

# Program Transcripts

January 2022



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**January 2022**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **JANUARY 2 – A NEW LIFE**

Many people fill their lives with sin and deep regret. Do you ever wish you could start over, clean and pure? Thankfully, the Lord Jesus gives us the opportunity for a new life where we can free from sin.

## **JANUARY 9 – LAWLESS WAYS**

Some things are lawful, and others are lawless. We need to know the difference. The word of God gives us the difference between right and wrong and tells us the destiny of each way. Let's choose to avoid all lawlessness.

## **JANUARY 16 – JESUS IS THE LORD**

Who is the One who has all authority over our lives? Who is Lord? Whom we choose to serve will make a difference in how we live on earth and whether we go to heaven. Who is your Lord?

## **JANUARY 23 – SAYING NO TO GOD**

Some people feel the love and grace of God means we can live as please and even say no to God. Is it wise to say no to God? What happened to the people of old who said no to God? What are the benefits of saying yes to God?

## **JANUARY 30 – THE FIRST GOSPEL SERMON**

The church began in the first century with its first messages of salvation. Those messages were given to all people in all places for all time. Since the gospel is a universal message, we must hear what God has to say.

## A New Life

Many people fill their lives with sin and deep regret. Do you ever wish you could start over, clean and pure? The Lord Jesus gives us the opportunity for a new life. The God we read about in the Bible is the One who created the world and each of us. He's the God of hope and forgiveness, who gives us an opportunity to start over fresh and pure in Christ. The Lord God expects us to keep His commands and avoid sin; but God is also our Father in heaven who has compassion on us, when we humble ourselves and repent. Through Christ we can have newness of life, filled with good things.

Today is the first Lord's day of this new year, and for me it's an anniversary. I began working with *In SEARCH of the Lord's Way* in January 2009. I've partnered with some of the finest people in the world over the last thirteen years, people who work hard to bring this program to you. I'm thankful for them and thankful to you for your prayers and kind words. Please remember to keep us in your prayers.

When people sin, and know they've sinned, they feel defiled and wish they could start over clean and pure. They become ashamed of themselves. They long for an opportunity to put the past behind and transform their lives into something nobler and better. The Lord's way is the best way to live; it's nobler and better than following the ways of the world. The Lord's way frees us from the deception and enslavement of sin; it brings joy and peace. The Lord's way opens the door to hope and to eternal life. Worldly ways will promise you freedom and happiness, while it corrupts and leads to ruin. Those who love this world will lose all that the love of God can bring.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel of John 3:1-7, and deals with a new life.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is 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 be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"

Let's pray together. "O Father, we're thankful that You have taught us and led us to know what You would have us to do and to be. Father, we are thankful that we can be born again, and that we can enter the kingdom. Bless us and help us to do Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen."

David committed the sins of adultery with Bathsheba and then caused the murder of her husband Uriah, then learned about God's forgiveness, and he wrote in Psalm 103:8-12, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

God loves us and wants to remain in lovingkindness toward us. Yes, we are flawed and sin, but God's love and forgiveness are great. He offers to each of us the opportunity to be born again to a new and different life, free from the past. When He forgives us, He no longer holds our past sins against us. He offers us a new and better life.

People often delight in sin, but as time passes that happiness turns to misery. When people understand what the old life is really like, they're ashamed of themselves. They wished they had never lived so worldly.

Romans 6:20-23 says "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you're now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul gives us a before and after description of what it means to know the Lord and to walk with the Lord. Ephesians 4:17-19 says, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

This way of life is characterized by a darkened understanding and a futile way of life. God excludes them because of their ignorance of His ways. They've become hard-hearted and callous, giving themselves over to sensuality, impurity, and greed. The word sensuality refers to the conduct of one who is morally unprincipled, who excites disgust, by unbridled lust and shamelessness. These ways have no restraints. They're filled with selfish pride and have no place for God.

Paul then describes the transformed lives of those who walk with Christ. Ephesians 4:20-24 says, "But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

At the heart of the transformed life in Christ is the truth. Christians listen to the voice of the Lord and have found the truth that sets them free. Truth is and has always been in Jesus. Truth about sin and about Christ will open the eyes of anyone. It'll lead a person to lay aside that old self, because they realize how the lusts of deceit corrupt one morally and spiritually. But it doesn't stop there! When you know Christ, you want to put on the new self, which is in the likeness of God. When a person is in Christ, he is created to live in righteousness and to embrace the holiness that comes when we know the truth.

The devil himself is a liar and wants to keep us ignorant of right and wrong, of sin and righteousness, and of heaven and hell. He wants everyone to believe that he can live any way he desires and will suffer no consequences. But Christ brings us the truth and with it freedom, hope, life, and love! He can help us lay aside the things that defeat us with corruption and give us victory over them.

Paul describes his thanksgiving for the church at Colossae that made that transformation from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Paul wrote, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel" (Colossians 1:3-5). The gospel message is God's power to save; and when we hear and obey the gospel, we're blessed with a true faith, a true love for all, and a hope laid up in heaven.

Because the Colossians had this kind of faith, Paul wrote, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we've not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us

from the domain of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:9-14).

Look at these marvelous blessings given to these redeemed souls who came to Christ in faith, love, and obedience. First, they were rescued, delivered from the domain of darkness, by the blood of Christ from their sins. Satan no longer has a hold on them. Second, God through Jesus has transferred them into the kingdom of His beloved Son, the church. We know it's the church, because Paul is writing to the church about this kingdom. Third, God gave them through the preaching of the word the knowledge of His will, which provides all spiritual wisdom and understanding. God's teaching opens the door to the wisdom that leads to eternal life.

Fourth, this wisdom and understanding helps us to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, so that we may please our Creator in every way. When we see the love of God shown on the cross, it makes us want to love and to please Him. Fifth, His love for us leads us to love others and to bear fruit in every good work. His love showing in our lives makes the whole world a better place; our energy is not wasted on selfish desire but on caring for others. Anyone who loves the Lord loves to bless the lives of others with good works. Sixth, a convert will be strengthened with all power according to His glorious might. We must not overlook the power of God to strengthen us, to protect us and to provide for us what we need to do His will (2 Corinthians 9:8-10). Seventh, God's activity in our lives will help us to become steadfast in our faith and patient while we wait for God's providence and protection.

All of these blessings call us to give thanks joyfully to our God who has loved us so richly and qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. We have all these blessings here and heaven for an eternal home.

It's no wonder that Paul never looked back. He left his old Jewish life and took on faith in Christ. He said, "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).

Paul never considered himself as a perfect man, nor does any faithful Christian. He knew that he still had to reach forward and press on to the goal. He said, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I don't regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14). Paul would not let his past keep him from disciplining himself and serving the Lord.

As you read the first few chapters of the book of Romans, you'll see the terrible nature of sin. There were people who suppressed the truth, who ignored God, and would not thank Him for all His blessings (Romans 1:18-20). Some who professed wisdom became fools. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. They followed degrading passions and took on a depraved mind and were filled with all unrighteousness.

In the second chapter of Romans, Paul describes those who knew the Law, passed judgment on others, and yet they practiced the same evil things. He says, "God will render to each person according to his deeds," and "there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:6-11). Ultimately, we must realize that "all have sinned and

fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). So we need rescuing, we need redemption, we need the forgiveness of sins.

Converting to Christ by our obedience to the gospel is just the beginning. Hearing the word of truth, we believe, we repent, we confess that Jesus Christ is God's Son, and we're baptized into Christ. When we're baptized, God adds us to His people (Acts 2:41), He washes away our sins (Acts 22:16), and He gives us newness of life (Romans 6:4). Becoming a Christian by being born of water and the Spirit is necessary to salvation and necessary to enter the kingdom. Baptism is a birth to a whole new life; a life that one must continue to serve the Lord all through his days.

Romans 12:2 was written to Christians. "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." We're transformed by the renewing of the mind, setting our minds on the will of God and living it out. Renew your mind by studying the word of God daily and meditating on it. Spend time daily in prayer. Get busy worshipping with the church.

Let's pray together. "O Father, we're thankful that we can have a new life through Your Son Jesus, being forgiven and redeemed, and we can be Your children. Father, help us always to love You and to do Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen."

I like to remind people of this saying: "I'm not all I ought to be; I'm not all I want to be; I'm not all I'm going to be; but thank God by His mercy and grace I'm not what I used to be." Don't believe anyone who tells you that you cannot change or that you cannot start over with your life. Transformation or conversion always expects repentance on our part. The Bible everywhere assumes people can repent, if they choose to do so. The prodigal son repented, Nineveh repented, David repented, the people at Pentecost repented, Saul of Tarsus repented, and you too can repent. You don't have to be stuck in a past way of life. You don't have to stay ashamed. You can have newness of life.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." You can become a new creature in Christ. So place your trust in Christ and the gospel. Repent by turning from your old way of life to serve the Lord. Confess Jesus Christ as God's Son, and be baptized into Christ. Romans 6:4 says, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." In baptism we're crucified with Christ so that our body of sin might be done away with (Romans 6:6). Through baptism into Christ, God makes us His children (Galatians 3:26-27) and transfers us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. This is the best day for you to do that. It's the best day to begin your new walk with the Lord Jesus. So repent and be baptized, find a church home, and live every day for the Lord.

We hope today's study about a new life has stirred you to start afresh in your spiritual walk with God. We encourage you to start going to church and to get involved. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.



## Lawless Ways

Some things are lawful, and others are lawless. We need to know the difference. Lawless ways will not lead to heaven. What is lawful and what is not? Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." God's ways help us to see the truth and give light in a confused world. Psalm 119:130 says, "The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." We search the Scriptures, because they contain the understanding necessary to know God, to have eternal life, and to live holy lives.

Today, we're focusing on what God describes as lawless ways. The Lord distinguishes between many things. There is a broad way and a narrow way, and they lead to different destinies. There is right and wrong. There are true prophets and false prophets. There is the true gospel, and there are other gospels that will not save. We must study the Word of God if we wish to see the difference between the true way and many false ways.

Moses told all Israel, "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). When we follow God's ways we find blessing for ourselves and for our fellow man. When we ignore or break God's commandments, we hurt ourselves. For this reason we must learn to listen and act carefully to obey the Lord. We can never be lawless and expect to please the Lord. One cannot be lawless and be righteous at the same time.

Our reading today comes from Matthew 7:21-23. This passage falls toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and it shows how people can be religious and yet not be righteous, how they can be spiritual and yet still be lawless and not right with God.

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. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father, help us to be lawful and not lawless, help us to be sincere and to be truthful in everything we do. And Father, help us to listen to Your words that we may be right with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

First John 3:4 says, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." Because lawlessness doesn't listen to God or recognize God's authority over our lives, lawlessness leads inevitably to sin. Lawlessness always leads us away from God. Jesus loved righteousness but hated lawlessness. Hebrews 1:8-9 says about God's Son Jesus, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

When we understand what God's laws are, we realize that straying away from God's teaching and commandments is lawlessness. It transgresses God's commandments by doing what God says not to do or by failing to do what God instructs us to do. It goes beyond the limits of the commandments of God and does what it desires for itself. Wise people hear and do what the Lord says, while foolish people fail to do the words of the Lord (Matthew 7:24-27). Lawlessness has a bitter end. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers [that is, lawless people], and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:41-43).

Lawless ways will not lead anyone to be right with God. So we need to examine what lawlessness is. First, lawlessness happens when people believe that there are no rules at all. Such people believe they can live as they please, and there will be no consequences. When you take the view that there are no rules, you're saying that you don't care what God says; and if you say you do not care what God says, you're revealing that you do not care about God Himself.

The Lord Jesus, however, said, "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" (Matthew 7:21). On another occasion Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46).

When you ignore and disobey God's ways in little things; it's not long until you throw out God's ways in bigger things. Paul described how lawlessness grows with time. Romans 6:19 says lawlessness leads to more lawlessness. The Lord Jesus recognized the effects of lawlessness on how people treat one another. Matthew 24:12 says, "And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold." Sin hardens the heart and makes people callous.

Why does God have a law? First Timothy 1:8-11 says, "Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound [or healthy doctrine], in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted." God gives us His law in the hopes that people will respect it and repent of their sins.

Second, lawless means departing from God's words and ways. Moses told the Israelites as they were coming to the promised land, "So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess" (Deuteronomy 5:32-33). Careful obedience and doing things as God prescribes is necessary.

The Lord God told Joshua, "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all that the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7). When people leave God's way for other gods or human traditions, they leave God's blessing as well. Proverbs 4:25-27 says, "Let your eyes look directly ahead, And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet, And all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil." When a person stays with God, he'll find God stays with him.

Third, lawlessness happens when people add to God's word. Deuteronomy 12:32 says, "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it." People often add their ideas and traditions to God's word. The Pharisees were not content with the written law of God; they believed that they needed to add their own human traditions. Many churches do that today with their human councils, laws, and creeds. Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

Some people believe that God speaks through them today. God said through Moses, "But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I've not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die" (Deuteronomy 18:20). There are many false prophets today who speak things that God never said. They made it up on their own initiative, and the fact that it proves false shows that God never spoke through them.



Jeremiah faced many false prophets. Jeremiah 23:16 points this out. "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They're leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the LORD.'" They are speaking their own made up thoughts not God's words. In verse 26, Jeremiah observed such false prophets are "prophets of the deception of their own hearts." God reveals in Jeremiah 23:21-22, "I didn't send these prophets, But they ran. I didn't speak to them, But they prophesied. If they had stood in My council, Then they would have announced My words to My people, And would have turned them back from their evil way, And from the evil of their deeds." Many preachers today pretend to be prophets, while they tickle ears rather than teaching God's holy word.

Paul faced preachers in his day who preached a false gospel. He said in Galatians 1:8-9, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"

Fourth, lawlessness happens when people take away from God's words. The Lord Jesus said, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19). The Pharisees were experts at finding loopholes in God's laws. For instance, the Lord Jesus asked the Pharisees, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God" (Matthew 15:3-6). Jesus said their worship was vain, because they teach as doctrines the commandments of men.

At the end of the book of Revelation, John speaks clearly that no one can change what was written in that book. He said, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19). What is true of this specific book of Revelation is surely true of other books that God gave. No one has the right to correct God by adding or taking away from the written word of God. God doesn't need an editor.

God said to Jeremiah, "Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a word" (Jeremiah 26:2). Paul could say to the elders of Ephesus, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I'm innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). The Lord Jesus expected the apostles to teach people "to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). We can't choose to follow what we agree with and then ignore the rest of God's teaching.

Fifth, lawlessness happens when people act on their own initiative. Sometimes they feel free to act in the silence of God, thinking "God doesn't condemn this, so it must be all right." When God specifically tells us what He wants us to do, and someone does something different that is not mentioned in Scripture, they're acting on their own authority. They're presuming that anything not prohibited is automatically permissive.

The Lord Jesus did not speak on His own outside the Father's will; He said, "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; and therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the

Father has told Me" (John 12:49-50). The Lord Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will guide the apostles "into all the truth" and "will not speak on His own authority" (John 16:13). If they would not act on their own authority (that is, Jesus and the Holy Spirit), how can we?

The word "baptism" is a specific word referring to dipping or immersing. When people substitute pouring water or sprinkling for baptism, they're acting on their own authority. When people baptize innocent infants who need no repentance, they are acting on their own initiative. When people play mechanical instruments in the worship of the church, they're acting on their own authority.

In Jeremiah 23:16 false prophets spoke "visions of their own minds not from the mouth of the Lord." The Lord said in chapter 23:32 of Jeremiah, "Behold, I'm against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them." We cannot act on our own authority. The New Testament records what God desires for the church. As Christians, let's act within the teaching of the New Testament and never presume to act on our own.

Let's pray. "O, Father, help us always to stay within Your will, to do the things that You have taught us, to listen to You, and to be obedient from our hearts because we love You. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen."

James 1:22-25 says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he's looked at himself and gone away, he's immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

Listening without doing doesn't work with God. What we do with what God says reveals our hearts and attitudes. The one who listens but doesn't obey is treating God with disrespect. James 4:17 says, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." To know you ought to repent but fail to do so is sin. To know you ought to become a Christian but do nothing is sin. To know you ought to worship at church but remain away is sin. To know you ought to study the Bible and pray but do nothing is sin. Sin arises not only from what we do but also from the right things that we fail to do.

Don't let lawlessness corrupt your heart. Jesus went to the Jordan River to be baptized because it fulfilled all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). Jesus bore the cross in order to do the Father's will, and we too must learn to do the Father's will to enter the kingdom of heaven. Put your trust in the Lord, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as God's Son, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. Do what is right!

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.

## Jesus is the Lord

Who is the One who has all authority? Who is Lord? Today, we're exploring the fact that Jesus is the Lord. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We want to know the truth, because only the truth can set us free from sin and from the false ideas that are so widely taught. We need the truth and the best source of spiritual truth is still found on the pages of the Bible. They give us a way to evaluate what we hear. The noble Bereans "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). That's what we must all do so that we may not believe a lie.

The inspired apostle Matthew wrote: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven'" (Matthew 16:13-17).

What people say and think about Jesus is crucial to their spiritual well-being. Jesus said the Father's prompt to Peter and his confession that "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," was true. Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ or the Messiah. The Hebrew term "Messiah" is translated with the Greek term "Christ." The Messiah was the promised king of the Jews, the Son of David. The word "Christ" means "anointed." The Lord Jesus is also the Son of God, sent from heaven, to reveal God's will to us.

Our reading today comes from Acts 2:29-36, and it is the conclusion of the sermon that Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost about Jesus Christ.

"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on the throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we all witness. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.' Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

Yes, Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

Let us pray. "O Heavenly Father, we pray that You will help us always to glorify You and to glorify Your Son Jesus who is both Lord and Christ. Help us to treat Him as our Lord and to be obedient to His will. In Jesus' name, Amen."

The apostle Peter told the household of Cornelius, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as

Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:38-43).

Jesus has been anointed as the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14). He will judge us all on the last day. The Lord Jesus said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). We'll not be judged by what people think, by what councils vote, or by opinion polls. We'll be judged by the words that Jesus spoke, words that can be found in the New Testament.

Since He's our King and Judge, we must recognize our accountability before Him. The apostle Paul told the Athenians, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). You can be sure that one day you will stand before the Lord in judgment. God will hold you and me accountable for how we have lived our lives.

We're accountable for our attitudes towards other people. The Lord said, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who's angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' [that is, Raca, "empty-headed"] shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' [that's the word moron] shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" (Matthew 5:21-22). God knows all that happens in our hearts.

We're accountable even for our thoughts. 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" (Matthew 5:27-29). When people think sexually immoral thoughts, they sin against their spouses and their God.

We're accountable for our words as well. The Lord Jesus said, "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:34-37).

We're also accountable for our actions. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for the deeds of his body, according to what he's done, whether good or bad." God's Word further says, "He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he'll give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality" (Romans 2:6-11).

We're accountable to the Lord Jesus whether we know it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, or whether we agree with it or not. Jesus, our Creator, who died to save us from sin, is also our Lord. Not only do we confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, we also confess Him as our Lord. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit proclaimed through Peter and the apostles to all the Jews that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36). God has made Jesus to be your Lord and mine.

The word "Lord" indicates two very crucial concepts. First, to call Jesus "Lord" means that He is divine, He is deity, God. The word "Lord" is often spelled with all capital letters in the Old Testament. "Lord" is the English word used to translate the word "Yahweh." This is the word the Lord God used to identify Himself to Moses at the burning bush.

In Exodus chapter three, God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Moses was reluctant and offered several excuses to God as to why he shouldn't lead them. At one point Moses said to God, "'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13 and 14). The word in Hebrew "I am who I am" translates into Greek as "kurios" and into English as "LORD."

When the Holy Spirit proclaimed Jesus as Lord on Pentecost, he was speaking clearly of the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:6 says that Jesus existed in the form of God. Philippians 2:5-11 says, "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. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue [listen to this] will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus has always existed in the form of God, but He emptied himself and took the form of a servant, being fashioned as a man. In humility obeyed His father by dying on a cruel cross. Because Jesus suffered and died for us, God exalted Him, gave Him a name above all names, and demands that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord! This type of worship is not for men but for deity, for God.

Second, to call Jesus "Lord" means that you've decided to obey Him. He is your master, and you are His servant. The word "Lord" in the Bible often refers to one who owns slaves. When you and I became Christians, we became the slaves of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." The Lord Jesus purchased us with something far more precious and costly than silver or gold. First Peter 1:18-19 says, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." As our Creator, silver and gold would have cost nothing to Jesus, but He sacrificed His blood and His life to redeem us.

A master owns his slaves and has the right to make decisions over their lives, decisions the slaves must accept. You may not always understand the Lord's decisions, but you can always trust that the Lord Jesus will act for your best interest. All of us are servants to someone or something. It's better to be the servant of One who loves and cares for us. Some enslave themselves to their lusts and their pleasures, which only last for a time and later destroy them. Some become the servants of the devil, who uses them with cruel, false promises. The devil is never your friend; no matter what he may offer you. If you choose to follow him, he'll lead you where you never wanted to go. When you take Jesus as your Lord, you give yourself to Him, the one who always will love you and take care of you. He is the Way, the only way, to heaven.

The question isn't whether Jesus will be a good and kind master; the question is whether you'll be a good and obedient servant. Obedience isn't always natural to us; we have to learn it. The Bible says of Jesus, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made

perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:8-9). If we're to please our Lord, we must obey His will. Obedience is how we show to Him our faith and our love.

The Lord Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Obedience also reveals our faith. John 3:36 in the New American Standard says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” How can the Lord rule in your life, if you aren't willing to keep His rules or His commandments? You can't say that you've made Jesus Lord of your life, if you are rebelling against Him and if you refuse to obey what He teaches and what He commands.

The Bible says, “By this we know that we have come to know Him [that is, to have a relationship with Him], if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I've come to know Him [I'm His friend, I love Him, I'm close to Him],’ and yet He doesn't keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. And by this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk [that is, to live] in the same manner as He [Christ] walked” (1 John 2:3-6). Can you say, “Jesus is my Lord”? Do you walk in His steps? Are you following Him? Are you close to Him? Do you love Him?

Let's pray together. “Heavenly Father, help us to love the Lord Jesus with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. To be obedient to His will, to walk in His way, to Love Him and to serve Him. And Father, help us to love others because He did. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.”

The Lord Jesus said clearly, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18) The Lord Jesus doesn't have some authority over our lives and souls; He has all authority. No one can overthrow or silence Him. The devil and his followers would love to see Jesus defeated. Many may decide to follow evil and overcome the Lord; but they will fail. Revelation 17:14 says, “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

Will you follow the devil or will you follow the Lord Jesus? You reveal which side you've selected by the way you think, talk, and act. One day you'll stand before the Lord and give an account for how you've lived. Are you prepared to stand before the Lord in Judgment? Is your heart right? Today is the very best day to get right with God. There's no future of peace with God by putting off your repentance, or the declaration of your faith, or of your obedience to the Lord.

How do we obey the Lord? First, we must know His will as it's revealed in the New Testament. If you don't know the Word, you can't obey it. Second, we must believe that Jesus is the Lord, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Your trust in the Lord says that you do really recognize His place, you trust Him because you know Him. So with trust and love, you turn away from rebellion and sin and you turn to the Lord in repentance. Whatever he asks, you're ready to do because you love Him—that's repentance. Then upon the confession of your faith, you're obedient to Him in baptism. That's when He'll wash away every sin, add you to His family, the church. Won't you do that today?

We do ask that you focus your heart by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. We hope that you'll go and be a part of a congregation.

## Saying No to God

Some people feel the love and grace of God means that we can live as we please and even say no to God. Is it wise to say no to God? We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We're grateful to God for His word that helps us understand Him and His character. From the very beginning God has wanted to bless mankind and to dwell with us, but God wants us to draw close to Him. God promises, "What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me,' says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

There's nothing in this world sweeter than a newborn baby. I love the thought of something so fresh from heaven. Jackie and I had four daughters of our own, and we're blessed with twelve grandchildren. When a little one gets to be about 18 months they learn to say the word "no!" They're telling their parents "no" and beginning a lifelong battle of wills.

Will we do our own will or will we accept God's authority, is another question. The first authority is our parents, but ultimately God is the supreme authority. The Bible urges us to be careful how we deal with the inner person. Our hearts are important. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life." If we let our hearts grow selfish and indulgent, we can ruin our lives by a moment's foolish choice.

Our reading comes from Joshua 24:14-18, it comes at the times when Joshua is an older man that had finished taking the Promised Land, and he was encouraging them to stay faithful.

Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it's disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. The Lord drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.

Let's pray. "O, father, help us to leave other things alone and to serve You and to put You first in our lives, and to obey Your will in every respect. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

Rebellion is an act of the heart and will; it's an act of defiance or resistance to one in authority. God gives us all freewill, and we can say yes or no to God. We can do God's will or we can follow our own desires; God won't rob us of our free will. My friend, you can choose to do what you wish. You can say yes to God and enjoy all of His blessings, or you can say no to God, but you've got to pay the price. God is gracious to the penitent and the willing; but when people rebel against him, there's a price to pay. That price is always higher than you think.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel often drifted away from God and began living lives that pleased themselves. The Bible says, "'Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. If you consent and obey, You'll eat of the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured



by the sword” (Isaiah 1:18-20). Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. We're all still making decisions whether we will refuse and rebel against God or whether we will find the blessing of God.

The history of the Bible shows that people said “no” to God, shut Him out of their lives and paid a very high price for it. God gave Adam and Eve only one boundary in the days that they were in the Garden of Eden. They couldn't eat of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” God said, “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” But they listened to the lies of the devil and were cast out of the garden, where there was no eternal life and no fellowship with God. The woman bore children with pain, and the man would eat his bread by the sweat of his brow “till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Saying no to God didn't bless anyone.

In Noah's day people also rebelled against God. The Bible 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. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them’” (Genesis 6:5-7). God sent a great flood and destroyed every person except those on the ark—eight souls in all. Saying no to God didn't bless anyone.

Then, Bible students will remember what happened to Israel as the people came into Palestine. In Joshua and Caleb's day, the people refused to do God's will. In Numbers 13:1-2 the Bible says: “Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, ‘Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; and you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them.’” God wanted them to see all the blessings of Canaan and to trust in His promise to be with them.

The ten spies brought back a bad report, and said, “We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there” (Numbers 13:27-28). They were afraid and counseled the people not to go in to Canaan. Numbers 13:32-33 says: “So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they spied out, saying, ‘The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.’”

Numbers 14:1-4 says: “All the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’ So they said to one another, ‘Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.’” Such lack of faith, such grumbling, and such rebellion!

Numbers 14:5-9 says: “Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, ‘The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.’”

Verse 10 says, "But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. And then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel." The Lord was angry with Israel and thought about smiting them all with pestilence. Moses interceded for the people, asking for their pardon. The Lord pardoned the people, but they had a price to pay.

In Numbers 14:21-23 the Lord God says, "Indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it." Everyone in that generation twenty years old and upward perished in the wilderness and never saw the Promised Land. Saying no to God didn't bless anyone and cost them the promise.

In Jesus' day there were a group of disciples who had seen many miracles. When they heard Jesus teach something that they didn't understand or embrace, they turned away from the Lord. The Bible says: "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?' And Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God'" (John 6:66-69). Saying no to God never brought anyone a blessing.

People lose more than they imagine when they say no to God. They may think they've gained their freedom to do as they please, but what is the cost? Adam and Eve did as they pleased and were cast out of the Garden of Eden. The people in Noah's day lost their lives. The people in Caleb's day died young and lost their inheritance. The people in Jesus' day lost "eternal life." You can say no to God, but you've got to realize the cost is great.

Let's say "yes" to God. Let's be obedient to God's will. We need to be like Moses. The Bible says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

We need an attitude like the generation who entered the Promised Land after forty years in the wilderness. The Bible says: "They [that is, that younger generation that was under twenty at the time of the bad report] answered Joshua, saying, 'All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you; only may the LORD your God be with you as He was with Moses. And anyone who rebels against your command and does not obey your words in all that you command him, shall be put to death; only be strong and courageous'" (Joshua 1:16).

Isaiah also showed a marvelous spirit when he said to God, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). We need the faith and love for God that says, Tell me what to do and I'll do it. Tell me what is true, and I'll believe it. We're not going to give any "ifs," "ands" or "buts." We're simply going to trust God enough to obey whatever He instructs us. We're not going to argue with Him or try to change His Word and become an editor of God.

The church began on the first Pentecost after the resurrection, fifty days after Jesus was crucified. Peter preached a compelling sermon to the people proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and how the Father in heaven has made him both Lord and Christ. When the people heard it they were pierced to the heart, because they realized the crucified Jesus was indeed the Lord and Christ. They were guilty and they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In Acts 2:38 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." The Bible says, "So then, those who had received his word [King James says "gladly received it"] were baptized; and that day were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting

themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:41-42).

The people in the early church began working to reach others with the gospel and to bring them to the Lord Jesus. If you love the Lord, if you love your soul, and you love the souls of other people, you'll want them to be right with the Lord just as you are. Knowing the Lord, being saved, and having eternal life are the greatest blessings that anyone can enjoy. If you have these blessings, you have everything. But if you don't know the Lord, you aren't saved, and you don't have eternal life, and you're missing out and robbing yourself of the most necessary, and most important spiritual blessings of all. When you say no to God, God will one day say no to you. When you say yes to God, and you do it in love and you do it in obedience, God will one day say yes to you. Are you saying yes or are you saying no to God? Are you pleasing Him, or walking in your own ways? Are you loving him, or ignoring Him? Are you with Him, or against Him? Don't ever, ever, ever, say no to God. Say yes, "Here am I, send me."

Let's pray. "Heavenly Father, help us to be obedient to Your will, to always say yes to You and to love You and to serve You in all that You ask. Give us strength and help us every day. In Jesus' name, Amen."

If we want the forgiveness of our sins, we ought to do the same thing the people did at Pentecost. Having heard of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we should believe, repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. When we realize that we've sinned, and the burden of sin is on our souls, we ought to repent and be baptized. No "ifs," "ands," or "buts" about it. No substituting what we'd like to do for what God asks us to do. Obedience is doing God's will in God's way. Let's say with our hearts and lives, "yes, Lord! We'll come to you and serve you by obeying what You have taught us to do."

Repentance is the turning away from sin and turning to the way of the Lord. Baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sin. Saying no to God or changing the instructions would be the worst thing that we could do, and saying yes and obeying them is the best thing that we can do. Let's say yes to God, and God will keep His promise. He'll wash away our sins, He'll add us to the church, He'll give us newness of life.

Let's also say yes to assembling for worship with the church, yes to supporting the church, and yes to serving and teaching others. The Bible says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Let's get involved in being God's people doing God's will in God's way. Let's give God our hearts, our obedience, and our lives. Saying yes to God is always right!

We ask that you 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.

## The First Gospel Sermon

The church began in the first century with its first messages of salvation. We're going to look at the beginning of the church and explore the first gospel sermon. The Bible opens for us doors of understanding. It helps us to see things as they really are from God's point of view. If all we hear is what the world thinks or what some religious leader believes, we may miss hearing God for ourselves. If all we believe is what we experience or feel, we may miss hearing God's bigger picture. God has spoken in His Word the things we most need to know about life and godliness.

Jesus made a promise to the apostles in Acts 1:6-8. They had asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus promised they would be filled with power of the Holy Spirit, and serve as witnesses to all the earth.

The Scriptures reveal how this promise began to be fulfilled in Acts 2. The book of Acts shows how the apostles took the gospel to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the world. What they said in the beginning is essential to our understanding of Christianity. Their first century message is for all people in all time and in all places. For this reason, we must pay close attention to what Luke by inspiration preserved for us in this Acts chapter 2. This is what God wanted the people of Jerusalem to know about Jesus, and what He wants us to know as well and how we should respond to our sins.

Our reading today comes from Acts 2:1-4. This is at the beginning of the church, and it's the beginning and the setting for this first gospel sermon.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

This tells us of the great miraculous power of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The day of Pentecost was one of the three required feasts that the Israelites had to attend. The day fell 50 days after the day of Passover and was originally a harvest festival. This feast also commemorated Moses' giving of the Law on Sinai. This Pentecost was just 50 days after the crucifixion of Jesus. So His disciples had spent forty days with Jesus after His resurrection. This first day of the week, on the day of Pentecost, marked the beginning of the church. Three visible miracles occurred together that made the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost an unmistakable and unique event: first, the rushing, mighty wind; second, the visible flames that rested on the apostles; and third, the apostles speaking in "other tongues." These "tongues" were recognized as the "native languages" of the visitors and strangers who'd come to Jerusalem for the festival.

Acts 2:5-11 says, "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the

parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Acts 2:12-15 tells of an accusation and how Peter answers it. “And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean? (talking about them speaking in the tongues).’ But others mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.’” Some will mock anything they don’t understand; but Peter answers their objections first from a practical standpoint (that it’s only 9 am) and then second from a biblical prophecy.

Peter explains what has taken place. He said, “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32): ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (Acts 2:16-21).

The Jews knew this prophecy and they knew the day would come when God’s Spirit would be poured out and people could be saved. Peter then turns to speaking about Jesus and what this means and he does this in Acts 2:22-23. Peter says, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

The miraculous works Jesus performed were very well known. In fact, the chief priests were worried about Him. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs (that is, miracles). If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:47-48). They decided to kill Jesus and then they incited the people to join in crucifying Him at the hands of Pilate. The people knew this.

But the death of Jesus was not the whole message. Peter, with the eleven, boldly said, “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David (in Psalm 16:8-11) says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence’” (Acts 2:24-28).

Peter explains that David wasn’t speaking about himself in this prophecy. Acts 2:29-32 says, “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” The apostles had seen

Jesus, touched Him, heard Him speak, and ate with Him. Acts 1:3 says Jesus “presented himself alive to them (the apostles) after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”

Someone asked where is Jesus now? Acts 2:33-36 says, “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says (Psalm 110:1), ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Peter argued clearly that Jesus is indeed an historic person and the Messiah, that the people knew Him and the miracles that He’d worked, that Jesus was crucified and they were witnesses that He rose from the dead. Peter preached the Scriptures prophecy of his death and resurrection. Fulfilling these passages Jesus is indeed God’s Christ, God’s Messiah. He is Lord and King!

Acts 2:37 says, “Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” J. W. McGarvey, a scholar from the nineteenth century wrote in his commentary on Acts:

“That in this exclamation, what shall we do, they tacitly confessed their belief of what Peter had preached; and the statement they were pierced to the heart and this shows that they felt keenly the remorse which the facts that they now believed were intended to inspire. Since Peter began to speak, a change had taken place in both their convictions and their feelings. They now believe that Jesus is the Christ, and they are pierced to the heart with the thought that they have murdered him.” The people heard and received this message, and it brought them to faith. Romans 10:17 stands true, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

These guilty men asked, “What shall we do?” They knew they had crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. If they had not believed what Peter said, they would surely have never asked what they could do to get rid of their great sin and guilt. What they were asking was, “What shall we do to be saved, or to be forgiven of this sin?” This is the first time under the reign of Christ, who is on the throne with the Father, that people in sin asked this momentous question; and this is the first time that an inspired answer is given.

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. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:38-39). Verses 40 to 41 continue: “with many other words he (Peter) bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Whatever the right answer in earlier days may have been, whether during the days of the Old Testament or during the earthly ministry of Jesus, Peter by the direction of the Holy Spirit gave this true and infallible answer at the beginning of the reign of Jesus upon the throne at the right hand of the Father! This answer from that time forward to the end of the world is the right answer to everyone in every place! This not only taught them what to do; it also teaches us today what to do to be delivered from the guilt of our own sins. If you wish to have forgiveness of sins, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This is God’s inspired message.

The commandment “be baptized” or “be immersed” is a passive imperative, meaning that one must allow someone to act upon him or her. The human baptizer is acting upon the baptized

person, who is passive and receives the action; in the same way, God is acting spiritually upon us when we're baptized. In baptism, we're not the ones acting; God is acting upon us. It is God who forgives, God who adds us to His church, God who causes us to be born again, God who makes us His child, God who buries us with Christ, God who raises us up with Christ to walk in newness of life, and God who saves us. Repenting, confessing our faith in Jesus Christ, and being baptized is when we submit to His will, merely responding to what He has commanded us. God is active in our baptism and our salvation, and we are passive. God acts upon us, and we receive His blessing. He saves us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit according to Titus 3:5. My friend, that's what God does in baptism: God is washing us clean in the blood of Jesus and giving us new life! In baptism, we are regenerated or born again!

Peter with many other words "bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'" (Acts 2:40). Peter taught them what they needed to know and encouraged them to act. Some say that we can do nothing toward our salvation, but Peter told them to "Save yourselves!" No one can save themselves by themselves; we're saved by the grace of God. But we do, however, act in obedience in order to accept His promised blessing. Why? Because He asks us to. This doesn't mean that we earn salvation but it does mean that we accept and act upon His required conditions to be forgiven and to become children of God.

Who were the 3,000 that gladly received his message, that wanted to be saved, and be baptized? They weren't infants who couldn't understand or believe. They were believers who were old enough to believe and repent. They were young and old, educated and uneducated, priests and common Jews! Whoever they were, they knew that they were sinners in need of the grace of God. My friend, do you need the grace of God?

You may wonder, "What about Acts 2:21?" It says, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Doesn't that teach one can be saved by simply praying for forgiveness? Many people believe that, but we've got to examine the Scriptures to see how one calls upon the name of the Lord. First, let's consider Acts 22:16. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." Calling on the name of the Lord occurs when one is baptized into Christ. Second, let's examine 1 Peter 3:21: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Baptism appeals to God for a good conscience. One's conscience is still in need of cleansing prior to baptism. In baptism, we receive from God the gift of forgiveness, which gives us a clean conscience.

One thing is sure: the Scriptures never invite one to pray the "sinner's prayer" to be saved. This is a modern innovation, not a Biblical instruction. Paul prayed for three days (Acts 9:11), and yet he still needed his sins washed away (Acts 22:16).

The people at Pentecost didn't debate with Peter about how to be saved. All 3000 understood his message alike and obeyed. They gladly received Peter's message (Acts 2:38), "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." I pray that you too will gladly receive the gospel message, that you'll repent of your sins, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.