

"Your Future"

Have you taken time to think about what lies ahead once this life is over? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And we're preparing for our future now. Stay with us and see what your future can be.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Scriptures help us to see things as God sees them. And God can see the future and has made plans for our future on earth and in the afterlife. God gives hope and life to those who trust and obey Him. He loves you and wants your love and devotion. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Now everyone one of us has a past, a present, and a future. Have you thought lately about who you are, why you are what you are, and where you're going? The apostle Paul was an amazing servant of Jesus Christ who had confidence in his future. Do you have confidence that one day you will go to heaven? Paul said in 2 Timothy 4 verses 6 to 8, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." Paul didn't dread the judgment day with doubts and questions. He had confidence that it would be an awards day. Do you?

I can't imagine any greater blessing in life than knowing I'm right with God and have a home with Him in heaven. Nor can I imagine a worse fate than being separated from Him for an eternity. I want to stay close to God and enjoy His blessing forever. Because of His grace and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we can have a future of blessing that lasts forever.

Now we offer this study on the future free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 12 to 16, and then we'll explore what our future could be.

Our reading today comes from 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 12 to 16. Paul writes.

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 is 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.

What a marvelous example Paul was. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're grateful for the mercy and grace found in Christ Jesus our Lord. And how He has had perfect patience with us. Father help us to be patient with ourselves and Father to love You more and more. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Everyone has a past. And if you've lived long at all, it's likely that your past is mixed. Some things were loving and good, while others fill you with regret and perhaps hurt. You know our past matters, because our experiences shape our thinking in the present. Paul spoke about his past on several

occasions. In 1 Timothy 1 verses 12 to 16, Paul said he “was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor.” He considered himself the chief of sinners. Paul remembered being Saul of Tarsus, who put people in prison, took away their homes, held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, and blasphemed the Name of Christ. He felt the sting of sin as a Christian

But as a Jew, Paul as Saul of Tarsus was deeply involved in his Jewish spiritual life. He wrote in Philippians 3 verses 4 to 6 that, “If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.” Oh, Paul was no ordinary Jew.

Paul could boast of his fleshly record with the best of them. He could say, “As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.” In fact, Paul said in Acts 23 and verse 1, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.” Paul was truly devoted to what he believed. But there was something more valuable to him than being a Pharisee. He said in Philippians 3 verses 7 to 11, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them (but) rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul wanted Christ more than anything else! Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 9:23 to 24: Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.” Paul knew Jesus Christ the Lord. And nothing was more important than that.

Knowing Jesus made this man give up everything to maintain that relationship. Paul gave up a lot, but what he gave up seemed to him but rubbish, in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ. Earlier in the book of Philippians, Paul had said, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Paul’s whole life was wrapped up in Christ, with Christ, and for Christ. Do you know the Lord? Do you have a close, loving, peaceful relationship with the One who created you? Is He your Lord and Savior?

In 2 Corinthians 11:23 to 28 Paul said, “Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” Paul was not an ordinary Christian; he was fully invested in serving Christ regardless of the cost.

Jesus told two parables in Matthew 13 that make me think of Paul’s sacrifice to be a Christian. The Lord said in Matthew 13:44 that, “The kingdom of heaven is like (a) treasure hidden in a field, which a

man found and covered up. (And) Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and (he) buys that field." And then the kingdom of heaven is worth everything, is everything that we possess.

Now that second parable is in Matthew 13 verses 45 and 46 he says, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great (price or) value, (he) went and (he) sold all that he had and (he) bought it." Now a pearl merchant would know one pearl from another. Some people think one religion is as good as another or one church is as good as another, but Jesus knew better. The kingdom of heaven is like that valuable pearl. You give up everything else to be in the kingdom of heaven. And nothing else, nothing else, nothing else compares.

Paul said in Colossians 1:13 and 14, "For He (that is God the Father) rescued us from the domain of darkness, and (then) transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." The Lord Jesus gave Paul a righteousness that came by faith, not by works of the Law. Paul's faith in Christ could do what the Law was unable to do. Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins. And by His blood He was able to rescue us and forgive us and bring us into His kingdom, which is the church. The domain of darkness is Satan's domain, a domain of sin and condemnation. And we are now children of light with promise in the family of God. And that's worth giving up everything else.

Paul wanted to go to heaven, to attain the resurrection. He said in Philippians 3:12 to 14, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, (he says) I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Paul not only forgot what was behind, he was pressing on, stretching, straining, and reaching for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. He was pressing on in faith and dedication to go to heaven. He wanted to go to heaven that badly. My friend, how badly do you want to go?

Paul said he wasn't perfect. Well, nobody is perfect. Paul hadn't arrived, hadn't attained the resurrection, but he was straining forward to reach it. He was staying faithful, keeping his heart right, keeping his life clean from sin the best that he could, and focusing on the goal. He couldn't let his past get in the way, so he put it out of his mind. Now, no one can forget what they do and what happens to them. In fact, Paul mentions his past life as a persecutor six times. He said about himself in 1 Corinthians 15:9 to 10, "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." You see, Paul could put it behind him and stop focusing on his sin, because God had forgiven him. And Paul understood the wonderful gift of God's grace and forgiveness.

Now, Paul didn't let God's grace prove vain. He worked harder than all the apostles, and God's grace worked with him and through him. Some go to church and "get saved." And then they leave the church and live as if nothing ever happened. The grace of God for them was some kind of emotional experience at church but not in their daily lives. They could not say, "For me to live is Christ." Lots of people want Jesus to be their Savior, but they aren't sure about Jesus as their Lord. They want to be saved but not change from their old way of life. They want the grace of Christ, but grace has to work in their lives. Otherwise it proves vain. And that's what Paul meant. We have to take the grace of God seriously enough to leave the old sinful things in the past and begin a life of love and service for the cause of Christ.

You see, we are born again to serve Christ. Paul said in Ephesians 2:8 to 10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, 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 so that we would walk in them." Now do you take that gift seriously enough to understand that you were created in Christ, that is born again, for the purpose of doing good works. God planned it that way from the beginning. He saved you from the domain of darkness and gave you the forgiveness of sins so that your life would be a blessing. He wanted you to be an example of good in an evil and corrupt world.

Has that grace proved true in you? When the Lord Jesus looks at you, does He see how His grace has made a difference? Now some of you are serving faithfully. You love the Lord, you help others, you attend church regularly, and give of yourself. Others, however, have not taken the grace of Christ so seriously. Some are caught up in sin, some haven't worshiped in years, and some only think of what they can get out of church rather than what they can give to the Lord. Knowing Jesus is more than "getting saved"; it means taking up our crosses every day and living the Christian life. Knowing Christ is a relationship with the Lord, loving the Lord, praising Him, praying to Him, being an active part of His family the church, keeping His commandments, giving of our time and talents, and sacrificing ourselves to reach out to a lost and dying world. I pray the grace of God has proved true in you and not vain. How sad it would be to have known the grace of God but to lose it. Don't let that happen to you.

Paul kept the future in mind. He said in Philippians 3:20 to 21, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." Oh, I'm proud to be an American, but I am foremost a citizen of heaven. My citizenship in heaven will last forever and ever and ever. You see my Lord is in heaven, my permanent residence will be in heaven, my inheritance is in heaven, and my heart is looking to heaven. My friend what's on your heart? What's in your life? Let's pray together. Oh Father we're thankful so much to You for the grace that has come about on our behalf because of the death of Jesus our Lord. Father we're so sorry for our sins and that He had to pay such a price. But we're thankful Father that He was willing to love us and pay that price. And Father we pray that the grace that You have given to us through Jesus may never prove vain in our lives. Help us to love You and to love one another. And Father Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Colossians 3 verses 1 to 4 says, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." Oh, I want to go to go and be with God when I die. And I hope that you do too. To make the transition from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved son, you must be saved by grace.

To be saved by grace, you must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Lord. You must repent and change your heart and life from the old way of sin to a new way of service and righteousness. You must confess the Name of Jesus before men. And, you must be baptized into Christ. And you do this by being immersed in water in His name. The result of your baptism is that God washes away your sins and adds you to His church. He takes away the old man of sin and gives you new life. It's in baptism that you're born again. Now perhaps you obeyed the gospel, you were baptized, but have wandered away from the Lord and want to return to Him. You can do that today by considering the grace of God and seeing it as the hidden treasure or the pearl of great price. Let the cross of Christ

touch your heart again. When your heart is open to Christ, you'll put away the sin and start embracing the good once again. Today is the best day to get your soul right with God! Don't waste another day without God. Come to Him today.

Well, we hope that today's study about the future has stirred you to consider your soul. Think about what God says. And if you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, than mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. You can also watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Just subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." There's also on-line a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

Please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. Keep searching God's Word with us and do tell a friend about this program. As always God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.