Pilate for compromising with the Jews over Jesus until I remembered that I've compromised. I became angry at the Sanhedrin for their jealousy and hatred until I remembered my own jealousies and ill-will. I grieved at those who hit Him and scourged Him until I remembered how hurtful my sins must be. I spoke against the ones who mocked Him and wagged their heads until I remembered my own careless words. I despised the self-righteous priests and Pharisees who thought they had overcome Jesus by sending Him to the cross until I remembered my own pride. Isaac Watts wrote in 1707, "When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, My richest gains I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride."

Our society has become willing to dismiss God and His teaching about sin. They easily excuse and justify even the worst of sins. While many people play fast and loose with sin, thinking they can set aside God's values in the Bible for worldly values, God grieves. We

shouldn't expect, however, that His love means that He will tolerate our sins forever, even if we tolerate them. The prophet said about God, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor" (Habakkuk 1:13).

Many have forgotten the cross and have forgotten sin. Two preachers, postmodern preachers, were discussing their evangelistic efforts on television. One was being congratulated that he did not preach about sin any more. The assumption was that everyone knows they are in sin and don't need to be told. Then came this advice: "When a man is drowning, you don't describe the water to him. You throw him a rope!" The audience clapped their hands and cheered their approval. That sounds good, doesn't it? But sin destroys and we need a response. Of course, the response of the postmodern preacher was for people to stand during the invitation and say a brief, salvation prayer with the preacher. They asked people to stay and say a prayer and that's all they asked. Nobody ever did that in the New Testament.

No, the process of salvation, for them, is often cast in this drowning man analogy, but analogies are often inadequate. First of all, sin in the minds of most people isn't what it used to be. A recent Ellison Research survey showed that thirteen percent of Americans did not believe there was any such thing as sin. Recent polls now reveal that many people no longer think a variety of sinful behaviors are even a moral issue.

According to the Ellison report, "People under age 35 are less likely than Americans in other age groups to believe that adultery, or getting drunk, or not reporting income on taxes, or homosexual activity, pornography, and gossip are sin. At the same time, younger people are more likely than others to say using tobacco and working on the Sabbath are sinful." They found that only 35 percent of Americans (who are not evangelicals) thought sex before marriage was sinful.

A Gallup Poll last year found that 77 percent of Americans believed that the moral values of our nation are getting worse. They found more people believed wearing clothing made of animal fur was more wrong than sex between an unmarried man and woman, or having a baby outside of marriage, or homosexual relations. Clearly, many people are no longer willing to accept God's standard of sin. While moral values change in our society, God's morals do not change. Sin takes place when people break God's laws. First John 3:4 says, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." When people have no respect for God or His teaching and do as they please, they sin against God. They offend Him, and He takes notice.

Many folks don't think about salvation from sin because they don't know they're lost. They don't know the serious consequences of being lost. Others who don't know about Jesus don't want to think about salvation from sin or heaven and hell. Among those who are not aligned with any religion, as many as 32 percent say sin doesn't even exist. The Bible, however, clearly says that sin exists and points out that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). First John 1:8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Then verse 10 says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him (Jesus) a liar and His word is not in us." Sin is real; and without the forgiveness found in the blood of Jesus, sinners will bear the consequences of their sin.

A LifeWay study in 2016 found that 65 percent of Americans said that everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. A great number of people recognize they sin but don't consider sin a big deal. They don't believe a few sins will cause them to be lost. The Word of God says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in

Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Sin is a big deal to God, even if it's not to us. Why? Sin's a big deal because sin is an offense to God. The offended see things differently than the offender. The one hurt sees things differently than the one who caused the hurt. The one who breaks the law sees things differently than the One who made the law.

Sin is real and devastating to our souls, and we will never understand the magnitude of God's grace or salvation until we see the terrible effects of sin on our souls. Jesus didn't go to the cross for trivial reasons. He suffered because sin destroys everything good. Adam and Eve's sin caused the ground to be cursed. Before their sin, they lived in a paradise and could have lived forever in communion with God. But, afterward, they brought pain and suffering into the world. God told Adam, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19). We suffer today because sin came into the world. It is a big deal.

The desire to sin leaves us doing many things that harm ourselves and harm others. We all face these problems, but there is a solution in the grace of God! Titus 3:3-7 says, “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Because of Jesus on the cross paying the price for our sins, a door of salvation has been opened to cleanse us from sin and to give us new birth in Christ. This new birth takes place when we put our faith in Christ, turn from that sin, and are baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Baptism takes us to the cross so that we can be saved.

God's Word says, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (Romans 6:3-7).

In baptism, we unite with Christ in His death and resurrection. We're baptized into His death; we're crucified with Him in baptism. We're buried with Him and raised with Him in baptism. Just as Christ had new life when God raised Him from the dead, so God gives us newness of life when He raises us up with Christ. Baptism is no empty ritual; it is how God chose to unite us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. God works through the cross and through baptism to put the old man of sin to death so that we may be free to live in righteousness. God saves us and gives us newness of life by the washing of regeneration. The washing that regenerates is baptism!

God actively works on us by uniting us with Christ in His death and resurrection. Colossians 2:12-13 explains, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." Baptism is not some meritorious work on our part; it's how we put our faith in the working of God. Because God raised up Jesus after His death on the cross, we allow God to bury and raise us up with Christ in baptism. God buries us with Christ and makes us alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. Though we were dead in our transgressions and sins, He made us alive. He saved us and raised us up to walk a new life just as He did Jesus Christ.

One day we'll stand before the great white throne to be judged by the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation 20:11-12 says, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." Everyone will be there from every nation from every century. We cannot escape because there's no place we can go.

The righteous will enter the joy of God, while the unbelievers and disobedient will be separated from God and His blessing. Salvation means living with God's blessing forever; being lost means an eternity of anguish without God. Being with God is so much better than being without Him. I wouldn't want anyone to miss the opportunity to have their sins forgiven. Come to the cross; find forgiveness and find life. That's what we all need to do. Some young people came to a wise older man and asked, "When should we repent?" The older man answered, "Repent the day before you die." The young people asked, "But we don't know when we will die!" The older man responded, "Then repent today!" If you take God and your sin seriously, then repent. You know you can ignore sin and act like it doesn't matter, but one day you'll have to face God and give an account for your sins. Romans 14:12 says, "So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God." First Corinthians 6:9 simply says, "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived." How often people fool themselves and they lie to themselves saying, "Oh I can do anything I want to do and it won't make any difference." My friend, it does to God and one day you'll have to face God.

Hebrews 4:12-13 reminds us, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." God will judge us all one day. Christ is the only one who is able to save you. Why would you ignore the most important decision that you'll ever make?

Today, is the best day to leave that old man of sin behind and to follow Christ to a new life of righteousness, freed from the devastating effects of sin. The blood of Christ can cleanse your soul and cleanse your conscience. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus in Acts 22:16, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ, and the time when the blood of Jesus cleanses you from sin. Oh, respond to Jesus today!

The Call of the Cross

The Lord didn't just die for us; He calls to us to come and follow Him. How is Jesus calling us today? He calls us through the gospel! We rejoice in God's message of forgiveness, love, and hope. There simply is no greater message than what is found in the New Testament. God calls us through the gospel message to love and serve Him. Loving and following Jesus Christ is the greatest privilege.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 Paul said, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." The story of the death, burial, and resurrection, as we will see, truly is good news.

The word "gospel," as Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 15, means "good news." The gospel is not merely, simply, good news; it's the best news that you're ever going to hear. Perhaps you got some good news at some point recently. You heard the word "yes" when you asked your wife to marry you; or you got accepted to college; or you were granted a loan for a new house; or you found out you were going to win an award; or perhaps you learned that you're going to be a parent or a grandparent. All of these things are good news indeed; but the best news you'll ever hear is about your salvation in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to John 3:14-17. Here Jesus is telling about the great love of God for our salvation.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only (or only) begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

That reading from God's Holy Word is about God's love. And oh, how precious it is. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You've loved us so much that You gave Your Son Jesus to die for us so that we might have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Help us Father to love You and to serve always. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Paul preached a story of good news about events that happened many years before. Paul didn't just announce it; he preached it because he knew the power of the message. He said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). The gospel message from God is so powerful that it can bring about our salvation.

Paul rejoiced that the Corinthians "received" the gospel. Not everyone who hears receives or welcomes the good news of Christ. Some hear but ignore it; some hear and rejoice over it but quickly forget it; and some don't want to hear it at all. John said that Jesus "came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). The gospel is good news, but you must receive it into your heart and your life if it's to do you any good. I hope that you'll do that.

The Corinthians not only heard and received the gospel; they took a stand on it. They believed it so strongly that they committed their lives to the Lord Jesus. In becoming a Christian, they left their old lives of paganism and idolatry. They took up their crosses at a time when authorities punished people for being Christians. They put their trust in God to bless and take care of them. Because they took their stand on the gospel, the gospel saved them. Man cannot save himself by himself; he needs God's mercy and wisdom. Paul said, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). The message of the gospel can make all the difference in your world, if you will believe and take your stand upon it.

The Corinthians took a stand on the gospel, because they knew that they would be saved if they held fast to it. The gospel is a foundation for a lifetime. Jesus said about his teaching, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved" (Matthew 10:21-22). There simply is no retirement plan in this life for the Christian. One who becomes a Christian does so, even if his whole family doesn't like it. One who becomes a real Christian will do so no matter what others think, or say, or do. They're going to put Jesus first no matter what.

Each of us must realize that we have three very real problems. First, we have a problem with sin. The Bible says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Your sins separate you from God and will bring about a punishment upon you. Paul also said, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). If you sin, the Bible says, "you must die" (Romans 8:13). The death that you die will not be physical but spiritual, which is far worse. The person who dies spiritually without God will be lost eternally. He'll not be able to go to heaven but in the end will be punished by being cast into the outer darkness, a place of fire, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. To be delivered from such a place is genuinely good news. God's salvation is just such a gift; it's life instead of death, joy instead of sorrow, comfort instead or torment, and hope instead of hopelessness.

Second, we must realize that we face what all men face. We will one day face death and the afterlife. The Hebrew writer said, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). No one likes to think of death, and obituaries remind us that our time will one day come. We all will face God and judgment. Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Death is frightening because we're leaving what we know to enter a realm that we know little or nothing about. Our destiny will be determined by the life that we have lived on earth. Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). Physical death for evil people will lead to a place of punishment and sorrow. In our hearts, we all know that we have sinned and need forgiveness and grace. Death without God is certainly bad news.

Third, we have a problem with life and temptation. The problem we all face is that we're

all weak to sin. We wished we weren't; we wish we'd never sin again; but the truth is that no matter how hard we try, we find ourselves committing sins. When the apostle John wrote to younger Christians, he said, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Even the best Christians find themselves doing the most regrettable things and in need of forgiveness and help. Paul described his life, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me" (Romans 7:15-17). We all have to face the ugly desires that are inside of us throughout life. Is there any help for that?

The word gospel means "good news"; and the good news is that Christ helps us with all three of these problems. Let's look again at 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, where Paul said, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, secondly that he was buried, third that he was raised on the third day in accordance to the Scriptures." The gospel is foremost the story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each of these things were actual events. Jesus really did die, really was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and really did rise from the dead. But it is what they mean to us that makes them all the more important! Nothing in your life is more important to your eternal destiny than the story of the gospel.

The cross of Jesus as an event is very sad—it's sad news because a righteous man who was innocent was unjustly crucified and suffered great agony. But the point of his death, as a sacrifice for our sins, is actually good news. He died for our sins, so that we could be forgiven and not have to pay the penalty of separation from God for all eternity. Paul said, "For our sake He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him (Christ) we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus bore the punishment we should have borne. Because he died, we can live in righteousness, being washed in his blood. His blood has the ability to cleanse us from every, every sin. My friend, that's good news!

The resurrection of Jesus was an amazing event. Because Jesus arose from the dead, we can know there is life after death. We can also find hope of life beyond the grave. First Thessalonians 4:16-18 says, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words." It is encouraging to know that there is a wonderful great eternity awaiting us in heaven!

The fact that Jesus has gone back to the Father and sits at His right hand in heaven is important for our third problem, our weakness to temptation. Jesus is there at the right hand of God interceding for us (according to Hebrews 7:24). John wrote to Christians, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). Jesus is interceding with the Father as our advocate; He's pleading our case for continued cleansing and forgiveness. John also wrote, "If we confess our sins, then He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Christians can have hope and they can find total forgiveness because of Jesus, even though

they're imperfect.

So... how do we benefit from the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? The good news is that when we believe in Jesus, repent of our sins, confess our faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and are baptized, we become united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Paul said, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death (there's the death part)? Therefore we've been buried with Him (yes buried with Him) through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we've become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this (hear this very carefully), that our old self was crucified with Him (when we were baptized into His death, we were crucified with Him), (why did that take place) in order that our body of sin might be done away with (so the sin could be gotten rid of), so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for He who has died is freed from sin" (Romans 6:3-7). Freedom from sin, eternal life beyond the grave, and daily help to live the Christian life because Jesus is interceding for us, is great news. God is so very good to us.

Freedom from sin opens up that door to reconciliation with God. We become His children and heirs of eternal life. Ephesians 2:4-7 explains, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you've been saved), and He also raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." Praise God for all that He has done, is doing, and will do for us! Let's pray. Father, help us every day of our lives to recognize all that you've done for us, to love You for it, to serve You, and to be close to You. And Father, we pray that Your Will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Believers who repent and are baptized become united with Christ and washed in His blood. What's hindering you from being baptized? Jesus had new life when he was raised, and you have newness of life when you're raised up with him in baptism. What is hindering you from obeying the gospel? Don't merely say you believe; respond! Medicine doesn't work until you take it, and the gospel only works when you respond to it. God's grace and love are available. Eternal life is the gift of God through Christ Jesus, but you cannot have it until you receive and take your stand on it. When you do, God will bless you.

God sent His Son to die for your sins. Won't you love and trust Jesus enough to respond to His marvelous grace? Don't pass up the mercy of Jesus, because without Jesus, there is no hope. The blood of Christ can cleanse you and Christ, as your advocate, can help you live the Christian life. You can live an abundant life on earth and enjoy heaven forever. Seek out one of the churches of Christ, tell them that you want to obey the gospel. Tell them that you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, and that you want to leave the old life of sin and to become a new person? Won't you be baptized into Christ, united with Him in his death and resurrection, so that your sins can be removed and you can be born again? Your friends at the church of Christ would love to help you in this matter, and they want to be your church family as you hold fast to the Lord and His gospel. A great new life awaits you, take hold of it my friend. Won't you do that today?