

Program Transcripts

For May 2015



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

May 2015

MAY 3 – NEVER ALONE

More than 44 percent of all adults in the United States are unmarried; that's more than 102 million people. Living alone presents many challenges to adults today, but the Lord's way provides some valuable help to single people.

MAY 10 – KEEPING MY ZEAL

Some people live their Christian life to the fullest, while others drift aimlessly. Some are passionate about their faith, while others are apathetic. How can we keep our passion and zeal for God alive?

MAY 17 – WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

When this life is over, we will look back at our lives wondering what we have done that mattered. Many spend their entire lives pursuing empty paths, but the one who is faithful to God pursues righteousness. What have you done?

MAY 24 – THE GOD OF THE BIBLE

Who is the God of the Bible and what is He like? If God did, in fact, create us, then we need to know Him. We need to know how we can come into a relationship with Him and what He desires of us.

MAY 31 – ONE OF A KIND

The Lord Jesus Christ is one of a kind. Though some say He is simply one great spiritual leader among others or He is like other ancient deities, Jesus is indeed unique in His life and in His teaching.

Never Alone

Living alone presents many emotional and spiritual challenges. Today we're exploring what God desires for those who live alone. The Scriptures are God's instruction book for everyone, in every stage of life, and in every circumstance. Whatever struggle or heartache you face, God has some comfort and help for you. He hasn't forgotten or abandoned you. He knows and cares about you. Many years ago, I did a funeral for an elderly man who had no family at all. Three funeral directors and I carried his casket to the graveside service; two ladies from the nursing home and I sang some hymns. No one else attended. Six people, no family, no friends! This man was utterly alone and buried by strangers.

Loneliness is a growing problem in our society. More than 44 percent of all adults in the United States are unmarried; that's 102 million people. A study by the American Council of Life Insurance reported that the most lonely group in America are college students. That's surprising! The survey next listed divorced people, welfare recipients, single mothers, rural students, housewives, and the elderly. Loneliness is a widespread problem; and in fact, one in four people complain about feeling lonely frequently. Persistent loneliness can harm our mental and our physical health.

The LORD God said, "It's not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). Living without a spouse is difficult, whether you've never married, become a widow, or have been divorced. Loneliness is painful and can confuse you into thinking that you are a loser or an outcast, but that's not necessarily so.

Our reading today comes from one of the Psalms of David, Psalm 139:1-5. "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me." Aren't you glad that God is so close? Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that no matter where we are that You're with us, that Your hand encloses us, that You know us so well. Father, we're grateful for that loving care. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

Loneliness makes people feel sad and empty, cut off from others and needing companionship. Loneliness typically includes anxiety because people need to connect with family. We all need a companion who shares our lives and dreams, who walks through life with us, who experiences our joys and sorrows, and who shares our responsibilities and decisions. Connecting with another is more than living in the same house. One can feel lonely even when surrounded by other people.

The Bible tells of several people who lived lonely lives. Joseph, the son of Jacob, grew up in a large family; but his half-brothers hated him so much that they sold him into slavery. At a young age, he lived as a stranger in a foreign land, Egypt. His master's wife tried repeatedly to seduce him. When he refused her advances, she falsely accused him and he spent years in prison, separated from home and family. I can only imagine how Joseph must have felt. However, Genesis 39:21 says, "But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer." Whatever Joseph endured, the Lord was with him. The Lord protected and provided for him what he needed, even if his family was far away. Joseph was able to endure his hardships and keep his faith, because he knew the Lord was with him.

Jesus walked alone much of his life. He never had a wife and children, but gave Himself completely to His mission of saving people from sin. Jesus had people all around Him all of His life. He grew up in a household with several brothers and sisters. He chose and trained twelve disciples who accompanied Him in His ministry. Jesus often stayed in the home of friends like Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Multitudes followed Him wherever He went. But in spite of all this, Jesus faced much of life alone and did what no other person could do. He went to the cross alone. While praying at Gethsemane His disciples fell asleep. His familiar friend, Judas, betrayed Him; Peter denied Him three times; and the rest were scattered from Him.

Like Joseph Jesus found strength in His relationship with His Father in heaven. Jesus said, "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I'm not alone, because the Father is with Me." (John 16:32). Jesus found the strength that He needed in the Father, and so can you. Peter revealed how Jesus dealt with lonely suffering. In 1 Peter 2:21-23 the Bible says, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; and while being reviled, He didn't revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." When Jesus suffered most, He put His life and His soul into the hands of the heavenly Father. There He found comfort and support.

Jesus began and ended His ordeal on the cross with prayer. He prayed for three hours while in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Lord Jesus prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). While Jesus wanted to escape the cross on one hand, He wanted to do the will of the Father on the other. His desire to fulfill the Father's will was greater and His true prayer, because of His love for His Father was "Thy will be done." Hebrews 5:7 says, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." In His pain and sorrow, the Father heard His reverent and obedient prayer.

As they were crucifying the Lord Jesus He was praying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34). Instead of focusing on their cruelty and the overwhelming pain of large nails going through His hands and feet, Jesus was thinking about their souls. Jesus prayed for them to be forgiven. We often focus on the evil and the ugly in life, but Jesus focused on saving people from their sins.

In Matthew 27:46, the Lord Jesus "cried out with a loud voice, saying ... 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" Did you know that these are words from Psalm 22:1. Psalm 22 is the most Messianic of all the psalms of David. It begins with a feeling of forsakenness; it speaks of the wagging of the head in verse 7; predicts the piercing of His hands and feet in verse 16; and speaks of the dividing of His garments in verse 18. Verse 27 speaks of all the nations turning to and worshiping the Lord. Could it be the Lord Jesus was reciting this Scripture to Himself and reassuring Himself that His death was not in vain?

Jesus kept entrusting Himself to the Father. In fact, Luke 23:46 says, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last." From the beginning to the end of this excruciating ordeal, Jesus found His strength in prayer. His example will help us in our times of pain and loneliness. First Peter 4:19 says, "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." When you're lonely, entrust your soul to a Creator who will not let you down.

The apostle Paul provides another example for those who live as singles. While some think he may have been married at some point in his life, he speaks of himself as being unmarried. He said, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:8). He realized that not everyone had the gift to live the single life yet he felt there were many advantages to living as a single. Paul knew that having family would get in the way of his ministry, and he wanted to be free of any responsibility except to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul often faced great difficulties. They put Paul in prison five times, and he spent about five years of his life in jail. If you read through the book of Philippians, you wouldn't think of Paul as depressed or defeated even though he was in prison when he wrote it. Instead, he spoke of his joy in that letter more than twenty times.

Paul learned the secret of being content in whatever circumstances he found himself. In context, Philippians 4 is speaking of Paul's financial wellbeing; but this is likely true of other circumstances of his life. He explains, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12-13). Paul found God's grace was sufficient for him, even when he was suffering. Having God in his life made up for all the things that he didn't have.

Paul also understood what it's like to face death alone. God spared Paul's life the first time he appeared before Caesar. Paul said, "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

When you're lonely, think on the promises of God. They will reassure you. The Lord God said, "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land" (Psalm 68:5-6). If you have God with you, you have far more than many of the largest families. The Lord Jesus promised, "and lo, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The Lord Jesus dwells with His people. I love the Lord's promise in John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." The Father and the Lord Jesus make their home with those who love Him enough to obey Him.

The Lord God promised Joshua, "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). This promise is repeated to Christians in Hebrews 13:5. David said, "I've been young, and now I'm old, yet I've not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread" (Psalm 37:25). What's true in practical matters is also true in our relationship with the Lord. David said, "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, But the LORD will take me up" (Psalm 27:10). When no one else was there for David, God was.

God said to the people of Jerusalem through the prophet Isaiah, "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me" (Isaiah 49:15-16). God thinks continually of His children. He thinks of their physical welfare, their spiritual strength, and their emotional needs. The Lord Jesus reminds

us that “your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). Oh, the Lord is a blessing to all of us.

David kept himself aware of the presence of God. Our reading today came from Psalm 139:1-5. He said, “O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.” David describes how intimately God knew him. God knew everything about him, how he acted, how he talked, even what he thought about. David said in verse 6, “Such knowledge is too wonderful to me, for me; it’s high; and I cannot attain it.”

God had known David from his conception in his mother’s womb. In Psalm 139:13-14 David says, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; and my soul knows it very well.” No one knows you and me as intimately as God. He’s watched over us every day of our lives, heard every prayer, known every thought, and provided every need. You cannot go anywhere outside the presence of God.

How does this help? Because you too can say, “I’m not alone; the Lord is with me.” You too can say His grace is sufficient for you. You too can say He will never leave you or forsake you. Give yourself to God! Let’s pray together. Father, we’re thankful that You love us so much, that You provide for every need, and that You’re with us through every trial of life. This we give thanks to You in the name of Jesus. Amen!

The outspoken atheist, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, who went to court to take prayer out of the schools, clearly sensed something was missing from her life. She wrote in her diary in 1977 that she had failed as a wife, as a parent, and as a politician. In a half dozen places in her diaries O’Hair wrote, “Somebody, somewhere, love me.” We all long to love and to be loved. There’s one place in your heart and soul that no one can fill but God. The loneliest person in the world isn’t the one who lacks family, but the one who has rejected God.

Some folks allow their love for God to fade as years pass. The Lord Jesus said to the lukewarm church at Laodicea, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; and if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). The Lord Jesus wanted to restore the warm and intimate fellowship He once had with the church in Laodicea, and He wants to have that same intimacy with you. Do you have a close, loving, peaceful relationship with the Lord?

Draw close to God; make Him part of your life every day! Become a Christian by placing your faith and your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He will never lie to you and wants to save you from your sins. Out of love, repent of your sins by forsaking them and following the Lord. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ, united with Him. We’re crucified with Christ in baptism that our body of sin might be done away with according to Romans 6:3-7. God washes away our sins in baptism according to Acts 22:16. Oh, become a Christian today!

Please get involved with a church of Christ. They love and support our ministry. If you’re looking for a Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ want guests, and you’ll be glad you worshiped with them.

Keeping My Zeal

Some Christians live their lives to the fullest, while others drift aimlessly. Some passionately pursue their faith, while others are lukewarm. How can we keep our passion and zeal for God alive? We love to study the Bible because we know the real author of the Bible is God. Peter said, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21). Men didn't dream up the words of the Bible; rather God's spokesmen, the prophets, were moved by the Spirit to speak. They said what God willed for us to know, to believe, and to do. Because the Bible is from God, we can begin to understand the heart of God and His love for us.

Today we're asking the question, "How can I keep my zeal for Christ and renew my passion for God?" I don't want a bored and dull faith. I don't want to forget what the Lord has done for me. The Lord created me, loved me, protected me, provided for me, taught me, disciplined me, and is preparing a home for me in heaven. How could I become apathetic toward one who has heard my prayers and opened doors for me? David expressed my heart, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2). God is our hope, our joy, and our Savior. Staying close to Him will keep our passion alive.

Our reading today comes from 2 Peter 1:5-11. "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You have given us the way to be able to respond to You out of love. Help us to give all diligence. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Have you ever been thirsty, really thirsty? The kind of thirst that demands you find some water? Israel knew what it was to have little water available. Israel had seasons of rain and seasons that didn't have much rain. Their streams would flow in the rainy seasons and dry up at other times. They could collect water in their cisterns, hoping to have enough water to last until the rains returned.

In the seventh century B.C., Israel turned its back on God and followed after the vain idols of nations surrounding them. God said about Israel, "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). By forsaking God, they also had forsaken the source of life. Don't imagine something else can take the place of God. Nothing and no one can.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." When was the last time that you were thirsty for

righteousness or for God? When did you last feel that being close to Him, worshiping Him, or listening to Him was an immediate demand? It's easy to forget what you have and take God for granted. God knows when people ignore Him, and forget Him, and forsake Him. Do you imagine that God will run to your side when you have neglected Him for many years?

Good relationships demand time and effort. Just like a marriage or any relationship, it can grow stale; and so our love for God can grow dull over time. If we want to strengthen our relationship, then we must take the time to make it grow and develop. We must first start paying close attention to what God says. Hebrews 2:1-3 says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" If we neglect to listen to God's Word, we'll fail to please Him and we risk the salvation of our souls.

Some people ignore God until they need Him. They focus their minds on the things of this world while they slowly drift away from God to pursue their own interests. They stop going to worship at church; they stop studying the Scriptures; they stop praying; and they begin talking and acting like the world. When some disaster then comes along, they feel God is distant. God doesn't forget His people, but His people frequently forget Him.

If you really want to have God in your heart, take a long look at what the Lord endured on the cross. The Lord Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). The Lord Jesus loves you beyond measure. He opened His heart to reach out to everyone. He bore the cross to die for the sins, not just of the whole world, but also for you. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't rule you out because you were imperfect. The only people Jesus died for were sinners.

See the crown of thorns on His head, see the nails through His hands and feet, see His back bloodied by the scourge, see His side pierced by the soldier, and see His blood offered for you. He suffered the shame of people mocking Him. He sacrificed Himself, "and with his stripes we are healed." "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). If the reality of what happened on the cross doesn't touch you like it once did, perhaps it's because you've let other things cause your heart to harden. Worldliness and sin cause people's hearts to grow cold.

Jesus didn't die on the cross to proclaim a health and wealth gospel that puts you in the center of the universe. He didn't die on the cross to help you become a millionaire, lose weight or overcome your fears and anxieties. He sacrificed Himself to redeem your soul from sin and to give you eternal life. His blood washes away your sin and causes you to be born again, so you'll be created in His image and become like Him. The Lord is interested in your inner man; and one day He will judge your soul on whether you gave of yourself as a humble servant.

In times of great prosperity, people tend to take their minds off God and put them on their own personal pleasures. Just as Israel was about to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land Moses warned them, "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I'm commanding you today; otherwise, when you've eaten and are satisfied, and you've built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).

Don't let your blessings keep you from remembering the One who gave you those blessings. James 1:17 says, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Apart from God we would have nothing. God is the One who gives us the ability to think, to work, and to make money. Moses said, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). The world wants you to be proud of all of your accomplishments. The Lord wants you to remember that every blessing that you have comes from what God provides in you and for you.

Some people turn away from God because they've faced some trying experience or circumstance. Rather than pull away from God, we need to draw close to God when we face a struggle or a heartache. We should turn to God for strength, for help, for encouragement, and for assurance.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." In hard times let's remember that God can do things that men cannot.

We draw close to God by making Him a priority in our lives every single day. We study the Bible because it reveals God's thinking and His will for our lives. To know God we have to listen to His words. We pray because we want God to know our hearts. First Thessalonians 5:17 teaches us to "pray without ceasing." God doesn't want us to quit praying. James 5:13 says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." If you want to be zealous for God, then make being with God a daily exercise. You build good relationships; they don't just happen.

To draw close to God, remember what He has done for you. David said, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that's within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle" (Psalm 103:1-5). God is ever good to you. Consider how God has answered your prayers, given you the Scriptures that give us hope and comfort, and strengthened you through the years.

If you want to draw close to God, keep your eyes on eternity. Colossians 3:1-4 says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

To draw close to God, focus on the good. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there's any excellence, if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." When we concentrate on the negative, we lose sight of God; but when we concentrate on the positive, we grow more thankful to God.

If you wish to be close to God, you've got to give Him room in your life. You must get the weeds out of your heart and soul. Just as weeds can take over a garden, so spiritual weeds can take over your heart. Weeds rob plants of the space and the nourishment that they need to grow and produce. Likewise, distractions of life can rob us of our time and our energy for God. The

Lord Jesus said, “The seed that fell among the thorns, this stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (Luke 8:14). Many Christians fail to grow in their faith and in their relationship with God because they devote themselves to things that push God out of their lives. We must learn not to let the things of this world come between God and us.

Sin destroys our desire to serve God because it replaces God and enslaves us. Ephesians 4:27 says, “do not give the devil an opportunity.” If you let sin into your life it will dominate your heart. The Lord Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). To overcome sin, you must put it to death. Romans 6:11 says, “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” You can't cut down a weed and expect to kill it; you must uproot it. If you simply cut it down, you'll see it grow back. Sin is like that. You can't just cut back on sin and expect that sin to go away. You must remove it altogether. Unless it's completely stopped, it'll keep growing and crowding out what is good and productive in your life.

You can't grow to be a productive and authentic Christian if you crowd God out by your whims and desires. You must give Him room in your life to grow. Many people let their jobs, and their hobbies, or their recreation come between God and themselves. None of these things is wrong in and of themselves; but if you let something, anything, take you away from your God, you can lose your soul. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

All this matters because it affects our relationship and our zeal for God. When our relationship is strong, then our hearts want to serve God; but when our relationship is weak, we let other things dominate our lives. If you wish to be zealous for God, then set your heart upon the Lord Jesus and upon all the blessings He has in store for you in eternity! Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You are so close to us. Help us to remain close to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

Is there anything in your life that's keeping you from being close to God? Some people never pick up a Bible, never utter a prayer, and never go to church. Is it any wonder that they feel far from God? They've shut the Lord out of their lives; and people grieve God when they shut Him out. He hasn't quit loving or caring for us, but it tears at God's heart to be abandoned by His people. If you're letting sin have a place in your heart, then it's time to put an end to that sin. You can't love sin and love God at the same time. James 4:4 says, “do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

To be rid of sin, you must repent. Repentance is an act of the heart that says, “I will no longer do what offends God, but what will please Him.” In repentance, we put a stop to sin, but we must also be forgiven. The Lord forgives us when by faith and repentance we're willing to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized. In baptism, we're crucified with Christ, “in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6). Baptism is that time that God saves us from sin.

Don't let your love for Christ grow cold. Don't grow weary of your faith and lose heart. Renew your faith. Restore your heart. Revive your spirit. Demonstrate your faith and love. Listen to God, love God, pray to God, grow a desire for God, and tell everyone about His goodness and kindness in Christ Jesus. Get involved!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

How would your friends describe you? Would they say you were a good person or a rascal? Today we're asking people to look at themselves to see how they've lived. When life is over, we'll look back at our lives wondering what we've done that mattered. Did we please the Lord or did we please ourselves? Were we a blessing to the people around us or did we bring them trouble? Many spend their entire lives pursuing empty paths, but the one who is faithful to God pursues righteousness. What have you done with your life? What will people remember about you?

Many Christians are content to be Christians in name only. They want to wear the name, but they aren't willing to take their faith seriously. My friend, Steve Higginbotham, recently wrote about some misplaced desires of people today. He said, "We want a Savior, but we don't want a Lord. We want a crown, but we don't want a cross. We want a harvest, but we don't want to sow the seed. We want to go to Heaven, but we won't go to church. We want to grow spiritually, but we don't want to feed on his word. We want Hollywood to 'clean up its act,' but we don't want to stop watching. We want the right to pray, even in school, but we don't want to pray. We want the Ten Commandments posted, but we don't want to live by their moral principles. We want to love God, but we don't want to abhor sin. We want to die the death of the righteous, but we don't want to abandon the lifestyle of the sinner." Steve is right. People want to go to heaven, but they don't live as Christians should. What about you? What have you done with your life?

Our reading today comes from Psalm 15, "O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change; He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken."

The Bible gives some interesting assessments of people's lives. For instance, Genesis 5:24 says, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." We learn from Hebrews 11:5, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God." Walking with God pleases Him. James 2:23 calls Abraham "the friend of God." Are you God's friend? God said, "I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will" (Acts 13:22). Are you doing all the will of God?

Then, there is the evil King Jehoram who killed all of his brothers with a sword. When he died, 2 Chronicles 21:20 says of him, "And he departed with no one's regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings." In the New Testament, we find Judas Iscariot, who stole money from the money bag and betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss. We also find Demas. Though Demas had once been faithful, 2 Timothy 4:10 says, "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Were you once faithful, and have you fallen away from the Lord?

The Bible teaches that we'll be judged according to our works, whether good or bad. Jesus promised, "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and

then he will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27). The Lord Jesus said, “And all the churches will know that I am he who searches the mind and the heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works” (Revelation 2:23). How we live matters. Our works tell what’s in our hearts, and the Lord will judge us by whether we have served Him or not.

The first thing that God looks for in people is whether they believe. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it’s impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” A faithful Christian believes the gospel and he knows the love of God. His faith is not merely a belief, but is a way of life. He takes Whom he believes and what God says seriously.

There are different levels of faith. Some people believe intellectually, that is, they say God exists and His way is right, but their belief doesn’t influence their behavior. They are believers in their minds but not in their lives. God wants our faith to be deeper than that. He wants us to believe on the involvement level, that is, our faith should impact how we live and our values. We ought to do more than just believe Christ Jesus rose from the dead. We live in obedience to Him, because we understand that He will raise us up one day. We ought to do more than believe that Jesus is Lord; we ought to obey Him as our Lord.

Unless our faith matters enough for us to practice it, it’s not any good. We must act on what we believe. We must move from a dead faith to a living one. James 2:14-16 says, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it doesn’t have works, is dead.” We want a living, active faith that makes a difference in our own lives and blesses the lives of others.

Someone asks, “Well Phil, aren’t we saved by faith alone?” While it’s true that we’re saved by faith, to talk about “faith alone” is to talk about a dead faith. James 2:18-19 says, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Well even the demons believe—and shudder!” Saying that you have faith, but are unwilling to demonstrate that faith makes you no better than the demons who believe so strongly that they shudder at the thought of God. What are you doing with your faith?

James 2:20-24 says, “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. A person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

When God tested Abraham, Abraham demonstrated his faith by offering his son Isaac upon the altar. Of course, God didn’t allow him to slay his son; God was testing him to see if he would obey Him. Many years earlier, God told Abraham to leave his home and family and go to a strange place. Hebrews 11:8 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Faith obeys! A dead faith talks a good game, but a living faith obeys what it believes.

John the Baptist said, “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). God never speaks approvingly of a faith that will not obey. The disobedient can expect one day to see the wrath of God. A believer who will not obey will never enjoy God’s grace. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 says, “when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” God loves everybody, but His grace and favor is extended to those who love and obey Him.

Because of this, we must move away from being spectators to being participants. Some say, “I love Jesus, but I don’t want to be in the church.” The church is the family of Jesus, the body of Christ. If you love and want to be like Jesus, then you must be part of His church. The church was and is His idea and it’s His family. Faith in Christ and worshiping with the church is not like going to a basketball game where we can sit in the stands and watch others on the floor. God expects each of us to sing, to pray, to listen to the Bible, to commune with Him in the Lord’s Supper, and to support the work of the church. Living for God means I am busy producing fruit every day, working for His cause, carrying my cross, sharing the gospel, and blessing the lives of other people. The Lord Jesus said, “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8). Don’t talk your faith, live it, live it out every day.

Ralph Grant in his book, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, told the story of the Franks during the Dark Ages. When the gospel came to Northern Europe, large numbers of these savage tribes of the Franks were being baptized. These people had been warriors for generations, so teaching them the ways of peace was difficult. They were not sure they wanted to give up their savage fighting, so they went into the waters of baptism holding their battle-axes up out of the water. They would say, “This hand has never been baptized!” They were willing to make a commitment to Christ in some things but would not give up their fighting.

Of course, one is either completely baptized, or he’s not really baptized at all. There’s no such thing as baptizing “everything but the hand.” God only accepts us on His terms; and He will not accept anything less than a total commitment. God doesn’t want some parts of you; He wants all of you. This is one reason baptism into Christ is an immersion of the entire person in water; baptism is a total commitment to God. Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we’ve 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.” The whole person is buried and raised with Christ, the whole person has all his sins forgiven, and the whole person rises from the water to walk in newness of life.

We sing the hymn, “All to Jesus I Surrender.” Have you truly surrendered all to the Lord Jesus? Are you totally committed? Listening to the way some Christians talk, I wonder if their tongues were ever baptized? Some continually gossip, and others constantly complain. Some tell dirty jokes, while others take the name of the Lord in vain. Some Christians tell half-truths, and others are given to slander. Taming the tongue is difficult, but becoming a Christian means keeping a close guard on our mouths. James sadly said, “from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way” (James 3:10).

The selfish and evil thinking of some Christians makes you wonder if their minds were ever baptized. Some are full of greed, while others are full of pride. They think little of others and they step on others to get an advantage. Becoming a Christian means putting Christ first, others second, and ourselves last. Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Considering what some people watch on television or at the movies, you'd wonder if their eyes and their ears were baptized? Some Christians have grown callous to sinful words, to nudity, to violence, to anger, and to all kinds of immoral behavior. Years ago, people expected the movie industry to maintain some moral standards. If a movie contained ungodly language or ungodly behavior, people walked out and told the theater managers they didn't care for such indecent movies. Today, one can hardly go to a movie or watch a television program that doesn't have indecent language or behavior. What are you letting into your heart?

How some people treat others makes you wonder if their hearts were baptized? Some people simply don't know how to be patient with others or how to forgive. They seem to have forgotten the words of our Lord, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Many people live with anger, fear, or hatred in their hearts. Paul said, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32).

How are you living? Do you follow God? Whenever someone looks at your life, are you a good person, or are you a rascal?

God sets the bar high for those who would follow Him. The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). God expects us to love Him more than anything else, and to put Him first.

Someone asks, "Well Phil, aren't we saved by grace?" Yes, we are saved by the grace of God; and that grace is a precious gift that can't be earned. We can't obligate God to save us. But because the gift is precious, God examines our lives to see whether we have genuinely received the gift or took it for granted. The Lord Jesus out of love paid a very high price to save you and me from sin. It matters to Him how we receive that gift. If we care so little for Him that we ignore His teaching and live as we want to, why should it surprise you or me, if the gift that we neglected was lost? The Lord will judge you and me according to our response to His grace. Have you lived in a way that shows that you love the Lord?

To enjoy the gift of salvation, we must lovingly respond to His grace by faith, by repenting of our sins, by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized into Christ. When you love the Lord, you don't argue with the Lord about what to do but simply obey Him. Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin. We obey because we believe, and our obedience reveals our faith. Acts 2:38 still says, "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." Won't you do that today?

The God of the Bible

Who is the God of the Bible and what is He like? Today we're going to take a look at what God reveals about himself. The Bible isn't simply another book; it's God's book, divinely inspired and full of wisdom. Through the Bible God reveals His character, His heart, and His nature. Bible history is truly His story. The Scripture reveals how He created and interacted with man through the centuries. One thing is for sure: God loves everyone and has always wanted what is best for us. This is why we spend our time studying the Bible. Nothing else measures up.

We know many reasons to believe in God: the starry heavens above, the moral law within, the complexity of the cells of our body are only a few. These things couldn't have just happened by accident. No, they came by intelligent design. Only a supremely intelligent and supremely powerful Being could have created them. That person is God! Romans 1:20 says that God's "invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." We can perceive some things about God from looking at the world, but to know God truly, we must go to Scripture.

If God did in fact, create us, then we need to know Him. We need to know how we can come into a relationship with Him and what He desires from us. We can't find that in the woods or by the seashore; we find God by looking into His divinely revealed Word, the Bible. Only the Bible can help us understand His character, and His nature, and His love for us.

Our reading today comes from Isaiah 40:25-26, "To whom then will you liken Me, That I would be *his* equal?" says the Holy One. 'Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these *stars*, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of *His* power, Not one of *them* is missing."

How do you view God? J. B. Phillips, many years ago, wrote a book entitled, *Your God Is Too Small*, which created quite a stir. He saw that what many thought God was like and how the Bible describes God were quite different. Many people have never taken the time to study what the Bible actually says about the nature and the character of God. Some simply focus on one aspect of the Lord's nature and ignore other aspects that are just as important. God is gracious, but God is also holy and just. God is compassionate, but He will also punish evildoers who will not repent. God is not lopsided in character. He doesn't have faults like we do.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For My thoughts (God is speaking) are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." Since we are imperfect and weak creatures, it's hard to understand our Creator who has no imperfections or weaknesses. We'd like to believe that He's just like us, but He isn't. We compromise, but He doesn't. We sin, but He doesn't. We lie to ourselves, but God never lies. He is indeed perfect.

God is not a "force" or simply an immoveable object, like some people think. Scripture describes God as a person. He thinks, feels, acts, loves, wills and judges. He has the mind, the emotions, and the will of a person. He can be grieved as He was in Noah's day in Genesis 6. He can love and He showed that love by giving Jesus for our sins. He can rejoice when sinners repent, as He does in Luke chapter 15. He can reason and He asks us to reason with Him in Isaiah 1:18. He can become angry and does so with those who will not repent. God can plan

and prepare for the future. When Jesus prayed, He prayed "Our Father." Christians have a relationship with God as a child would with his father. God made man in His own image, so that man has an intelligent and moral spirit.

When Jesus came to earth, He had flesh and blood; but the Father in heaven and the Holy Spirit are not physical or material. God is spirit. The Lord Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). God is indeed spirit; and the Lord said, "a spirit does not have flesh and blood" (Luke 24:39). Paul told the philosophers at Athens, "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24-25). God created man. Paul said, "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, or an image formed by the art and thought of man" (Acts 17:29).

Sometimes children ask, "Well, where did God come from?" The answer is that God has always existed. Indeed, He is self-existent. Acts 17:28 says, "in Him we live and move and have our very being." God introduced himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14 as, "I AM WHO I AM." This phrase was revered as the holy name of God by the Israelites. Today we use words like Yahweh or Jehovah to reflect this self-existent nature of God.

God is not only spirit and self-existent, He is also infinite. God does not have the limitations that men have. Space and time cannot limit God. As to time, God is eternal. Moses wrote, "Before the mountains were born, Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2). Second Peter 3:8 says, "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." Unlike us, God exists outside of time. He created time for us, but He is not limited by it. Nor is God limited by space. When Solomon finished building the Temple, he said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good."

Beyond this, we must confess that God is all-wise and all-knowing. God knows and understands all things about people, about nature, about animals and the universe. Romans 11:33-36 says, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor? Or who has first given to him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

God is not only all-knowing, He's also all-powerful. The Lord Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). Job 42:2 says God "can do all things." Jeremiah said, "Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You" (Jeremiah 32:17). Being all-powerful doesn't mean that God can or will perform logical impossibilities, such as making a square circle or a stone so large it can't be moved.

Ephesians 4:6 says there is "one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." God is certainly unique. The first of the Ten Commandments says, "You shall have no

other gods before Me.” That is, no other gods besides Me. Man-made gods are forbidden, because they are imaginary and don’t exist. Idols can’t reflect the true grandeur and glory of the eternal God who doesn’t live in temples made with hands according to Acts 17:24. Men sin against God when they forsake the immortal God and they serve creatures as the pagans did with idolatry in ancient times. Paul said, “Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4).

Since God is Lord of all, He is sovereign. God rules the nations. According to Jeremiah 18:7-10, God plants and uproots nations. According to Acts 17:26, He “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” God now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). At the end of the world, God will judge each of us according to our works and according to His Word.

As the judge of men, thankfully God is impartial. God doesn’t show favoritism, but He accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right (Acts 10:34-35). Because God is holy, we can regard what He teaches as righteous. Psalm 19:9 says, “The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.” God’s moral and religious standards will stand firm at the judgment. Though people want to set God’s ways aside, God has spoken in His Word what His teaching is about, and those things regarding spiritual matters and about morals. God hasn’t given us any weak or useless laws. Each one has a purpose.

As we consider God’s character, we must realize that God is utterly holy. Isaiah tells of the seraphim who cry out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:3). James 1:13 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.” God commands His children, “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Because God is holy, sin is offensive. People today are keenly aware of what offends them, but they may not know what offends God. While God loves the sinner and has provided a way of salvation, God still gets offended when the people He loves sin against Him.

God’s grace doesn’t cancel out His holiness. God never approves of sin. The prophet Habakkuk says about God, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor” (Habakkuk 1:13). According to Hebrews 6:18, the Bible says “it is impossible for God to lie,” or to commit any sin. It’s God’s holiness that demands justice when people sin. God’s goodness means that He cannot ignore sin. God doesn’t simply make up sins arbitrarily. Sin is sin, because God knows it’s destructive and harmful. God speaks out against sin, because He loves people. Being holy is good for people; and sin is always harmful.

In addition, God is unchangeable. God Himself said, “I am the Lord, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6). Moses wrote, “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). God doesn’t have the weaknesses of fickle men who change at a whim. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” I am thankful that God doesn’t change, because that means that we can count on Him to keep His

promises. We can also count on His commandments and His moral teaching. Culture doesn't change God. Right and wrong do not change with the times.

I am thankful that God is merciful. The Lord Jesus said that your Father in heaven "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). Even though men were foolish and disobedient, God's kindness and love appeared in Christ Jesus. Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy." God's mercy can save even the worst of sinners when they repent and turn to Him.

That's because God is love. We know what love is and what good is, because of the great example of our God in Christ Jesus. First John 4:7-11 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. Now in this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." God's character teaches us how to live and how to love. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Why does this matter? The more we know about God, the more we love Him and the more we want to be like Him. Christ embodied every good and righteous thing, and everything He did blesses us and gives us life. The Lord Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). We need to know the Lord Jesus; and the more we know Him, the better our understanding of our Father in Heaven will be.

God is God. He created us, gives us life, and will judge us at the last day. Whether we accept or approve of Him, He's still the one true and living God. God's power, His teaching, and character hasn't changed, even if our culture changes. What we think or feel about God doesn't define Him. God defines and describes Himself through His revealed Word. We must accept Him on His terms. The God of the Bible is very different from many popular beliefs. Some serve a false god that they wish existed rather than the true God revealed in Scripture. This is why we must search the Scriptures. We want the true God.

I have a question. Paul called the God of the Bible "my God" in Philippians 4:19. Is He your God? Be honest: are you living in such a way that honors or dishonors God, that pleases or offends Him? If you are living in such a way that God is offended, then shouldn't you think about your soul?

To get right with God, love and believe in Jesus Christ. Believe that He died for your sins and arose from the dead. Make Him your Lord by turning from your sins in repentance. Becoming a Christian and transforming your life, leaving that old man of sin to become like Jesus Christ. With your love, and faith, and repentance, confess your faith and be baptized into Christ. Now baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism is the time when God buries the old man of sin and raises you up to walk in newness of life according to Romans 6:3-7. In baptism God acts upon you, making you His child, adding you to the church, forgiving your sins, and giving you eternal life. What are you waiting for? The Bible says in Acts 22:16, "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." Won't you do that today?

One of a Kind

The Lord Jesus is truly unique. No one in all history compares with His love, His purity, or His honesty. Today we're going to see how Jesus is one of a kind. We know the Scriptures come from God, and there is no other volume in all the earth like the Bible. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Because it's God's Word, the Bible can work in our lives like no other book. It can teach us the truth, keep us straight, and train us to do what is right. God blessed us greatly through the Bible.

In all of history, Jesus stands unique; He is one of a kind. We can find no one so pure, so kind, so humble, so loving, or so honest. He sets the standard for morality, for sacrificial giving, for compassion, and for righteousness. He is our only hope, our only joy, our only peace, and our only source of eternal life. The apostle Paul said of Jesus, that He "became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). What is Jesus to you? How do you regard Him? Have you set Him apart as Lord in your life? Is He one of a kind in your life? When you boast, do you boast in the Lord?

Our scripture reading today is from Acts 4:8-12. Peter and John had healed a lame man who was in the temple. They were called to account by the chief priests and others. Here are the words of Peter. "And then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.'" Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful for the fact that Jesus came to this earth. And we know that we must give our faith and our trust to Him. Father help us everyday to be pleasing in your sight, and to love our Lord. It's in His name we pray, Amen!

Dr. James Francis wrote this brief essay about Jesus Christ in 1926, "Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a little carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years, He was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying, His executioners gambled for the only piece of property that He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress. And I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built,

and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.”

Jesus was and is indeed one of a kind! We can thank God that He came to this earth and gave Himself that we might have forgiveness, that we might have eternal life, and hope. Because of Jesus, we have reconciliation with the Father. Because we pray in His name, the Father hears and answers. Because of Jesus, we can become children of God and fellow heirs with Christ in heaven. How is Jesus able to do all this?

First, Jesus is unique because He has always existed. John 1:1-3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Some see Jesus as nothing more than a myth; others see Him only as a traveling preacher. The Bible, however, teaches that Jesus was in the beginning and created you and me. In Revelation 22:13 Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” The Lord Jesus told the Jews, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). In saying this, Jesus was revealing His divine nature, that He’s always existed.

Second, Jesus is unique in that He fulfilled prophecies made hundreds of years before His birth. You cannot find prophecies of other religious leaders like those that are made about Christ. The apostles appealed repeatedly to God’s prophecies found in the Old Testament to show Jesus is the promised prophet and the Messiah. J. Barton Payne listed 191 Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. Alfred Edersheim, a Jewish Christian scholar, cited 456 Old Testament passages referring to the Messiah. The Jews knew that a Messiah would come, and Jesus fulfilled those well-known prophecies precisely as no one else could.

The prophets knew that Jesus would be a son of David, that He would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, that He would be betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver, that He would be crucified, that His bones would not be broken, that soldiers would gamble over His clothes, and that darkness would cover the land. The prophets knew that He would ride triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey, that He would teach in parables, and that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Isaiah, the prophet, knew that He would make His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.

The Lord Jesus could say, “these are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Jesus said the prophets wrote about Him in John 5:39. Peter could claim, “the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). Yes, Jesus fulfilled the many prophecies given about Him over hundreds of years. Can anyone else make such a claim? No, Jesus is indeed one of a kind.

Third, Jesus is unique in that He was born of a virgin. Isaiah made the prophecy about Him in Isaiah 7:14. The apostle Matthew records its fulfillment in Matthew 1:20-25. Matthew tells how an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).

Now when Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: and he took his wife, but he knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” The virgin birth is unique; and only God could make that happen.

Fourth, Jesus is unique in that He never committed a single sin. Peter said, “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus could ask, “Which one of you convicts me of sin?” (John 8:46). Could you say that? Jesus could not have sacrificed Himself for our sins if He Himself had committed sins. First John 3:5 says, “You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.”

Because He was sinless, He was the perfect high priest and the perfect sacrifice. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 7:26-27 explains, “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all time when he offered up himself.”

Fifth, Jesus is unique, because He bodily arose from the dead. The Lord Jesus confidently predicted “that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Matthew 16:21). The eyewitnesses to His death and resurrection say it happened precisely that way. Through the years, others have predicted that they would rise from the dead, but no one has; no one else has risen, only Jesus Christ. One can visit the tombs of the world’s great religious leaders, and those tombs possess the bones of those leaders. Jesus’ tomb, however, is empty.

Jesus did not get resurrected in an emergency room after an accident. He wasn’t given a shock after His heart stopped. No, they took His dead body to the tomb. Pilate would not release His body until he was sure that Jesus was dead. That’s why the soldier pierced His side with the spear. John 19:34 says that when he was pierced with that spear, “immediately blood and water came out,” giving proof that He had died. There can be no doubt, He truly was dead. They bound His body “in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews” (John 19:40). He spent three days in the tomb, but He arose just as He promised.

Both His disciples and His enemies knew the place where He was buried. His enemies tried to prevent His disciples from stealing the body and claiming a resurrection. Matthew 27:62-66 says, “the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and they said, ‘Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I am to rise again.’ Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.’ Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; you go, make it as secure as you know how.’ And they went and they made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.”

But the guards and the seals, the governor’s seal, couldn’t prevent Jesus from rising from the dead. God planned and ordained His resurrection. David prophesied a thousand years before the time of Christ, “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (Psalm 16:10). The apostle Peter cited this passage and declared, “God raised Him up again,

putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:24). Again, Peter said of David, “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 are all, (that is all the apostles), witnesses” (Acts 2:31-32).

Yes, Jesus had witnesses. He appeared on twelve occasions to His disciples. Paul said, “He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:6). His disciples were skeptical at first, and some had hardened their hearts in unbelief. But Acts 1:3 says Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days.” They saw Him, heard Him, touched Him, and ate with Him. In being resurrected like this, Jesus is one of a kind. These disciples who could hardly believe at first, were bold and courageous after the forty days. They told the story of His resurrection again and again in spite of all the opposition and persecution. They wouldn’t sit silent and leave the truth untold.

Some skeptics claim Jesus wasn’t the only god that died and was resurrected. They say Jesus actually borrowed this idea from some pagan gods. The problem with this claim, as the historian and Biblical scholar Mike Licona has pointed out in his book “The Case for the Real Jesus”, is that the reports of pagan gods dying and rising from the dead can only be found after the first century. While there are reports of dying and rising gods among the pagan religions, there are no reports of someone dying for the sins of mankind and rising up bodily like Jesus did. What we do find is pagan religions talking about the changing seasons of winter to spring being like a resurrection. No, the gospel story is indeed unique; and there simply is no one like Jesus Christ.

Why does this matter? Because the Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God, who can save our souls. Is He your Savior and your Lord? Let’s pray together. Father help us to give our hearts and lives and souls to Jesus. To serve Him all the days that we live. And help us to love You. In Jesus name, Amen!

Everything in history before Jesus points forward to Him, and our calendars point back to Him. He is Lord of all people, of all places, of all tongues, and of all time. He is indeed one of a kind. We must place our faith and trust in Jesus. The apostle Paul wrote, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The word “gospel” means good news, and everything Jesus did is good news for you and me. He died for our sins; He arose so that we might have life. Like the Christians of old, we need to receive the gospel, believe it, and hold fast to it. The gospel has the power to save you, and if you receive and obey it, it can. Put your faith in Jesus, and in His Word. Repent of your sins and begin following the Christ. Confess your faith in the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. And be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. When you’re baptized into Christ, according to Romans 6:3-7, you’ll be united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Then you’ll be raised with Him to walk in newness of life, free from sin, and with the hope of eternal life. No one can give you that life but Jesus. Follow Him; serve Him! And do it today!