

# Program Transcripts

January 2023



IN  
**SEARCH**  
OF THE LORD'S WAY<sup>®</sup>

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**January 2023**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **JANUARY 1 – YOUR TIME**

Time passes by quickly, and we often miss opportunities to do good. We must wake up to the fact that our time on earth is not unlimited and use our opportunities to serve the living God. Let us use our time wisely.

## **JANUARY 8 – THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM**

What is the seed of the kingdom and why does it matter? The seed of the kingdom reveals the wisdom of God for all people in all places for all time. If we wish to be part of the kingdom of God, we must be born of this seed.

## **JANUARY 15 – THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE**

There are few gifts so precious as the granting of an opportunity to change. God graciously offers us the gift of repentance so that we might change our hearts and lives; this allows us to be saved and to live with Him forever.

## **JANUARY 22 – IRONIES OF THE CROSS**

The Scriptures offer many ironies surrounding the cross. An irony is a state of affairs or an event that seems deliberately contrary to what one expects. There are many surprises and ironies attached to the ministry and death of Jesus Christ.

## **JANUARY 29 – THE WORD “MUST”**

We like to pretend we are free to do as we please, but the Scriptures present to us restrictions and requirements that contain the word “must.” “Must” in the Scriptures means something is spiritually or morally necessary.

## Your Time

Time passes by quickly, and we often miss opportunities to do good. We need to wake up and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Benjamin Mays wrote a poem that reminds us of the time that we have. "I have only just a minute, Only sixty seconds in it. Forced upon me, can't refuse it. Didn't seek it, didn't choose it. But it's up to me to use it. I must suffer if I lose it. Give account if I abuse it. Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it." We can fool ourselves into thinking a little thing doesn't matter. A minute of temptation can ruin a life. An angry minute can lead to a terrible conflict. A careless minute can cost a life. Instead, a loving minute can restore a friendship. A minute of joy can renew the spirit. A minute of prayer can focus our hearts on God. A patient minute can help us see things in a better light. A minute of Scripture can keep us from falling to temptation.

Some people claim they never have enough time, yet they spend enormous chunks of time doing trivial things. Use your time wisely. Because once spent, you cannot replace time. Are you closer to God today than you were a year ago, or are you farther away? How will you use your time?

Our reading today comes from Romans chapter 13, verses 11 to 14.

"Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

That's a reading from God's holy word.

Let's pray together. "Oh Father, help us to awaken, and help us to realize that our time on this earth is short. Help us to live for You and to serve You and to please You. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

We live our lives watching the clock. Our watches, our telephones, our cars, our rooms, our computers all have clocks and calendars reminding us that time is passing. Virgil Trout once said that we live in a "clock-eyed world." We are constantly looking at the clock, thinking about time to do something: time to get up, time to eat, time to go to work, time to come home, and time to sleep.

Day and night never cease. Since time is so much a part of our lives, we need to treasure what we have. And I think here are some important lessons about time:

First, I must learn that my days are measured. I won't live forever on this earth. Death comes to us all. David said in Psalm 139:16 when he was speaking about God's knowledge about our lives, but he says even before our birth, David says "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

David could say in Psalm 39:4 to 5, "LORD, make me to know my end, And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath."

Moses wrote in Psalm 90 verse 12, "So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom." Again, Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 32 and verse 29, "If they were wise, they would understand this; they would discern their latter end!" Hebrews 9:27 clarifies this: there the Hebrew writer

says "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." Death is real, and so is the judgment that follows death. Yes, one day your time on earth will be no more.

Second, I must learn to take care of myself physically and spiritually. Moses wrote in Psalm 90 verse 10, "As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away." Since life is brief, we must take time seriously. Romans 13:11 says, "Do this, knowing the time, that it's already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." I tell you, you're getting older and you are closer to salvation or closer to judgment than you have ever been.

The Lord Jesus said in Luke 12:35 to 40, "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third (that's way late in the night), and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Third, I must learn to make the most of my time. You see, the time we possess today is so precious that we must not waste it on things that don't matter. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:15 to 17, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." You see, the Lord doesn't want us to waste our souls on evil things that may ruin us. He wants us to know His will and to do it, so that we may please Him in everything.

Paul wrote in Colossians 3:23 to 24, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." If I belong to the Lord, I must give myself to His service instead of living for my own pleasures. If I belong to the Lord, I need to give Him my all and serve Him with all my heart and strength. We must surrender ourselves completely to God; and that includes our time, our energy, our hearts, our money, and our strength. We must not spend our time ignoring Him or fighting with Him.

The Lord Jesus said in John 9 and verse 4, that "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is today; night is coming when no one can work." The Lord knew that His time on earth was limited, and He wanted to make the most of the time that He possessed. So should we! We're all limited in time. Have you considered how you use your time? Much time is wasted, not in hours but in minutes. You know, a bucket with a small hole in the bottom will become just as empty as the bucket that someone deliberately kicks over.

You need to use your time to think about making memories, memories that You're making, make sure that they're good ones, happy ones. Few things sting as badly as a memory of some sin, some misspoken word, or some hateful act. You see, you're trading a day of your life today for good, or for evil, maybe you're trading it for nothing of value. How you live today will be remembered by someone somewhere tomorrow. What will they think of you? Will they see Christ dwelling in you? We wouldn't want to spend our lives building a reputation of evil.

Luke 12, verse 16 to 21 says: That someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But Jesus said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a

parable, saying, "The land of a very rich man was very productive. "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'

Then he said, 'This is what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to my soul,' "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." ' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Fourth, I must learn not to put off until tomorrow the things I should do today. Oh I can plan for tomorrow, but I will never possess tomorrow until tomorrow comes. If you waste time, you may be sacrificing your eternity. If you waste time, you're wasting opportunities to be right with God. All I can give to God is myself, my abilities, and my time. If I fail to give Him my time, I'll fail to give Him myself. And so, let's invest our time in God for good.

In Hebrews 3:7 to 14 we read: Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they've not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.' Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it's called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share (he says) in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." The Lord doesn't want anyone's heart to harden in sin or for anyone to lose their soul.

We must take advantage of our opportunities. James 4:13-17 written to some merchants says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we're going to go into such and such a town and we're going to spend a year there and trade and make a profit'— yet you do not know what your tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you're a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. And instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' And as it is, you boast in your arrogance. And all such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Life is indeed uncertain, and we can't presume that we have lots of time to do as we please. Proverbs 27 and verse 1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you don't know what a day may bring."

And this is the reason getting right with God is vitally important! Time is short and how long we have is uncertain. We need to act with wisdom and to act soon. Paul wrote in the book of Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 2, "Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

The Lord Jesus, in Matthew 25 verses 1 to 12 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' And then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also,

saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Are you prepared for the Lord's coming? Is your heart right with God?

I've talked with people about their souls, and they tell me, "Well, I'm thinking about it." My friend, don't think so long that you fail to follow Christ. It's tragic to think of a soul who died thinking about becoming a Christian and never got around to doing it. It's also heartbreaking to hear of a Christian who thinks one day he'll repent but never begins to do it. Don't die thinking about it; get right with God. 2 Peter 3 and verse 9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." My friend, do you need to get right with God. Today is the best day for you to do that.

Let's pray. "Father we're thankful that each day You give us an opportunity to get right with You, to serve You, to love You and to rejoice in all Your blessings. Father help us to give our hearts and our lives to you every single day. And Help us to do Your will, and to please You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen."

David said in Psalm 31:14 to 15, "But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand." God has your yesterdays, your todays, and your tomorrows. You've just one life to give to God. How you spend your time is how you live your life. Your time is what you make it. God blesses those who make the most of their time. David said in Psalm 31:19, "Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!"

Romans 13:11, "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." Are you nearer salvation or nearer regret? What is your life saying about how you think of God? Does your life say that you love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength?

To become a Christian, lovingly place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and believe the good news, the gospel, of His death, burial, and resurrection. Turn from sin to righteousness. Confess Jesus Christ as God's Son and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. While you believe, and while you repent, and while you confess Christ, being baptized means someone else is acting upon you. Physically it's another person who baptizes you, and spiritually God is active in saving you, forgiving your sins, burying and raising you with Christ, adding you to the church, causing you to be born again, and making you His child. In baptism God acts upon you. Let God give you newness of life when you trust and obey Him.

## The Seed of the Kingdom

What is the seed of the kingdom and why does it matter? The seed of the kingdom reveals the wisdom of God for all people in all places for all time.

If we would know the truth, we must search the Scriptures. Paul urged Timothy in second Timothy 2 verse 15, "Do your best (or study) to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." The Lord wants us to please Him by diligently studying the word of God itself, not giving in to human traditions, or human ideas, or people who twist the Scriptures to make them say something other than the truth. Time and culture cannot and do not change the words written in Scripture. Reading human ideas into Scripture is never approved by God.

Let's go back to the Bible for the true seed of the kingdom. It'll take some study. We don't want to miss the truth. If you misunderstand and corrupt the seed of the kingdom, you won't have the true kingdom of God but a corrupted substitute. We don't want human substitutes; we want the pure word of God, the seed of the kingdom. And when we follow the Lord's teaching, we can't go wrong.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according Matthew chapter 13 verses 3 through 9 and tells the parable of the sower.

"And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, 'Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.'"

That parable helps us understand the nature of the heart of people. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father help us to be good soil in our hearts. To listen and to care about the things that You have taught and to not let others things distract us or take us away from the truth. This is our prayer in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When the disciples heard the parable of the sower, they asked for an explanation of what the parable meant. Well, Jesus explained in Matthew 13: 18 to 23, "Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in (the) heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Now here Jesus refers to the seed of the sower as the word of the kingdom. The seed that makes the kingdom is the message that Jesus used and taught in the New Testament. Now this is a saving message, an eternal message, and an inspired message. It is the truth that will one day determine whether we live with God eternally or live without God. When you turn away from this seed, you turn away from the kingdom of God. It defines the kingdom of God and determines who belongs to the kingdom and who does not. This is why the Lord Jesus said, "He who has ears, let him hear."



The apostle Peter expressed how the seed that causes us to be born again is the message preached in the first century. He said in first Peter 1: 22 to 25, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. the grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the LORD endures forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you.” The message preached in the first century was what caused the people to be born again; and they obeyed the truth.

Now one isn't born again by some “better felt than told” inner experience but by hearing and obeying the truth found in the message preached. First Corinthians 1:21 says, “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.” James 1: 21 to 22 further says, “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

Now let's not be fooled. The gospel of Christ is the message of the kingdom, and it saves! Romans 1:16 says, “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.” Paul reminded the Corinthians of the gospel that he received from the Lord and preached to them. He said in first Corinthians 15: 1 to 5, “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.”

Sadly, many think there is more than one way to receive the gospel. They believe they can change the message found in the New Testament and still be okay with God. They say salvation comes by merely believing without obeying, but early Christians had their souls purified when they obeyed the truth (first Peter 1:22). The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”

Others imagine that if they say a little prayer accepting Jesus in their hearts, they are saved; but Saul of Tarsus, though he fervently prayed for three days, did not have his sins washed away until he was baptized into Christ, calling on His name. Peter told the people at Pentecost something very different from saying a prayer. He told the people who were guilty of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ, “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.” Yes, people are saved by calling on the name of the Lord, but how does this happen? Well, Peter explained in first Peter 3:21, “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of (the) dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” When we're baptized in water to wash away our sins, we are making an appeal to God for a good conscience.

Sometimes people don't understand the message. The devil loves to keep people from understanding the truth that saves them, to steal away the true word that from their hearts to keep them from being saved by it. The Lord Jesus explained, that “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.”



Now this message that caused their salvation and new birth is an eternal message; it is imperishable and endures forever. Some people think the message can change over time as culture changes, but this is a misunderstanding. What the Lord said in the first century is the same message in the twenty-first century. What the Lord said in one place is true in all places and all times. Jude 3 says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write (to) you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." The message was handed down once for all time to all people in all places. It is eternal and universal. God handed it down, and any change to it means that we've lost what God has said.

Sometimes people don't hold on to the message. You remember Jesus said in Matthew 13: 20 to 21, "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word (of only God, he) immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only, (it's only) temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he (he) falls away." The message with its promises and commandments didn't change; his heart changed. Some events led him to stop trusting the message and stop living for the Lord. He lost sight of the cross and the empty tomb. His fear of persecution led him away from the narrow road back to the world. They were unwilling to endure persecution for being a Christian.

Many today see no need to stay with God or with His church. Instead, they've followed the worldly ways. Rather than being looked at as odd for upholding life, biblical marriage, biblical genders, and biblical morality, they've bought into worldly ideas that lead to confusion, conflict, and chaos. First John 2:17 says, that, "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." You cannot follow worldly ways and follow God at the same time.

Sometimes people get distracted and choke out the message. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 13:22, "And the one on whom (the) seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." One can get so busy with work, with hobbies, with the pleasures of this world that they forget God. They can become unfruitful Christians, because their hearts are more centered on money and the things of this world than they are on the Lord who gave Himself for them.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6: 33 to 34, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." If we put the Lord first and trust Him to care for us, we'll not get so focused on money, pleasure or the concerns of life. Throughout the history of Israel people forgot God and followed the idolatry of the nations that surrounded them. They deceived themselves into thinking there was something better than the way of God. And each time they did so, God punished them. Life didn't get better, it got worse.

Some churches think if they change their beliefs or their worship to please people they will flourish; but numerical growth doesn't mean a church has grown spiritually. You can't grow with God by believing and practicing worldly, human ways. When churches focus on pleasing people and ignore the will of God, they won't produce fruit for God. And they deceive themselves.

Thankfully, some Christians do produce fruit! The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 13:23, "And the one on whom (whom) seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." Luke 8:11 says the seed is the word of God. When people hear the word of God, understand it, and take it to heart, they will indeed bear fruit for God. They'll be what God intended them to be!

And they'll influence other good-hearted people to hear and obey the Lord. They'll live with faith in God and set an example of godliness and integrity. They'll love others the way the Lord loves. They'll hold to the truth and not give in to worldly ways. They'll preach the truth. Romans 12 and verse 2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." God's ways work; and they produce fruit. The ways of the world may attract people, but they cannot produce fruit for God. We want to please God by taking to heart the seed of the kingdom.

Let's follow the Lord Jesus. Let's follow His word! Let's not get sidetracked by popular religion that focuses more on following the crowd than following the Lord. Let's pursue the truth vigorously and diligently. Let's be careful to listen to God's message and do only what He says. To do so is true faith that demonstrates real trust and obedience.

Let's pray together. Father as we hear Your word help us to take it into our hearts, to love it, to meditate on it, to live it out in our lives and to share it with others. Father we're thankful for the seed of the kingdom that can lead to fruitfulness and eternal life. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen

If you found out that what you have been taught and believed wasn't true, would you want to know? People can tell a lie so often that people assume it's the truth. Human traditions passed down through time can become so ingrained in people's hearts that they regard it as more true than God's own words. Now the Pharisees relied more strongly on their unwritten, oral traditions, supposedly coming from Moses, than they did the written Law of Moses. They actually accused Jesus of wrongdoing in Matthew 15 because He didn't wash His hands according to the tradition of the elders.

The Lord Jesus responded to the Pharisees by quoting Isaiah 29:13, "This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." He said of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:13 to 14, that "Every plant my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." Now if you get blinded by human traditions and follow others who are blind, you too may fall into a pit.

Let's stay on the narrow road that leads to life. Place your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; repent of your sins; confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God; and be baptized into Jesus Christ, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins. And when you're immersed, God will wash away your sins, bury and raise you with Christ, make you His child, and add you to His church, the kingdom of God. Let the seed of kingdom be planted in your heart, so that you may become God's child.

## The Gift of Repentance

Today I want to tell you about a gift that will truly change your life. We're going to explore the greatest opportunity you'll ever have.

Gifts are wonderful, but God's greatest gifts aren't wrapped with bows. We know about God's forgiveness and grace. We know of His providence. We know that He hears our prayers and promises us a home with Him in heaven. These are wonderful gifts! But there is something else God considers a gift. That gift is as precious as anything that we have mentioned. It opens the door to a new life and gives us hope. That gift is repentance.

I hope, when you hear the word "repentance," that you don't think of something negative. You see, repentance is a precious opportunity to make a new life pleasing to God. The Bible describes repentance as a gift in Acts 5:30 to 32, where it says, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Peter and the Jews rejoiced in Acts 11:18 that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles. And we should rejoice too! The opportunity to repent, to change our hearts and lives, is a great gift. We don't have to be stuck in a life of sin and separated from God. We can come to Him and enjoy His love and His grace forever and ever.

Our reading comes from 2 Timothy chapter 2 verses 24 to 26. And here the apostle Paul is telling Timothy how he is to try to work with those who have been caught in the snare of the devil.

"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

That's what sin does, it captivates us, and repentance is how we get rid of the sins in our lives. Let's pray together. Father help us always do Your will. To love You, to turn away from the things that are evil and to turn to the things that are good. Bless us Father as we study. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

How is repentance a gift? Well, imagine you're driving down a narrow and winding road and you come upon a car crash. When you pull over to help the person, you find a man with a broken leg. He's in great pain and crying out for help. And you immediately call 9-1-1, and an Emergency Medical Team is dispatched immediately. When the, a, technician gets there, he finds the man with the broken leg crying out, "Give me something to deaden the pain! Just knock me out!" Surely, he'll give him something to ease the pain; but he won't stop there. He'll prepare the leg to be set in place so that it can heal. Now that may require surgery back at the hospital. If the leg isn't set in place, the man won't be able to use it. The problem must be corrected, if the man is to be whole and healthy. It may hurt terribly to set that leg, but it would be far worse to leave it broken. You see, we go to the doctor to find healing.

Jesus, the Great Physician, brings healing to our lives by correcting the spiritually and morally broken places in our lives. He eases the pain through forgiveness but corrects the life by granting us the opportunity to repent. Luke 5:30 to 32 says: And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I've not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Well, of course, all of us today are sinners. James said that we all stumble in many ways. We all need the grace of God; but, just as much as we need the correction repentance and what it brings. We need that just as much as we need grace. Repentance is indeed the gift of God!

Some preachers rarely use the word repentance. I suppose they ignore it because repentance implies the problem of sin and the need to change. One well-known preacher said Christians should never speak about people being sinners or needing to repent. He said such language is unkind and runs people off; but that's like the medical technician giving a pain shot but failing to set the broken leg. He is only easing the pain for a moment and isn't doing the patient any lasting good.

Repentance is a great gift; it must never be taken lightly. The New Testament from the beginning to the end emphasizes the need for repentance. John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3 verses 1 and 2). The Lord Jesus went through the villages of Galilee preaching, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4 and verse 17). When Jesus sent out the twelve apostles to preach throughout Israel, they proclaimed that people should repent (Mark 6 and verse 12).

Fifty days after Jesus died upon the cross, Peter by inspiration of the Holy Spirit preached to the people of Israel who had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. He told them that they had crucified the Lord by the hands of godless men, but God had raised Jesus from the dead and made Him both Lord and Christ. "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and (they) said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, '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 verses 37 and 38). Now both repentance and baptism were necessary to give them forgiveness of their sins. God wanted both their forgiveness and their transformation. In baptism our sins are forgiven and we're born again; and in repentance our lives change to become the people that God intended for us to be.

When Paul preached to the philosophers on Mars' Hill, he spoke of the nature of God and the need for people to repent. The Bible says in Acts 17:30 to 31, that "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he's fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." God doesn't want anyone to remain in spiritual brokenness, and the opportunity to repent, to change, is His gift. The Bible says in 2 Peter 3 verse 9, that "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come through repentance."

Now, God's way for you to find healing includes repentance. We ought to have the same attitude toward repentance that God has. Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 15 verse 7! He said, "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." In verse 10 he said, "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." We should rejoice at repentance, not groan, because repentance is God's way to bring healing to our lives.

Repentance is "a change of heart and mind that leads to a change of life and behavior." Repentance is not merely admitting that I have done something wrong. Some would rather do anything than face the reality or their own sin. Still others think they can confess their sins but fail to change their hearts toward sin. Now if sin is wrong today, it's wrong every day. I must stop my sins. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 18:8 to 9, that, "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it's better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It's better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell." Now confessing our wrongs is essential, but changing our hearts and our ways, they are also essential.

God takes sin seriously, even if we don't. We can excuse ourselves, deny our sins, ignore the consequences, and put off making any changes; but that doesn't remove our responsibility for wrongdoing. God will hold us accountable. 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We must take our thoughts, our words, and our deeds seriously, because God does. Romans 8:12 to 13 says, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you're living according to the flesh, (that is you're sinning a lot, because you want to then) you must die; but if (you) by the Spirit (a) you're putting to death the deeds of the body, (then) you will live."

Repentance is not merely being sorry for our sins. While godly sorrow produces repentance (2 Corinthians 7 verse 10), sorrow alone isn't a change of heart and ways. It's our love for God and the sorrow we have for disobeying Him and failing to please Him that leads us to give up our sins. The religious leaders of John the Baptist's day thought that they could come for baptism but didn't need to repent. And John told them in Matthew 3:7 to 8, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Some think that because they've walked down an aisle confessing sin or have given their hand to a preacher in sorrow, they have repented. Repentance is more than being sorry. One must change his ways and please the Lord.

Repentance is more than stopping the wrongdoing. While repentance means one ceases to do evil, it also means that one turns his heart to the Lord and embraces His will completely. One gets rid of the bad and takes on the good. That's healing. Some people sweep the house clean of sin but don't fill their lives with the Lord's way; so sin sneaks back into their lives. One may cease to do evil, but real repentance means one lovingly learns to observe everything Jesus commands. He genuinely lives to serve the Lord. Repentance is not pretense. One may pretend at righteousness, but the Lord knows every man's heart. One may attend the meetings of the church; but if he doesn't clean up his life, he hasn't repented. Pretending service to God is hypocrisy.

A penitent person is truly sorry for his sin against God. He's sorry that he hurt and grieved God by his transgression and he recalls that Jesus suffered on the cross for his sin. It's, it's, it's this kind of godly sorrow that leads to the change of repentance. God's kindness and grace leads us to repent. So sin grieves God and it breaks our relationship with Him. The Bible says in Isaiah 59:1 and 2, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."

Who could truly love God and want to continue sinning against Him? Who could keep on offending the Lord Jesus who bore the cross for his sins? When a person finally sees the awful ugliness of his sin and takes to heart the amazing grace found in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, he will make a commitment to change and be rid of the sin in his life. When David sinned, he said, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). He wanted nothing more than to be clean and rid of his sins. And he cried out in Psalm 51:9 and 10, "Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Repentance is hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Oh that each of us, you and me, had that kind of zeal in our hearts!

Repentance is not only a turning away from sin; it is also a turning toward God. A penitent person's heart is changed to follow righteousness. The penitent Thessalonians demonstrated their repentance by turning from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1verse 9). A penitent person loves the things that God loves and wants to please Him in every respect. The penitent believer is willing to

deny himself, take up the cross of Christ daily, and follow the Lord (Luke 9:23). He is willing to lose his life for the sake of Christ that he may find it eternally. He is neither ashamed of Christ nor of his teachings. His heart is determined to do everything the Lord asks him to do.

The Ephesians made known their repentance by "bringing their books together and burning them in the sight of all" (Acts 19 verse 19). God calls us not only to stop sinning but also to hate the offense of sin. Hating sin doesn't mean hating sinners. Christians don't hate anyone; they hate the evil that ruins lives. Many people mix that up. God said in Rom. 12 and verse 9, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; (and) hold fast to what is good." Repentance is not some punishment for our past, but our hope and healing for the future. Repentance is good for the soul, because it recognizes the Savior Jesus as the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father help us to recognize Jesus as our Lord and well as our Savior. And helps to live every day for Him in love. This is our prayer in Jesus name, Amen.

James describes repentance in this way. The Bible says in James 1:21 to 25, "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law of liberty, (and preserves, or) perseveres (rather), being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

Today is the best day to start changing your heart and life. Some young people asked a wise man when they should repent. The wise man said, "repent the day before you die." Well the young people said, "But we don't know when we'll die." The wise man said, "then repent today." You have only today to make a change in your life. Who knows what your life will be like on tomorrow. You're just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Are you prepared to face God? The Lord Jesus twice warned, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3 and verse 5). The Lord didn't say this to be mean. He said it because the opportunity to repent is a gift. Don't waste this opportunity.

To become a Christian, put your faith in Jesus Christ, confess Him as the Son of God, repent of your sins and be baptized into Christ, that is, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins, just as Peter said at Pentecost in Acts 2 and verse 38. Repent, and be baptized, and of course, be forgiven!

## Ironies of the Cross

When you consider the cross of Jesus Christ, you'll find many surprises. Today we're exploring some of the ironies of the cross. Stay tuned.

God taught us what He wanted us to know in Scripture. And we can usually take Scripture at face value, but this doesn't mean that Scripture doesn't use rhetorical devices to add force to the truth that it conveys. The Scriptures sometimes use irony to express what God wants us to know. An irony takes place when a statement describing an event or circumstance seems to contradict itself. The statement seems deliberately contrary to what one expects from the circumstances. But what appears to be mockery tells the truth. And what appears to be weak is strong. What appears to be cruel provides an example of supreme love.

We owe so much to the Lord Jesus for all that He has done for us. He was punished for our sake, a punishment that He didn't deserve, so that we didn't have to suffer a punishment. A punishment that we did deserve. 1 Peter 3 and verse 18 speaks of His suffering as "the righteous for the unrighteous." We couldn't save ourselves by ourselves and we're wholly dependent upon His gracious sacrifice. Sadly, many have lost sight of how great a sacrifice He made on our behalf. Just like those in the first century, they think nothing of putting Him to death. We pray that you'll think seriously about the cross of Christ.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Mark chapter 15 verses 16 to 20. And this is the story of Jesus with the Roman soldiers just as they were preparing Him to be crucified.

"The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him."

What a horrible event. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that You us so much. And we're so sorry that Jesus had to suffer so many things to show that love. And Father help us to love You with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The more I study the cross of Christ, the more I find surprising things. The cross itself was an instrument designed to execute criminals in the most painful and prolonged way. It was cruel beyond measure. Both the Jews and the Romans worked together in order to execute Jesus with unfair trials, beatings, mocking, scourging, and crucifixion. The apostle Paul explained in Acts 13:27 to 28, "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed."

Crucifixion was a particularly cruel thing. The law would not allow Roman citizens to be crucified. That was reserved for criminals and slaves. In fact, polite Roman citizens did not even want the word mentioned among them. Seneca, who tutored and advised the Emperor Nero asked, "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 (his) shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross." He asked can anyone be found who would suffer on the cross? Yes, the Lord Jesus would suffer.



Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy set before Him. Hebrews 12:1 and 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." The shame of the cross was that Jesus was labeled as a criminal before the whole city. He was stripped of His clothes and had to observe the soldiers gambling for them. This, by the way, was a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, which predicts, that "They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots."

While Jesus felt shame for the time He hung upon the cross, (and) He focused on the joy set before Him. One might wonder what joy could Jesus possibly have in enduring the cross? Well, Jesus could see what His sacrifice that day would lead to in the future and in eternity. Death and Hades did not prevent Him from building His church. He could see the souls who would take up their crosses daily and follow Him. He could see the thief on the cross being in Paradise with Him. He could see being on the throne at the right hand of His Father.

In His suffering such a cruel punishment, Jesus showed overwhelming love to those who inflicted the pain and to all sinners. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). While they were taking His life, He was thinking of their souls. Such love is immeasurable. Romans 5:6 to 8 reminds us, that "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 (the) 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."

The Father demonstrated great love when Jesus Christ suffered and died for people who could not save themselves, who never gave godliness a second thought, and were sinners against Him. Would you die a cruel death for someone who never gave a thought about you and someone who had sinned against you?

So determined were the Jewish Council to crucify Jesus that they chose Barabbas to be spared, while they called for Jesus to be crucified. Matthew calls Barabbas a notorious criminal. Mark said he committed murder and was an insurrectionist. John says he was a robber. Well, in contrast to this, Pilate repeatedly told the Jews he could find no fault in Jesus that was worthy of death. Peter said to the Jewish Council in Acts 3 verses 14 to 15, "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses."

The Lord Jesus left heaven to become a man and to die for us. 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." He left heaven, so you could go to heaven one day. Philippians 2:5 to 8 reminds us, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but (He) emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The Creator of the universe, the Son of God, became human, humbled Himself, became a servant, and obeyed His Father by going to the cross. He sacrificed everything, so you could have the promise of heaven.

It's insufficient merely to say Jesus died for us, for our sins. Isaiah 53 and verse 5 says, "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." Yes, He was wounded, so we could be healed.

His stripes healed my sin-sick soul and gave me opportunity to change. He suffered so that you and I could find joy. Because He suffered for our sins, we can find peace in His forgiveness. He was a guilt offering for sins that He didn't commit, so we could be delivered from the punishment that we deserved.

1 Peter 3 and verse 18 says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit."

Sometimes people have little regard for Jesus Christ. They don't want to make any commitment to Him, they don't have time for Him, they don't care about Him. But He cared for you to the point that He was nailed down, so you could be set free. He graciously paid the ultimate price so that you wouldn't have to endure the wrath of God for your sins. He didn't shirk from His determination to do the will of the Father. Have you shirked your duty?

The Scriptures tell of the agonized pleading of the Lord Jesus to be spared from the cross. Matthew 26 verses 37 and 38 tells of Jesus' great agony in the Garden of Gethsemane: And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

Jesus fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26verse 39). Mark 14:36 describes His prayer, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." Jesus gave up hope of saving His life physically, so that you could have life spiritually with Him forever.

He gave up hope of saving His life, so you and I could have the hope of heaven. When the crowds came with swords and club or spears to arrest Jesus, you'll recall that Peter thought he needed to defend Jesus by swinging his sword and cutting off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Then the Lord Jesus told Peter in Matthew 26:52 to 54, "Put (up) 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 knew that what would happen next to Him, on the cross, was not only the will of the Father but also what had been prophesied in the Old Testament hundreds of years earlier. It had to happen.

The Jewish leaders who watched Jesus on the cross mocked Him as weak and helpless to save Himself. In Matthew 27:41 to 43 they say that: the chief priests, along with these elders and scribes and a, the others, were mocking Him and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. "He trusts in GOD; let GOD rescue him now, if he delights in him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And yet Jesus could have left if He's wanted.

Remember the 12 legions of angles. A legion at full strength is composed of 6,000 soldiers. The Lord Jesus could call upon 72,000 angels to defend Him at any time. Now the angels of God don't lose. They could have destroyed the whole nation to save Jesus. But Jesus realized His death on the cross must happen this way to fulfill the Scriptures. He didn't call on angles. Jesus put the predetermined will of the Father ahead of His own desire to live. He gave up hope of saving His physical life, in order to give you hope of eternal life. He did it out of love for His Father and out of love for you. Jesus would not save Himself, so that He might save you.

It amazes me how the words of those who sent Jesus to the cross were said in mockery but turned out to be true. The Roman soldiers mocked Him for saying that He's a King. As we read in Mark 15:16 to 20, "The soldiers took Him away to the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on

Him; and they began to acclaim Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. And after they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him." For these soldiers the claim of Jesus, the King of the Jews, was a reason for amusement. But, Jesus was indeed the King of the kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

If Jesus was going to the cross for saying He's the King of the Jews, Pilate wanted that known. John 19:19 to 22 says that, "Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said (He was King of the Jews), 'I am King of the Jews.' Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." Ironically, what Pilate wrote is indeed true! Jesus was King. Is Jesus also your Lord and King?

Let's pray together. Oh Father in heaven help us to realize the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The greatness of His love, the greatness of His power, the greatness of His compassion and His gracious forgiveness. And Father help us to devote ourselves to Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords. And to do His will always. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

I too must deny myself daily to sin and the world if I wish to live eternally with the Lord. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 9:23 and 4 that, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." Now each day you live, you're making choices as to what really matters. Some value the present to the loss of eternal, while others choose what is eternal. John wrote in 1 John 2 and verse 17, "And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." To live forever, we must choose, like the Lord Jesus, to do the will of the Father.

Jesus suffered for several hours, so that you might live with Him forever. He wants you to believe in Him, to love Him, and to follow Him. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." Consider how much the Lord Jesus loved you and how He was willing to suffer for you to bring you to God. I pray that this look at the cross will draw you to Him.

To become a Christian, place your trust in the Lord Jesus and believe the gospel. When you do, the love that you'll have for Jesus will turn your heart away from sin and lead you to live righteously. That's repentance! If you have believed and repented, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Please obey the Lord today!

## The Word "Must"

Choices are important, but have you considered that there are some things over which we have no choice. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're exploring the use of the word "must" in Scripture.

People enjoy many choices, but they also face things that they "must" do in life. You must have a driver's license to drive a car legally, you must be at least 18 years old to vote legally, and you must have a passport to fly to Europe. "Must" describes a moral imperative, a requirement, or a necessity. "Must" removes our options. Many ignore what God requires of us morally and spiritually. The idea of "must" is out of step with our culture. People want the right to live as they please morally, but the word "must" won't allow choices.

Some things are "musts" if we're to please God. The God who made us has a right to rule in our lives. And we must remember, however, that every law of God was for our good according to Deuteronomy 10, verse 13. 1 John 5 and verse 3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." Christianity isn't impossible; God helps us. And if you think it's unfair that God requires obedience, remember that even Jesus had some things that he must do. And so do we.

Our scripture reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 16, verse 21 to 23, and here Jesus is opening the eyes of His followers, the disciples, about His upcoming death.

"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 He said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You're a stumbling block to Me; for you're not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'"

I pray that we will always set our mind on God's interest and not our own.

May the Lord bless us as we pray. "Heavenly Father, we're grateful for Jesus and what He was willing to do, to die in our stead so that we might have eternal life and the forgiveness of our sins. Help us to commit ourselves to You and to Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen."

The Lord Jesus came to this world for a purpose, and even though He was the Son of God, the Father required certain things that He must do. The Lord Jesus said in John 3:14 to 16, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The Lord Jesus knew that one day He must be sacrificed on the cross. Matthew 16:21 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."

When Judas led the multitude of soldiers to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, Peter pulled out a sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Jesus told him in Matthew 26:52 to 54, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" Jesus knew that He must bear the cross, even though He could save Himself.

During His lifetime, Jesus used His time wisely serving the Father in a multitude of ways. He taught God's word, He healed the sick and raised the dead, and He called people to repentance and

righteousness. He didn't waste His life with things that don't matter. Jesus knew His time was limited. The Lord Jesus said in John 9 verse 4, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work." Now notice the Lord uses the word "we," and that means you and me, along with Him must do the works during the day.

So what does the Scripture say that we Christians must do? Well first of all, we must come to Jesus as our Lord. There's no one else who can save you. Peter said in Acts 4 verse 12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." I tell you, there is but one Lord and Savior. The Lord Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me."

Now Jesus urges in Matthew 7, verses 13 and 14, to "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Now Jesus never taught that there are many roads to heaven. He taught us to travel the one, narrow road.

Second, if we are to please God, we must believe. Hebrews 11 and verse 6 says, "And without faith it's impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He's a rewarder of those who seek Him." The Lord Jesus certainly taught this. He said in John 3:17 and 18, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; but he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Now the Lord was clear when He told some unbelievers in John 8:23 to 24, that "You are from below; and I am from above. You're of this world; and I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins."

Third, the Lord reveals that all must repent of sin. In Luke 13 verses 1 to 3, you remember it says: "That on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and He said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'" Paul, also certainly pressed the necessity of repentance to the philosophers at Mars Hill. He said in Acts 17:30 to 31, that "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he's fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Yes, repentance is a must!

Sometimes Christians allow the sins they committed before they became Christians to linger in their lives. Others flirt with sin and never turn from their wicked ways. The inspired Scripture says in Romans 8:12 to 13, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you're putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Fourth, the Lord Jesus said that we must be baptized. The Lord Jesus spoke with Nicodemus in John 3, verses 3 to 7. And Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Well Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he's old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be (must be) born again.'

Now no one can enter the kingdom of God unless that person has been born of water and the Spirit. This is a reference to baptism, and the early church fathers, Greek and Latin, understood this unanimously. The New Testament never speaks of a child of God who has not been baptized into Christ. When we're baptized into Christ, we become children of God, the Lord adds us to His church, and by faith we are saved from sin. You can see, then, why baptism is necessary.

Fifth, the Lord Jesus spoke of what worship must be. The Lord said in John 4:23 to 24, to the woman at the well in Samaria, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." We should truly worship the Lord from our hearts out of love and reverence. Hebrews 12:28 to 29 says, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and let us then offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." You see, worship must go from the inside out and must be as done as God prescribes. We shouldn't think of worship as entertainment. Worship is what we do to please and to praise God.

Sixth, we must pay attention to God's teaching. Hebrews 2 verses 1 to 3 says, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" The book of Hebrews clearly teaches that we won't escape the wrath of God, if we're disobedient to God's word. God does pay attention to us, so we too must pay much closer attention to His word. Hebrews 12:25 says, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven." God speaks seriously, and we must listen and obey Him.

Seventh, we must obey God rather than men. God is over all. And serving Him must be our first priority. You remember that the Sanhedrin Council told Peter and the apostles in Acts 5:28 to 29, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men." You see the challenge to serve men rather than God is always before us. We have laws that contradict the teaching of Scripture, and we have a culture that is no longer respectful of God. However, we must obey God first and always.

Number eight, we must help those who are weak. Luke wrote the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 and verse 35, he says "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" We all have an obligation to serve the Lord by helping others who are in need. 1 Timothy 6, verses 18 and 19 reminds us that Christians "are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

Ninth, yeah ninth, we must be careful how we speak. 1 Peter 3:10 to 11 says, "For 'Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'" Christians must consider how they talk to one another and how they speak to those who are outside the faith. God's people must not be given to complaining, and gossiping, lying, or slandering. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 to 37, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every

careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Tenth, we must face God on judgment day. 2 Corinthians 5, and verse 10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he's done, whether good or bad.” Now this is an appointment that no one can refuse or ignore. You will be at the judgment throne of Christ, no matter what. If you have enjoyed the grace of God, served Him, and obeyed the Lord out of love and faith, you'll be blessed and you'll inherit a dwelling place with the Lord forever. But if you don't know the Lord, or you've rebelled against Him, you've ignored Him, never obeyed Him, or you've drifted away from Him, you won't be able to claim His promises.

Our God is a God of grace, offering us many opportunities to come to Him in faith and love. And one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father (Philippians 2 verses 10 and 11). Why not serve the Lord now in faith because we love Him?

Let's pray together. “Heavenly Father help us all to love you with all our heart and soul, and mind and strength. To serve You and to do Your will always, to care for others and love them. And Father we're grateful for Your church, and help us Heavenly Father to be devoted, nit inly to You, but also to all the people of God. In Jesus name, Amen.”

When Jesus predicted that He had to go to Jerusalem and die, Peter objected. Well sometimes we're like Peter and prone to say, "God forbid it, Lord!" Some say, “God wants us to be happy.” Yes, He does; but God doesn't want us happy in sin. He wants us to pursue righteousness and godliness, which brings about lasting joy and peace. When people refuse to follow the Lord's will, it ends badly. The happiness that they once had vanishes. Proverbs 23:31 to 32 says, “Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.”

When you follow the Lord, you find blessing. Galatians 6:7 to 8 says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Now eternal life is filled with lasting love, joy, peace, and blessings beyond our imagination. So turn to the Lord

The Lord Jesus said in John 3 and verse 7, that “You must be born again.” 1 Peter 1:22 says that we purify our souls by obeying the truth, and verse 23 says that truth is found in the imperishable seed of the word of God. Scripture teaches us to believe, to love, to repent of sin, to confess the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Galatians 3:26 to 27 says, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Being baptized is an act of faith in the working of God.