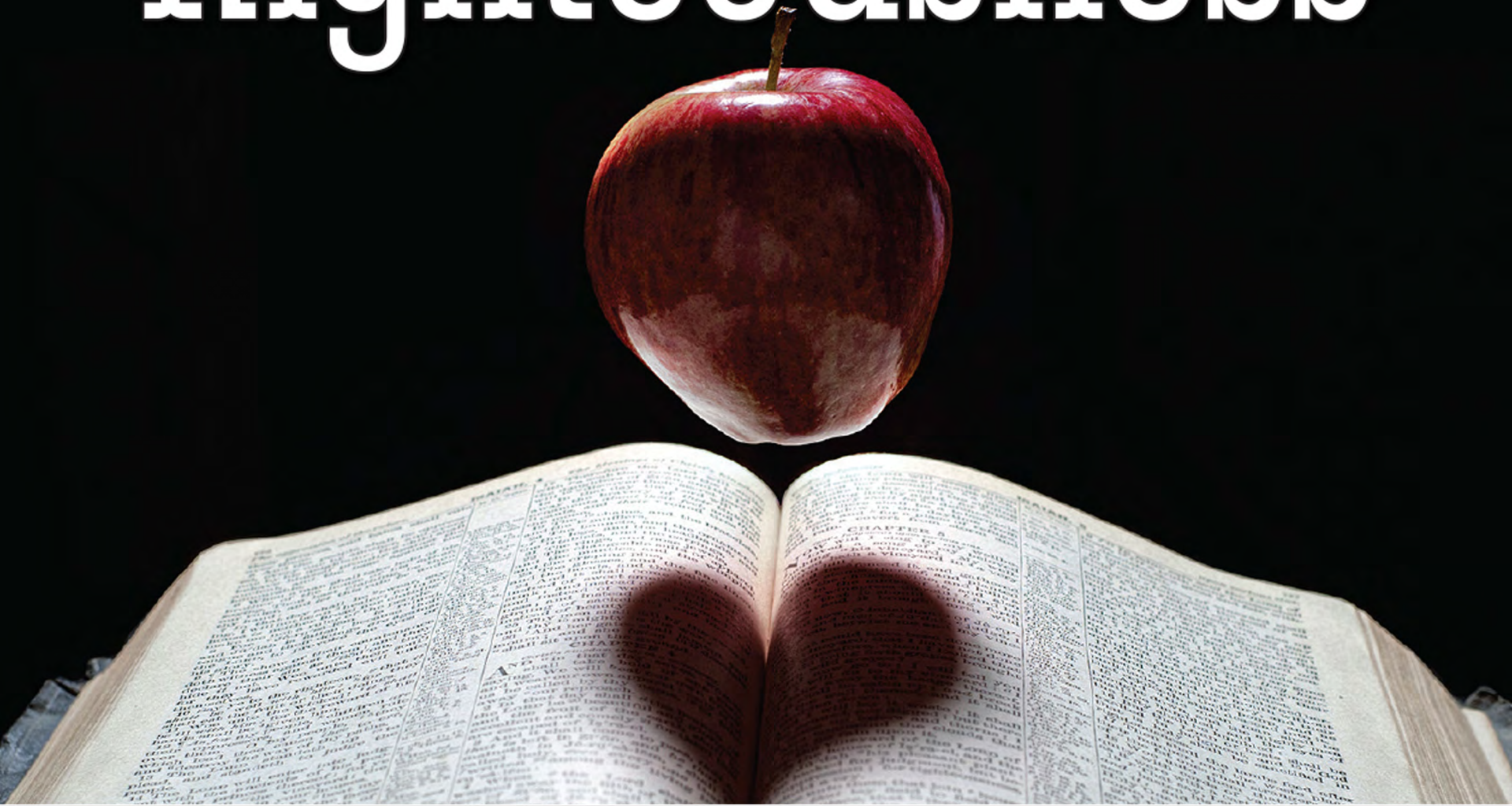


Hungering *for* Righteousness



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SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

OCTOBER 3 – IMPOVERISHED IN SPIRIT

The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What does it mean to be “poor in spirit,” and why is such a condition is blessed of God? A person poor in spirit is a person who knows he needs God.

OCTOBER 10 – MOURNING OVER SIN

When Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,” He was not speaking of physical death but something far worse, the separation from God that comes from sin. Sin brings death, but Christ brings hope.

OCTOBER 17 – HUNGERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” There is a significant difference between being spiritually empty and spiritually filled with God’s blessing.

OCTOBER 24 – THE BEAUTY OF FORGIVENESS

The person who realizes he is in sin and the bitterness of being lost seeks for mercy. The one who receives that gracious mercy at that point begins to understand the beauty of forgiveness and the joy of reconciliation with God.

OCTOBER 31 – THE RIGHTEOUS LIFE

The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” God forgave us and delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have the forgiveness of sins.

Impoverished in Spirit

I know something inherently true about every person. What is that truth? You desperately need the Lord Jesus in your life. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. How we think of God makes all the difference in the world. If we love Him and humble ourselves before God, God will bless us richly; but if we fail to give Him our respect and our obedience, we'll find the blessed life disappear. The more we get away from God, the more the blessings of God get away from us. That's why we continually go to the Word of God, the Bible, to find the truth of God and the blessing of God. You won't find it anywhere else. God's way is the right way, the blessed way, and the true way.

Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world in his day. God allowed him to have this power in order to punish Israel for her sins. Three times Nebuchadnezzar's army entered Jerusalem, and the third time completely destroyed the city, including the temple. Nebuchadnezzar's home was the great city of Babylon, whose hanging gardens were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Chapter four of the book of Daniel tells how Nebuchadnezzar became proud and said, "Is not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" Because he forgot God was the true ruler of the world, God humbled him by making him like a beast of the field for seven periods of time. He ate grass like cattle, and his hair and nails grew long. Afterwards Nebuchadnezzar praised and honored the Most High God. He learned his need for God the hard way.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew and contains the words of Jesus Himself as He begins His sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:1-6.

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

That's the words of Jesus our Lord.

Let's pray. "Father, we're thankful that You have given us Your word, to know the things that we can do to be a blessing, to be blessed by You, and to bless other people. And Father, we pray that You will help us always to do Your will. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to hear Jesus speak in person? In 2006 sweet Jackie and I visited the site near the Sea of Galilee where Jesus supposedly delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The crowds gathered to the mountain to hear Him speak. They hung on every word. The people knew about Jesus' power to heal, His godly teaching and kind ways. Matthew 4:23-25 says, "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, paralytics, and he healed them all. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan." They wanted to hear what the Master had to say—I hope you have that kind of hunger for the Word of God.

How would you begin your signature sermon? The beginning statement of a sermon is usually what catches people's attention. Jesus made a surprising and captivating comment about being poor in spirit. He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). He started His sermon talking about people who are "poor in spirit." He started there because He knew how vital being "poor in spirit" was to our relationship with Him and with the Father. If we're not "poor in spirit," we may never have room for God in our hearts. The blessed person not only has room for God; the blessed person cannot live without God!

What does it mean to be blessed? The word "blessed" means more than merely being "happy." Happiness is merely an emotion, often dependent upon outward circumstances. To be blessed here refers to the ultimate well-being of a person who has lasting spiritual joy arising from his relationship with God. The beatitudes are not simple statements, they are exclamations! They are saying these are the kinds of people that God sees as having the ultimate in well-being.

I'm reminded of Habakkuk, a prophet in the Old Testament, who lived at a very difficult time. Habakkuk 3:17-19 says, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail, And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places." A relationship with God is a wonderful and fulfilling blessing, because it assures us of an eternal home, even when our world here falls apart.

The Lord Jesus, before His death, gave some assurance to the apostles. Jesus knew that He would be crucified and they of course sorrowed over that, but the Lord said, "Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you" (John 16:22). In Christ, no one can take away our joy or our hope. In Christ we have forgiveness, the right to pray, eternal life, and an inheritance in heaven. No one can take this away! We may have all kinds of change in this world, but nothing can take all the joys that Christ gives. If you're counting on this world to bless you, remember this world is fickle and temporal, but Christ is eternal.

We don't see things the way that God sees them. The people we think are blessed aren't necessarily the ones God says are blessed. God said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The world values riches, honors, fame, intelligence, appearance, and strength. These beatitudes emphasize an inward disposition, that is the attitudes of God, not the outward circumstances, but the inward. God has different values than we do. Jeremiah 10:23-24 says: "Thus says the LORD, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD." Men shouldn't boast over their human wisdom, power, or wealth. These things don't make a man blessed in God's eyes. If you wish to boast about something, boast that you know and understand the Lord God of heaven, who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth. Those things are truly valuable.

When God calls someone blessed, he is blessed indeed! God never lies but calls things as they truly are! If anyone else blesses you, the blessing lasts for a time, but God's blessings last for a lifetime and beyond. God's blessings are both physical and spiritual. He meets our physical needs for food, water, clothing, and shelter; but He also meets our spiritual needs. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

In Christ we have every spiritual blessing that we could ever hope for. We have access to the Father, peace, joy, assurance, and love. In Christ we have forgiveness. Romans 4:7-8 says, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." Forgiveness through the blood of Christ opens the door to an eternal fellowship with God on earth and in heaven. That is a truly blessed state, a truly blessed condition!

The Lord said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." There are two words for poor in the New Testament. First, there are the poor who are needy and must work from day to day to earn a living. They have food and clothes enough to survive but very little if anything else. Second, there are the destitute beggars, living in absolute poverty—the person who has nothing at all and is desperate. It's this second word that

is used here in the poor in spirit; and that's what makes this so surprising! The blessed person is the one who "in spirit" has nothing at all. He has nothing and is utterly dependent upon God.

The poor in spirit are not the same as the "poor-spirited," who are dejected or self-pitying creatures who go about in fear or in indifference. No, this is speaking of people who realize their spiritual poverty without God. They realize they have a great need and dependence upon God. Since they know their condition, they are humble and yearn for God's help. They put their whole trust in God. They realize that they owe their existence and their salvation to God. They realize that on their own without God they're lost in sin and have no hope. They know that they cannot earn their salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." A person poor in spirit will become wholly dependent upon God—and God means everything to him! We must realize that we need God's help and strength; and only God can give us eternal life. We must put our trust in Him.

A person that's poor in spirit doesn't invent his own religion and doesn't invent his own way to be saved. A person poor in spirit is willing to listen and do what God says and do it God's way. He doesn't try to correct God or change God's laws or God's morals. He doesn't propose his own solutions to the problems of sin or question God's wisdom and justice. He loves God and is willing to follow the Lord and learn from Him.

Because a person "poor in spirit" realizes His need for Jesus to be His Savior, he also regards Jesus as His Lord! He belongs to the Lord and takes what God says seriously. God said, "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). Does the Word of God make you tremble? It should. God's Word will one day determine your eternal destiny. God is the eternal authority, and one day you'll have to give an account for your life to Him.

False religions think they can make their own rules and decide their own morals, but God is the only One who can make moral laws. The Pharisees lived by their own human traditions and judged others for not keeping their rules. They would even judge Jesus for not keeping their traditions! They were really just deceiving themselves. The Lord Jesus said, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them [that is, the Pharisees] alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:13-14).

A proud person doesn't think he needs God's wisdom but imagines God should be honored just to have him around. You remember the Lord Jesus "told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus [some versions say prayed to himself, and he said]: 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'" But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but he beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted'" (Luke 18:9-14). God cannot use a man who's so full of himself, because such a man has no room for God!

The Bible also tells of an arrogant church that didn't know that it needed the Lord. The Lord Jesus sent this message to the church in Laodicea: "I know your works: that you're neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I am rich, I've prospered, and I need nothing,' not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door

and knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation. 3:15-20).

These things matter because we all stand in need for God. Are you poor in spirit? Do you need God? Do you wish to enter the kingdom of God?

Let's pray together. "O, Father, help us to love You and to praise You, and to give You the glory in our lives, knowing that we have a great need for You every day. And Father we pray that our love and our service will show how much we regard You, and know what You have done for us. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

Blessed is the person who knows he needs God and puts his trust in God, for only by lovingly denying himself can he take up a cross to follow the Lord. Obeying God is a demonstration of our faith and love. James said a man shows his faith by his works. The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23-24). Humble yourself before God to enter the kingdom of heaven.

To become a Christian, we must die to ourselves, so we may live for Christ! Trust in the Lord with all your heart, remove the sin in repentance, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ by being immersed in water. Baptism is when our old man of sin dies and we're born again to walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-4 says, "Do you not know that all of us who've been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Start a new life in Christ today by trusting in Christ and obeying the Lord.

Get involved in the church. When you're baptized, the Lord saves you and adds you to His church (Acts 2:41 and 47). Keep your connection with God and with His people by regularly worshiping at church. You need the Lord and His people to help you stay faithful and to reach heaven. You can do nothing more important today than getting right and staying right with the Lord Jesus.

So focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. There's probably a church of Christ near you. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one.

Mourning Over Sin

Since sin is real and can cost you your soul, how do you react to the guilt of your sins? Some ignore the consequences of sin and actually celebrate evil. What does God say? We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Bible is an entirely practical book, dealing with our everyday lives and the attitudes of our hearts. The Lord Jesus never speaks needlessly; we must know how to keep our hearts and lives within the Father's will. The difference between following the Lord and not following the Lord is a difference between eternal life and eternal destruction. We must take God and our sins seriously.

The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Most people think of this passage when they have lost a loved one; but it may not be referring to this, but to mourning over sin. Certainly the loss of a loved one hurts deeply and needs comforting; but the Lord is here speaking about something worse than death. You can suffer death and still have hope of eternal life with the Lord in heaven. The apostle Paul referred to his potential death at the hands of Caesar that he said he had "the desire to depart and to be with Christ, for that is very much better" (Philippians 1:23). Though we grieve for the loss of a loved one, we can celebrate when a faithful Christian is with the Lord.

If, however, a person refuses to believe, refuses to repent of sin, or refuses to obey the Lord, he'll face eternity without the Lord and without His blessing. In such cases we not only mourn our loss over a loved one, we also mourn for the fate of his soul. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

Our reading today comes from the book of James 4:7-10. James is here talking about a group of people who unfortunately had made themselves friends of the world, and became a little arrogant about it. So he says to them:

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Let's pray together. "O, Father, help us always to put our focus upon You, to turn away from evil, to love You and to serve You, and to do Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen."

In every age people have forgotten God and rejoiced over wicked ways, ignoring the consequences of their sins. Some have hardened their hearts for so long they've forgotten the guilt, shame, and the harm that sin produces. Don't imagine that our culture was the first to depart from the ways of God.

Before the flood found in the book of Genesis, it says, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. So the LORD was sorry that He had made mankind on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:5-6). Humanity had indeed corrupted its way on the earth with violence, so God determined to destroy them and had Noah to build an ark.

After the flood, God told Noah and his sons, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Instead, the people gathered at Shinar and decided to defy God. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we'll be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). At that time God

confused their language, so that they couldn't understand each other and scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

God used Moses to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt, to give them a law, and establish them as a holy nation. As the centuries passed, the people forgot God and His laws. They began serving other gods. The prophet Jeremiah said: "Thus says the LORD, 'What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me And walked after emptiness and became empty?'" (Jeremiah 2:5). We wonder about why people who call themselves Christian today have wandered far from God for an empty way of life. Jeremiah 2:11-13 says, "'My people have changed their glory, For that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate,' declares the LORD. 'For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.'"

In parts of ancient Israel, there were few springs and creeks, so the people dug cisterns in strategic places to catch the rainwater during the rainy seasons. They would hollow out a place in the ground and seal it on the inside with a kind of plaster; but if there was even the slightest of earthquakes, or the plaster might crack, then the water would slowly seep out. An empty cistern was useless.

Our society has forgotten God and gone our own ways. We've forgotten God's morals and deliberately mocked God with our confused and chaotic morality. Editing God's ways and morals to suit ourselves is foolish beyond measure. When we imagine that we're wiser than God, we'll start drinking unclean water from a broken cistern.

Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet, because of the sins of the people. He said in Jeremiah 9:1-3, "'Oh that my head were waters, And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night, For the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the desert, A wayfarers' lodging place; That I might leave my people, And go from them! For all of them are adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men. They bend their tongue like their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land; For they proceed from evil to evil, And do not know Me,' declares the LORD." Jeremiah prophesied and preached for forty years to Judah, but they didn't listen to God's words that came through him. Jeremiah said, "But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock has been taken captive" (Jeremiah 13:17). Sinful desires can not only enslave us, they can also harden our hearts and drain out our faith and love for God. Psalm 119:136 says, "My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law."

The New Testament also speaks of the blessing when people mourn over sin. Do you remember the parable of Jesus about the Pharisee and the tax-collector in Luke 18? The self-righteous Pharisee who prayed to himself rather than to God did not see his need for God, but the humble tax-collector knew that he needed God's forgiveness. The Lord Jesus said, "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). God knows our hearts and He knows whether we have a heart that mourns our sin and hungers for righteousness.

Peter was a man who often spoke and acted before he thought, but He loved the Lord and wanted to do right. That describes many of us. The Lord Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times in the night before He was crucified. Luke 22:55-62 tells what happened: "After they had kindled a fire in

the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, 'This man was with Him too.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I don't know Him.' A little later, another saw him and said, 'You're one of them too!' But Peter said, 'Man, I'm not!' And after about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, 'Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.' But Peter said, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about.' And immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and he wept bitterly." Have you ever wept over your sins?

Some folks, instead of weeping, become indignant and act like sin doesn't really matter. Paul dealt with this in the church at Corinth. He said, "It's actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You've become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who's done this deed would be removed from your midst" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). They ignored the situation, they tolerated it, and even boasted about an incestuous sin that the pagans wouldn't even allow. Paul acted and he judged the man in the presence of the church. He wouldn't allow the church at Corinth to have fellowship with sexually immoral people. This apparently made the Corinthians stop and think about what they were doing. They needed to repent of tolerating sin.

Paul wrote, "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I don't regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter" (2 Corinthians 7:8-11). When people remain unwilling to judge others' sins, even though they don't commit it themselves, they're siding with wickedness not with God.

We tend to celebrate today's sinful pleasures and forget what the Lord Jesus said. We also forget the Lord Jesus is coming again to judge us all. One day the Lord will call us to give an account of our lives, and no one will be celebrating sin on that day. We should be like Moses. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." What matters to you? Do you count the fleeting pleasures of sin more valuable than a home in heaven?

There is a Day of Judgment coming, when the Lord Jesus will either reward or punish us according to the deeds that we've done in the body. Christians face a lot of animosity from those who do not know God or believe His teaching. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 says to faithful Christians, "and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."

What should we do? James 4:7-10 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you." Let's look into our hearts and consider our souls. Let's be done with sin and draw near to God. Yes, we should mourn our sin; but God will comfort us.

Why does this matter? Remember the Lord's words. The Lord Jesus said, "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30). Being in sin is worse than losing an eye or hand, and it's even worse than physical death. You can die physically and still go to heaven; but you can't cherish sin and refuse to repent and enjoy eternal life. Only those who turn from sin and walk in the light with the Lord can enter heaven. Revelation 14:13 says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" I can find no such promise for those who are lost in sin. We can't hold fast to our sins and presume that we are still in the grace of God. We're in great spiritual danger without God. So let's turn our hearts toward Him, repent of our sins, and draw close to Him.

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father, help us to love You with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, to turn away from the things that are sinful and evil, and turn to You. So that we may do Your will and please You, and may live with You forever. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." God doesn't want to leave us in mourning for sin and not give us any hope of salvation. He wants to comfort us, and He does this by giving us hope and by saving us from sin. Though our sinful ways plague us, we have hope in the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us. The Lord God told Solomon, "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). You can find healing and comfort from God when you humble yourself, pray, seek the face of God, and turn from your wicked ways.

We need to follow the Lord Jesus to do His will and do it His way. There's no path to heaven and righteousness except the Lord's way. Don't delight in the thinking or the practices of the world, but turn your heart toward God and take up your cross to follow Jesus.

To be right with God, place your trust in the Lord Jesus as God's Son and listen to His word. Turn from evils of sin and renounce them. Determine to live righteous lives and confess Jesus Christ before others. Be baptized into Christ; that's how God causes you to become united with Christ, to be born again, and to be freed from sin (Romans 6:3-7). God washes you of your sins when you're baptized, immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16). What are you waiting for? Turn to God in faith and fulfill His desire for you to know the truth and to be saved. There's no better day than today.

Hungering for Righteousness

I'm sure at some point in your life you've been really hungry, but we're not talking about physical food. What we're talking about is hungering for righteousness. God's Word gives us the wisdom to feed the hunger of the soul and quench our thirst for an eternal life. That's why we search the Scriptures for God's truth and His promises.

In the last few weeks, we've been seeing the blessedness that comes from being poor in spirit and wholly dependent upon God; we've also seen blessedness that comes from taking an honest look at our sins and mourning over them. Today, our focus is on Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (or filled)." We all know what it is to be hungry and what it is to be thirsty, and we also know what it is to be full. The hunger and thirst of this passage, however, is not the normal hunger and thirst for food and water but the intense hunger and thirst of a person who must have food and water to survive. Such desperate hunger and thirst for righteousness will cause a person to pursue it, that he has to have it. In Christ one can find the filling satisfaction that they must have.

How hungry and how thirsty are you to be right with God? If you truly know your need for God and you truly mourn over your sins, then you'll realize the importance of finding the fulfillment that comes from being forgiven of those sins and being right with God. A lost person in sin is empty and broken, while a saved and faithful person is filled. You have a hole in your soul that only God can fill. You have a nagging in your conscience that cannot be satisfied until you get right with the Lord, and you find that forgiveness that you seek. Are you hungering and thirsting for the righteousness that only comes through the blood of Jesus Christ?

Our reading today comes from Philippians 3:7-11. Here the Apostle Paul is describing leaving his old way of life in Judaism, and becoming a Christian.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful for all of the good that You've done for us, for the love and the joy that we've been able to have because of Your Son Jesus. And Father that we can one day go and be with You forever and ever. Father help us always to do You will. In Jesus' name, Amen."

There's a big difference between being hungry and being filled physically and spiritually. Just as there comes a time when you must eat to survive, so there's a time when you must come to the Lord to survive spiritually. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). The apostle Peter clearly said about Jesus, "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" (Acts 4:12). People seek spiritual fulfillment in many places, but there's only one that can fill your soul with the promises of God.

The Devil uses sin and broken lives to keep us empty. Many don't know their sins and their focus on the world is what makes them empty. Jeremiah spoke of the empty people among the idolaters of his day, but the same is true of people who pushed God out of their lives today. Jeremiah 2:13 says, "For My people have committed two evils: They've forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves

cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.” To survive physically we must have an adequate supply of clean water, and to survive spiritually we must have a right relationship with God.

In our hurried world today, people have forsaken God for their own busy lives that have little room for all the joy and blessing that comes from serving God. First John 2:15-17 warns, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that’s in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

Perhaps you’ve seen what I’ve seen in people. The person who is spiritually and emotionally broken wishes to be made whole and healed. The person enslaved by sin longs to be free from the hold that sin has on him. The person who knows he’s lost in sin wishes he could be righteous. The person filled with regret wishes he could make things right. The person who has a defiled conscience wishes that he could once again respect himself. The person who feels dirty with sin longs to be pure and clean. The guilty soul hungers for forgiveness.

The person who is filled with conflict longs for peace. The person who’s unloved hungers for love. The confused person thirsts to know the truth. The person who has no faith wishes that he could trust in the Lord. The lost person who has no hope hungers for the hope that can fill his soul. The lost person who only sees judgment longs for the mercy that opens the doors of heaven.

Righteousness means loving God with all your heart and allowing God to rule in your heart. It means loving the things that God loves and avoiding the things that offend God. It’s all about Jesus Christ being your Savior and your Lord. You long for His mercy, but you will also have to respect His being your Lord and Master. It’s all about walking with God. We won’t find purpose, love, rest, joy, peace, or hope, until we find it in the Lord Jesus Christ. You will remain hungry until you taste and see that the Lord is good.

The apostle Paul realized that his heritage wouldn’t give him what the Lord Jesus could give him. He wanted more than what he had as a Jew and as a Pharisee. He wanted to “be found in Him (that is, in Christ), not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9). Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it’s 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 gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Paul knew that God’s grace came as a gift that he couldn’t earn. He knew the Law of Moses couldn’t give him salvation. He said, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law (speaking of the Law of Moses), then Christ died needlessly” (Galatians 2:2). He explained, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him (that is, Jesus) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). We’re not saved by the blood of bulls and goats but by the blood of Jesus Christ. We’re now under the new covenant of Christ not the old covenant given at Mount Sinai.

Have you considered how deeply God hungers and thirsts for people to become righteous? If you want people you love to be saved, and I know you do, God does even more so. Remember the words of Jesus, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son (others just say only Son), that whoever believes in Him shall not perish (or should 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” (John 3:16-17). God loves every person, every man, every woman, every boy, and every girl.

In 1 Timothy 2:3-4 the Bible says, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God wants everyone to be saved and everyone to know the truth of the gospel that's found in His Word. God has never wanted people to lose their souls; He wants them instead to repent and to live righteously. Ezekiel 18:31-32 says, "'Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the Lord GOD. 'Therefore, repent and live.'"

Have you considered how deeply the Lord Jesus wants you to be righteous and to be saved? In Matthew 23 Jesus pronounced several woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites and describing their sinful behavior. Yet He says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" in Matthew 23:37-38). His heart was broken that the religious leaders of his day refused to believe and refused to leave their hypocrisy.

John wrote words of encouragement: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). Do you know what Jesus is doing in heaven right now? He's serving as an advocate, defending you to the Father, even though you've sinned as a Christian. He's at God's right hand interceding on your behalf (Romans 8:34).

Even when the lukewarm and offensive church at Laodicea thought they were rich and needed nothing, Jesus was concerned about winning them back. The Lord Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; and if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I'll come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). The Lord wants to have a relationship again, even with people who have moved away from Him. He never quit loving you, even if you've quit loving Him.

Did you know that even the Holy Spirit is moved by whether we live righteously or live in sin? Ephesians 4:30 says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Yes, the Holy Spirit grieves when we sin. We think of how sin affects us and we forget how it affects the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Sin offends God; it transgresses God's law; it's an abomination to God; it causes us to be separated from God spiritually. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not short, That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so 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."

In God's eyes, sin brings spiritual death. Romans 6:23 says, "the wages of sin is death", and that hasn't changed. Culture may lead you to think that sin doesn't matter to God, but it does. Don't take sin lightly; God doesn't. Don't act like God won't care; He does. Don't imagine God will hold others responsible for sin but will overlook yours, He won't. God is no respecter of persons and will hold everyone responsible for his sins. If your sins are not washed away by the blood of Jesus, you will bear the guilt and the punishment for your sins. We have no other hope than Jesus Christ.

This fact ought to make us hunger for God's grace that saves and the transforming of our lives to prove what the will of God truly is, "that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). We can't be saved apart from God's grace. You can't earn grace, and God doesn't owe it to you. Grace is God's gift that frees you from sin and punishment, but that's not all that it does. God's grace "instructs us to deny worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly" (Titus 2:12). Grace opens the door to changing our lives,

freeing us from an old man of sin destined to be punished and leading us to a new life that lives in love like Christ lived.

This newness of life, the new birth, means the old man of sin is dead, and you are born again. You were dead in sin, now you're dead to sin and alive in Christ. If that's so, God expects you to live as a person born again who has repented and intends to stay free from sin. We must never take the grace of God for granted, as if it were something trivial. Jesus paid a great price, His precious blood. Only His blood can wash us clean (Revelation 7:14). He does this when we unite with Him in His death and resurrection, and that takes place in baptism (Romans 6:3-7).

Do you want to be free from sin? Do you want a clean conscience? Would you like to respect yourself again? The grace of God can lead you to a pure heart and a life that God intended for you. So place your trust in the Lord, turn from your sin, and be baptized into Christ. God never wanted you to hate yourself when you look in the mirror. His way will give you rest for your soul and give you promise in the life to come. I can't imagine living one day, one hour, or even one minute without the grace, love, and promises of God. Do you hunger for a close, loving relationship with God?

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father, help us always to come to You, and to draw near to You, and to submit ourselves to Your will. And we pray that our love will grow deeper as the days go by. In Jesus' name, we pray."

When Jesus passed through Samaria, he sent the disciples into town to get Him some food, but the events of that day led to something more important to Jesus than a meal. When the disciples returned with food, there also came men from the town to hear what Jesus had to say. Jesus refused to eat at that time and explained, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). Jesus' focus was on doing the Father's will and teaching the people. Nothing else was as important. The Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:33 to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." What are you seeking? Paul urges us to "pursue righteousness" (2 Timothy 2:22). What are you pursuing?

There's only one way to be right with God, and that takes being justified by the blood of Jesus Christ. To be justified means that God regards us as innocent of sin. Romans 5:8-9 says that "God demonstrates His own love towards 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." We're saved by grace through faith when we put our trust in Christ, turn from sin in repentance, confess His name, and are baptized into Christ. Romans 6:3-7 says that in baptism we have newness of life, we're crucified with Christ, and we're freed from sin. Now baptism is an act of faith in the working of God (Colossians 2:12), and it results in being made alive in Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Consider being baptized into Christ today? If you hunger for righteousness, don't put off responding.

The Beauty of Forgiveness

When we realize that we're lost spiritually, we seek for mercy. God's gracious mercy helps us understand the beauty of forgiveness. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We search God's Word, because it gives us a glimpse into the heart of the One who can save us and give us eternal life. We want to please Him and follow His instructions out of love for Him. We're not interested in pursuing our own agenda but in pursuing God's will.

Seeing the beauty of forgiveness, David said, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!" (Psalm 32:1-2).

Someone has well noted that the beauty of grace and forgiveness is greatest when we realize the bitter misery and consequences of our sin. We love God most for His great sacrifice in the giving of Jesus upon the cross for our sins. "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" (1 Peter 3:18).

Forgiveness is not forgetting but "forgetting against." When God forgives us, He no longer counts our sins against us (2 Corinthians 5:19). He no longer holds sin against us so that we might be reconciled to Him (2 Corinthians 5:20). Humans can't undo their past sins, but God can forget them against us so that we're no longer guilty or in sin. Psalm 85:2-3 says of God: "You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger." Because Jesus bore the punishment for our sins, God no longer counts them against us.

Our reading today comes from 1 Timothy 1:12-16. Paul is talking about what Christ Jesus had done for Him and his conversion and salvation.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It's a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

Oh, what a wonderful example of the great gracious wonderful love of God and His mercy.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful that through Your love and Your grace and mercy, You can save each of us even though we too have been sinners. We're thankful for Your love and for all of the promises we have through Jesus. Father, help us always to do Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins." For that reason Psalm 130:3-4 says, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared." Without the grace and forgiveness of God, we would all be lost and doomed for eternal punishment. Without God's grace we have no hope.

But Micah 7:18-19 reveals the nature of God: "Who is a God like You, who pardons our iniquity, And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He doesn't retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities

under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea.” Because of His great love and grace, God has compassion on us and disposes of our iniquities and sins, so they are no longer on His mind.

Forgiveness is indeed a beautiful gesture on God's part. David wrote, “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:8-13). I'm deeply grateful for the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10) who can help us in times of temptation and can forgive us when we sin against Him. What does forgiveness do?

First, forgiveness frees one from the bondage of sin. John 8:34 says, “everyone who sins is a slave to sin”; but verse 36 says, “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” Romans 6:17-18 reminds us, “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness.” God's Word gives us the way to freedom from sin. Earlier in the chapter we learn about that form of teaching that frees. Romans 6:3-7 says that our baptism into Christ means that “our old self was crucified with him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who died is freed from sin.”

Second, forgiveness releases one from the debt or penalty that's incurred by sin. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Sin separates us from God, yes, and without forgiveness we'll remain separated from God eternally. Forgiveness releases one from the guilt, in spite of what one may deserve. Forgiveness shouldn't be confused with injustice, as when a guilty person escapes punishment through lies or bribes. Forgiveness is a pardon; the sin was real but now no longer matters because Jesus bore the punishment for our sins on the cross.

Third, forgiveness creates the opportunity for a new beginning. Second Corinthians 5:17 says “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (a new creature); the old has (passed away, it's) gone, and the new has come!” Forgiveness means God has cleared out the old record of sin, and God looked upon us as if we had never sinned. His past, your past, my past, no longer matters to God, for we have died to sin and have undergone a new birth in Christ. With the past buried by the love of God, God and man can now start a new covenant relationship, brought about by the blood of Jesus. This new birth (John 3:3-7) allows a person to start over with God. One can think, act and speak like Christ.

Fourth, forgiveness is the means by which God reconciles the world to Himself. Reconciliation involves repairing a division caused by conflict between two parties. Sin causes hostility, anger between God and man. But reconciliation restores the favor, and a loving relationship, between God and us. Second Corinthians 5:19 says “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.” Reconciliation is the bringing back into friendship a world that was alienated by sin.

Sin completely separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2), so that God no longer even hears our prayers. Forgiveness restores the relationship by removing the sin that causes the separation. When God forgives our sins, we can once again approach God through Christ. Forgiveness is really better than merely forgetting, for by forgiving us God demonstrates His love to us (Romans 5:6-8) by sending Jesus to die for us. We at that time were powerless, ungodly, and sinful. But His love for us calls us to love Him as well. What this does is it heals the broken relationship and causes it to be one of love and stronger than ever. The cross reaches out to us in love and “compels us” to love Him and to serve Him. “And he died for all that

those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Forgiveness is not an approval of the sin that people commit. Forgiveness implies a wrong has been done, and God never approves of sin. Forgiveness does not excuse what people do. Sin is not a trivial thing, but cost the Lord Jesus His life. Forgiveness is not justifying what they did. Forgiveness doesn't turn a sinful act into a righteous one. Forgiveness is not denying what they did; forgiveness honestly exposes and recognizes sin for what it is. Forgiveness is not turning a blind eye or acting like something never happened; nor is it merely forgetting about something so serious. Forgiveness doesn't refuse to take what is immoral and what is wrong, to take it seriously. Forgiveness doesn't pretend sin is harmless; sin is wrong because of its destructive and harmful nature. Sin always causes somebody to get hurt, and every sin is an offense to God.

God's forgiveness of our sins is a great gift of love and grace. God is not naïve but fully aware of the evil that has been done; nothing escapes His notice. Because He's aware of the harmful nature of our sins, we marvel at His gracious love to be willing to forgive. When God forgives, He chooses to keep no record of wrongs. He removes our sins and releases us from the guilt. When He forgives, He refuses to punish us for those forgiven sins. Once forgiven, God doesn't endlessly remind us of what we did. He doesn't any longer count those forgiven sins against us. Since God is merciful, He doesn't give us what we deserve. He sees us for what we have become, and not for what we did in the past.

Forgiveness is an act of the heart and will. Just as God chose to give up Jesus to the cross because He loved us, God chooses to accept the atoning sacrifice of Jesus for our sins because He loves us. Jesus willingly and lovingly chose the path to the cross to bear our sins in His body, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds we are healed of sin (1 Peter 2:24). Even though we had grievously sinned against God, God has had compassion on those who fear Him in Christ. He knows we are weak and helpless and in need of saving. Forgiveness opens the door to our salvation.

God is also forgiving for His own sake. Think about this; God said, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25). Sin creates a separation and hostility between the sinner and God. Forgiveness ends that bitterness, and anger, and hatred over some past offense. Psalm 103:9 says God "will not always strive (or fight) with us, nor will He keep His anger forever." God would rather forgive those who come to Him humbly, lovingly, and penitently than remain angry forever.

The point of God's forgiveness is reconciliation. He wants to have a loving relationship with you and me. Through Christ He is reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). This gracious forgiveness leads us to change our ways. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Ephesians 4:30-31 says to us, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Because we are forgiven by God's grace, we don't let sin reign in our lives. Because we are forgiven, we replace the old ways of sin with a life of good deeds that honors the Lord. Because we are forgiven, we aren't afraid to lead other people to God's forgiveness.

With confidence Christians can rejoice in the grace and the forgiveness of God. They can say, "By God's grace I'm washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. I'm forgiven and can have a clear conscience. I'm once again a friend with God. The old man of sin has died. I'm born again into God's family with newness of life. I pray to my Father with confidence, knowing that He will do more than I ask or think. I'm blessed with the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. I'm a fellow citizen with the saints in the kingdom of heaven. I'm a member of the

body of Christ with a purpose and function. I have all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. Jesus has prepared for me a permanent dwelling place in Heaven with my Father, where He will show me the "immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus."

Occasionally someone asks, "Did God really forgive my sins?" I answer yes. You can find His promise in the Word of God, and God keeps His promises. God said, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12). You can count on the promises of God, because God is faithful. God was able to forgive those who crucified Christ on the day of Pentecost when they repented and were baptized (Acts 2:38); God was able to show grace and wash the sinners of the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and God was able to wash away the sins of the apostle Paul who was at one time the foremost of sinners, the chief of sinners, but he was baptized and his sins were washed away (Acts 22:16). So we can have confidence that He's able to save us as well.

Recall 1 Timothy 1:15-16. "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though I formerly was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly and in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost (the chief), Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." God can forgive you too, if you will humbly obey Him.

Let's pray. "Father, we're thankful that Your grace is greater than our sins as we approach You humbly and lovingly, and are willing to be obedient to Your will. Father help us always and give us strength. In Jesus' name, Amen"

David said, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You" (Psalm 86:5). God will forgive if we turn our hearts to Him. Isaiah 55:7 says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon."

We can call upon God like David did in Psalm 51:2; "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin." God is gracious and wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. God doesn't want anybody to be lost. Sadly, some won't accept God's provision to save us and instead choose to remain accountable for their sin.

God has called us through the gospel, which has God's power to save (Romans 1:16). God calls us to respond to His message. The gospel is the good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. When we place our faith in Christ, turn from evil to good, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and are baptized into Christ, God Himself washes away our sins and forgives us. When by faith we're clothed with Christ in baptism, we become children of God (Galatians 3:26-27) and we're born again (John 3:5). In baptism God redeems us and reconciles us to Himself. When we're baptized, God adds us to His kingdom, the church. Oh, I hope and pray that you aren't saying no to God. I hope you're saying yes to Him, that you want and need to become a Christian.

The Righteous Life

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is straight that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” Which way are you going? We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We look to God with a hunger and thirst for righteousness. The Scriptures teach us how to please God and to live in a right relationship with Him. We want nothing less than to love God with all our heart and soul. God has promised to satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness, if we turn from evil and seek His face.

The apostle Paul asked a serious question, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2). The grace that forgives our sins is the marvelous gift of God. Faith in God, repentance of sin, and baptism lead to freedom from sin. When we repent, we die in our hearts to sin. We no longer determine to live in sin but to follow the Lord Jesus. Grace and repentance work hand in hand. Grace forgives at baptism, but repentance changes the heart toward righteousness and away from sin.

Titus 2:11-14 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” Grace teaches us to live for the Lord and to turn away from evil. Allowing God's love and grace to work in our hearts and lives yields the fruit of righteousness.

Our reading comes from the Second Epistle of Peter 1:5-11. Here we have the Word of God that gives us great and precious promises and gives us all that we need for life and Godliness. This requires faith, but it requires more than faith. So let's read.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

Oh, what a wonderful promise.

Let's pray together. “Father, we are so grateful for Your precious promises, help us to grow and increase in all of these qualities in our lives, so that we may please You, and may love You more and more as days go by. Help us Heavenly Father in every way to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Righteousness generally means adherence to what is required according to God's teaching and moral standards. Sadly some have sought to establish their own righteousness, since they didn't know about God's righteousness and didn't subject themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). The Pharisees adopted many humanly conceived traditions that caused them to annul God's own commandments, rendering their pursuit of 'their own righteousness' futile (Matthew 15:3-14).

Today people still think of themselves as being righteous, though they permit and even celebrate what God calls sin in their lives. Many churches today suggest that we come as we are and leave the same way.

Many ignore or forget the need to repent (Luke 13:3, and Acts 17:30). So not wishing to confront or offend, many preachers no longer speak of repentance. Repentance demands that we turn our hearts from sin and reverse our lifestyles as well. Those who reject or ignore God's laws become a moral law to themselves, subjective and usually permissive. By doing so, they set their minds and hearts on their own desires. They don't realize their rejection of God's laws means they cannot be righteous in His eyes.

Romans 8:5-8 says, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it doesn't subject itself to the law of God, for it's not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." If you wish to be right with God, you must consider where the focus of your heart lies.

The Lord Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:27-30). What we think about in our hearts matters, and we must learn to control our eyes, our thoughts, and our desires. Whether it's the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life, we must learn to deal with it.

Many today have forgotten the momentary pleasures of sin have a high price. They may imagine there are no rules, but Scripture repeatedly warns of the dangers of sin. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). God will even judge the secret sins (Romans 2:16). One may feel he's justified in his actions and yet he's only fooling himself. "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). All the changes happening in our culture won't turn a lie into the truth, won't turn sin into righteousness, won't turn the immoral things into moral, and it won't justify having no morality at all.

Sin always costs more than we think. Sin will always yield more pain than we thought. The wages of sin, which is death, will last longer than we can imagine (Romans 6:23). If we think we can live for our desires and never face any consequences, we're only lying to ourselves. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Don't be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will 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."

Therefore, the faithful Christian who hungers and thirsts for righteousness needs to value virtue, integrity, and purity. The word "virtue" describes moral excellence. The virtuous person not only avoids sin, he's also highly involved in doing good to others. For him the pursuit of what is good is foremost in his daily thoughts. Paul described the way a Christian should think, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there's any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Not only does the virtuous person think properly, he practices what he believes. Like Jesus in Acts 10:38, he goes about doing good and blessing others. He does more than is expected for others and is kind to all. Since he knows he belongs to Jesus Christ, he looks for opportunities to serve others. They please God and bless all who know them. Ephesians 5:-2 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

The righteous person is a person of integrity and honesty. He takes seriously the admonition in Romans 12:17, to “respect what is right in the sight of all men.” A righteous person is honest with himself, he’s honest with others. He doesn’t lie, cheat, or steal; and he doesn’t cover up for those who do. A righteous person does an honest day’s work for an honest day’s wage. A person of integrity keeps his word. Psalm 15 describes the person as one who shows integrity: whenever “he swears to his own hurt and does not change; He doesn’t put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.” Integrity in character makes a person trustworthy.

The righteous man also values purity. The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Paul urged Timothy to show himself an example of purity (1 Timothy 4:12). He said, “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). The righteous man shows self-control in his thoughts and his behavior. Sadly, some people allow their minds, their speech, and their behavior to become anything but pure. Titus 1:15 says, “To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.” Do people see you as a person of virtue, integrity, and purity?

Righteousness can also refer to God’s character of holiness and purity. We serve a holy and pure God, who doesn’t sin, and doesn’t permit sin, to please Him. We can learn about becoming righteous through the gospel. The apostle Paul said, “For I’m 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:16-17).

The apostle Paul did not want a righteousness that comes from keeping the Mosaic Law but one that comes from faith in Christ Jesus. Paul, who had been a leading Jew and a Pharisee wrote, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I’ve counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:7-11).

Because of Jesus, we can become right with God and enjoy the blessings of being His children and in His grace. Jesus suffered to redeem us and to make us right with God. The One “who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “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” (1 Peter 2:24).

We can have a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We’re justified (that is, made righteous) “as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22-24). It’s by the grace of God through faith that we’re freed from the condemnation of sin and are able to enjoy newness of life, being born again into the family of God and able to enter the kingdom of God. Of course, the faith that saves is an obedient faith (Romans 1:5).

The Lord Jesus said, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Righteousness means loving God with all your heart and allowing God to rule in your heart. Many think of love as a feeling of the heart, but love for God requires the whole person: heart, soul, mind and strength. The Lord Jesus said love for God includes how we react to His commandments. He said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father

will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:23-24). Faith alone is not enough to show love for God; one must also be obedient to His will.

It means loving the things that God loves and avoiding the things that offend God. It's all about Jesus Christ being your Savior but also your Lord. You long for His mercy and grace, but you also must respect His being your Lord and Master. Righteousness is all about walking with God and giving God a home in your life. We won't find purpose, love, rest, joy, peace, or hope, until we find it in the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll remain hungry for righteousness until you taste and see the Lord is good. Augustine of Hippo was right about our need for God when he said, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in thee."

Jesus calls us to that rest, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). If you wish to live as a righteous person, then come, come to the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray. "O, Father we're thankful that Your word helps us to understand Your will for our lives, help us to have faith, help us to know of Your grace, help us to turn from evil and to live lives that please You, that are righteous. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

What does the righteous life look like? How does living for the Lord make a difference?

Galatians 5:22-24 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; and against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." These are marvelous gifts and beautiful ways of life; they bless everyone. When you hunger and thirst for righteousness, that leads you to act in faith and obedience, and the blessings of life grow each day. God's grace can make a difference! Don't doubt what God can do in your life, if you deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acting in faith means putting away your old way of life and taking up the Lord's way. You can't find God's satisfying ways while you live in sin. You must hunger and thirst for righteousness. Do you thirst for God? Place your faith in the Lord Jesus and believe in the gospel. Turn from sin and follow the Lord in repentance. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38).

The apostle Peter wrote, "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" (1 Peter 3:21). If you wish to be saved, don't argue with God or hold to your sins; be obedient to the Lord in faith. Today is the best day to let that hunger for righteousness lead you to be filled with faith, love, and peace.

We hope that today's study has stirred you to consider whether you're living the righteous life. So focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everyone needs a church family. There's probably a church of Christ near you. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one.