

# Program Transcripts

September 2023



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**September 2023**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **SEPTEMBER 3 – MISINFORMATION**

If you love the Lord, do you also love the truth? Many people claim to be religious but fail to see the value of the truth found in the word of God. They would rather be misinformed than to hear what the Lord has to say.

## **SEPTEMBER 10 – OBEYING THE LORD**

Does it matter what Jesus says and whether we obey Him? Many think God ought to be satisfied with us if we do anything religious at all, but the Lord demands obedience that shows respect to Him.

## **SEPTEMBER 17 – THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Many think the Lord's kingdom will be set up in the future, while others believe Jesus built His kingdom in the first century. Was the Lord's kingdom set up in the first century? The answer to this question can be found in the Scriptures.

## **SEPTEMBER 24 – THE EPISTLE OF JOY**

When life is filled with troubles, strife, and uncertainty, how do you find joy? The apostle Paul endured many problems in life but still found ways to rejoice in the Lord. The book of Philippians teaches us how to have such joy.

## Misinformation

If you love the Lord, do you also love the truth? In this lesson we're going to see the difference between the truth and a lie.

Were here to search the Scriptures, because we know that the Bible is inspired. God breathed out the words found in Scripture. And God willed every single word found there. Because God is all-knowing and utterly wise but never lies, we can trust what we read in Scripture. Humans, on the other hand, don't know everything and are often fooled. We can't always trust people, so we must measure what we hear by God's Word.

We live in a culture filled with misinformation, where people with agendas have spun lies and half-truths. This is not new; people in all ages have told falsehoods to gain control of others. The devil himself uses lying wonders and the deception of wickedness to lead people away from God. Many will "perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 10). We need to believe the truth rather than take pleasure in what is wicked or what is false.

Our reading today comes from 1 Kings chapter 13 verses 15 to 18. This tells about a man, a religious man, but he believed a lie.

Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." He said, "I cannot return with you, nor go with you, nor will I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. For a command came to me by the word of the LORD, 'You shall eat no bread, nor drink water there; do not return by going the way which you came.'" He said to him, "I also am a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him.

You know what? Even today sometimes people who know the Lord, or think they know the Lord, will lie to you. Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to believe You and what we know You have said. And not be influenced by the things that people have dreamed up. And the lies that they tell. Help us Heavenly Father to hold fast to the truth. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

After King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam took the throne. Because Rehoboam was immature and greedy for power, the people rejected him; and this brought about the division of Israel from Judah. Jereboam, who became the leader of these rebellious ten tribes, caused Israel to sin by making two golden calves and placing them in the cities of Bethel and Dan. Jereboam feared the people would go to Jerusalem and return to the Lord, so he told the people in 1 Kings 12 verse 28, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."

Jereboam claimed that his golden calves represented the God who led Israel out of Egypt. And he incited the people to offer sacrifices and burn incense to the golden calves, which he had made. These idols could never be God. The second of the Ten Commandments says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20 verses 4 to 6).

Well, how could the people of Israel depart from God's teaching and believe such an outright lie? Well, they had to ignore almost everything they knew about God in order to follow Jereboam's false and man-made religion. I'm reminded of Paul's statement in Romans 1:25 about people who "exchanged the

truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” How can something man-made create mankind?

God saw what Jereboam did and decided to send a man of God to the altar at Bethel, where Jereboam was, and he was to speak out against the king. Well, in 1 Kings 13 this man of God at God's direction predicted a sign or miracle: he said, “This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: ‘Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out’” (1 Kings 13:3). Well, it happened just as God said that very day. The altar was split apart, and the ashes were poured out. The man of God left Bethel, going home by a different route and refusing to eat bread or drink water.

Well, 1 Kings 13 tells of an old prophet who chased down the man of God and said, “Come home with me and eat bread.” The man of God replied, “I may not return with you, or go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place, for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, ‘You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.’”

Well, the old prophet, however, was not content. 1 Kings 13:18, 19 tells the sad story. The old prophet said, well “I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, ‘Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.’” But he lied to him. So he (that is the man of God) went back with him and ate bread in his house and drank water. Now apparently the man of God placed his trust in what the lying prophet said rather than what God himself had told him.

Because of his disobedience, God punished the man of God. A lion met him on the way and killed him. Because he believed a lie, he suffered the wrath of God. Now some people say it doesn't matter what you believe if you love God. My friend, that isn't so! It matters what you believe. The man of God had to learn that truth the hard way. I hope you won't make that mistake. If you believe a lie, it could cost you your soul.

Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, warning them not to follow a false gospel. Paul said in Galatians 1:6 to 9, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one (that) you received, let him be accursed.”

You know even if the source seems to be credible, such as an angel from heaven, we must not distort what God says, in His word that we know came from Him, and then turn to a lie. Many are deceived by distorted gospels today. They think they believe the truth, but they've placed their confidence in a distortion of the truth. There is but one gospel, and anything contrary to that one gospel is dangerous to the soul.

Christians must help people to distinguish truth from error. And that means, because we love people and want them to be saved, we must proclaim the truth and expose what is false. It's not mean-spirited but loving to expose error and to help people learn the truth. James 5:19 to 20 says, “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

Paul taught Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24 to 26, that “The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by

him to do his will.” Our task as humble and gentle servants of God is to help people in error to find the truth, to help them to go to heaven. I would rather tell people the truth that hurts for a little while than tell people a lie that causes them to be lost eternally. My friend, it matters what we believe.

Adolf Hitler once boasted, “By the skillful and sustained use of propaganda, one can make a people see even heaven as hell or an extremely wretched life as paradise.” Hitler told many outrageous lies. He held that if you tell a big enough lie long enough and tell it frequently enough, it'll be believed. He realized that people would fall for a big lie quicker than they would a little one. By telling lies, Hitler and the Nazis were able to slaughter eleven million people in his concentration camps. The more outrageous the lie, the more some become gullible. The old song says that if you are not willing to stand for something, then you'll fall for anything. We have to stand with God. We stand with His Word, the Bible.

And the difference between the truth and a lie is as great as the difference between God and the devil. The Lord Jesus is the source of truth, but the devil has always been a liar. The Lord Jesus Himself described the devil this way in John 8:44, He said, “He (the devil) was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

While the devil speaks lies, He pretends to be a follower of God. He wants everyone to think he's moral and true, but he has no intention of being moral or speaking the truth. He's out to fool people into following His error. 2 Corinthians 11:14 to 15 says, “No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, (then he says) whose end will be according to their deeds.” Being religious doesn't make a person righteous, and calling oneself a preacher or prophet doesn't guarantee what one says is true.

Many people like Pilate have, frankly, given up on trying to find the truth, when it's staring them right in the face. They don't really want the truth, and they have no love for the truth. Because of sin and pleasure, many would rather believe fantasy, a lie than take the steps necessary to believe the truth. We don't like to call sin sinful, so we lie to ourselves about when life begins or whether marriage matters. We don't like to think of anyone as being wrong, so we decide that every doctrine must be right. We don't like to think of anybody being lost, so we consider everybody saved. Someone doesn't like the teaching of the necessity of baptism for salvation, so they decide baptism isn't necessary. We don't want to admit there is but one gospel, so we think any gospel is true. We don't like to admit there is one faith, so we believe every road takes you to heaven. Oh, those are all lies. But we're not the measure of truth, as human beings. God is the measure of truth and His Word, the bible, declares what is truth.

No matter how strongly we believe that something is right, it's false if it contradicts what the Lord says in His Bible. We need to know that the Lord Jesus takes His Word seriously, even if we don't. The Lord said in John 12:48 to 50, that “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” Now Jesus knew His words were the measure of truth and would affect our eternal salvation. If we reject His words, we'll be lost; but if we abide by His words, we can know the truth and the truth will set us free and we can be saved.

When believing the truth is demanding but believing a lie is convenient and popular, unfortunately many choose to believe the lie. They believe what they want to believe and they find preachers and teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. Tickle their ears. They get complacent and will insist that their lie is really the truth. They will do nearly anything rather than listen to what God has actually said. Solomon urges us in Proverbs 23:23, “Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and

understanding.” My friend, buying the truth comes at a high price. It means being honest enough to admit that what we have heard in the past may not be true.

Why are we speaking like this? Because many in our religious world no longer value the truth and has bought into lies. We need to be like the noble Bereans. Acts 17:11 says, “Now these Jews (that were in Berea) were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Have you searched the Scriptures to find out if what you believe is so? Or have you simply accepted what people have told you? Have you tested the truthfulness of what you believe by a serious study of God's Word? Have you paid the price to buy the truth? Have you searched God's Word.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we pray that You will put in our hearts a desire for the truth. That we will love what You have taught us in Your word the gospel. That we'll read it and study it and that we'll believe it and be obedient to it. This is our humble and our urgent and our fervent pray Father. This in Jesus name, Amen.

Many have faced the bitter reality that what they once believed was not biblical and true. We all get fooled, but we aren't left without hope. We can know the truth. Jesus promised we could in John 8:32, and God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2 and verse 4). God reveals the truth in His Word, the Bible; but we must take the time to search it out, believe it, and obey it. It's not enough to know the Word. We must let it touch our hearts and shape our lives. Ignorance causes confusion, lies cause chaos, but knowledge of God leads to order and wisdom.

James 1:22 to 25 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” If we do nothing with what we've learned from God, we've robbed ourselves of a blessing.

And if your soul isn't right with God, don't lie to yourself. You need to follow God's truth! To become a Christian and free from sin, you must believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Repent of your sins, confess Jesus as the Christ and be baptized, immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Ah, do it today! Do it today.

## Obeying the Lord

Does it matter what Jesus says and whether not we obey Him? Let's look at what it means to obey the Lord.

We love God and we want to hear all He has to say. We love God and know that doing His will blesses everybody. We aren't like those who don't care. We care because we know it affects our lives and our eternal destiny. We pray that you will care too! Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and we want to be a part of your life each week.

The Greek word for "obedience" means "to hear what an authority is requiring and then act upon it." In other words, to obey is to submit to the command of one in authority; it's to be compliant with the demands or requests of someone who is over us. The first-grade teacher repeats endlessly to children "Listen and follow instructions." Now if we learn to listen and follow instructions, we'll obey. We intentionally do what we are told to do the way it should be done. We don't argue or change the instructions. When we were young, our parents used to say, "I told you what I wanted. Mind me!" Well we knew that pleasing our parents brought trust and reward. We also knew that failing to mind our parents had consequences that we didn't like. Loving and trusting our parents' instructions mattered!

Our obedience to God also comes from putting our faith in Him, listening carefully to Him, and acting on His words. Paul describes the role of his apostleship was "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (Romans 1 verse 5). Now obedience trusts in the One who gives the command. Disobedience is an act of defiance. Loving obedience draws us close to God. Defiance always leads to disaster.

Our reading today is from Psalm 1. The six verses.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
 Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
 Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!  
 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
 And in His law he meditates day and night.  
 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,  
 Which yields its fruit in its season  
 And its leaf does not wither;  
 And in whatever he does, he prospers.  
 The wicked are not so,  
 But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.  
 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
 Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.  
 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
 But the way of the wicked will perish.

That's God holy word. Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to be people who love You and meditate upon Your word and practice it. And help us always to do Your will. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

We are all servants of someone or something. Some serve Satan, some serve their passions, some serve the ways of the world, but some serve the Lord. Whom do you serve? Romans 6:16 says, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, (that) you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" We either serve God or we serve our desires. (and) One brings life, the other brings death. Obedience is a choice. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 that "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other,

or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and (mammon or) wealth." You can't serve God and serve sin. You can't serve God and serve Satan.

God "will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury" (Romans 2 verses 6 to 8). Now what we obey matters! The Lord Jesus on judgment day will judge the dead "by what was written in the books, according to what they have done" (Revelation 20 verse 12). Our works reveal whether we believe God, and how we live will be what judges us according to the written Word of God.

Now the Scriptures show how faith and obedience fit together. John 3:36 says, that "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Faith without obedience will not work, and obedience without faith will not work. It takes both! Galatians 5 and verse 6 says what really matters is "faith working through love."

Now Hebrews 11 speaks of the faithful who did the will of God. And Hebrews 11:7 to 8 says, "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." You see an active faith is a living faith; and obeying faith; Noah and Abraham acted and obeyed out of faith and reverence.

Jesus Himself set the example for what true obedience means. On the night before His crucifixion, He told His disciples that the world will know His love for the Father when He does "exactly as the Father commanded Me" (John 14:31). Jesus set aside His own will for the will of the Father. And He prayed, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22 verse 42). The Lord's obedience mattered to the Father. The Lord Jesus said in John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

Philippians 2:5 to 8 explains and teaches us to follow His example. "Have this attitude (this mindset) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied (He) Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Jesus was willing to humble Himself and die the cruelest of deaths to obey His Father, even though He was and is Himself deity. And we need to embrace a heart like Jesus who humbled Himself.

I'm amazed at religious groups who call Jesus Lord these days. They have a funny way of treating Jesus, when it comes to the beliefs and practices that they pursue. And in the end, they have ceased to listen to Jesus and have given themselves to the culture of our times. Many blindly follow that broad way that leads to destruction. They never give a second thought to where that road leads. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:13 to 14, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

You know churches once united in following Jesus and the Scriptures, studied themselves into a form of consensus religion. They imagine, "Well, if we all believe that a certain practice is okay, then it is okay"--even if the Scriptures declare that practice as unlawful and going against "the Lord's commandment" (1 Corinthians 14:33 to 37). You know it appears that they have trusted more in their consensus than in the Lord. They somehow believe if enough people agree to believe a certain practice is acceptable to themselves, then the Lord will approve it too!



Even if a million religious leaders believe or practice something, their ways cannot override what the Lord Jesus says. It's presumptuous to think that we know better than God. It reminds me of God who through the prophet Samuel told King Saul to destroy the Amalekites completely. Well the Israelite people won the battle. You see they convinced Saul to not do that. And they presumptuously offered sacrifices of the best sheep and oxen rather than to obey the Lord (1 Samuel 15:12 to 28). Well, Saul gave in to what the people consented rather than what the Lord commanded. He followed consensus religion rather than the Lord.

And Samuel said to Saul, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king." That's what Samuel told Saul. (1 Samuel 15:22 to 23).

Now in a society, such as ours, where being woke and inclusive has become more important than the teaching of God in scripture, people have relied on the consensus of people for their faith and their practices, rather than on the distinctive teaching of God according to 1 Corinthians 14:33 to 37. And when people introduce their cultural ways that contradict the Word of God, they inevitably cause division in the church. They must choose the broad way or the narrow way.

And lest anyone thinks this is harsh, remember that even Jesus could not serve as a priest in the temple at Jerusalem, because He was of the tribe of Judah not Levi (Hebrews 7 and verse 14). When people cease to follow the Lord, even in small things, they cease treating Jesus as Lord. God's distinctions matter! Romans 12 and verse 2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Now two words in the New Testament are synonyms for obeying. One is the word observe and the other is the word keep. These words include the idea of close listening and carefully obeying what God instructs us to do. First, let's look at how Jesus uses the word "observe." The Lord Jesus said in Luke 11:28, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." Well, the Lord Jesus was instructed the apostles what they must do once a person is baptized in Matthew 28 and verse 20, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Second, let's look at how Jesus uses the word "keep." The Lord Jesus said in John 8:51, "Truly, truly, I say to you, (that) if anyone keeps My word he will never see death." Again, He said in John 14:13 to 15, "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (and) If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." When we hear God, God hears our prayers; and when we keep His words, He keeps His promises and keeps us from evil.

Now another phrase found in Scripture that refers to obeying the Lord is the phrase, "doing the will of God." The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 to 23, that "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Wouldn't you hate to hear the Lord Jesus say to you, "depart from me"? A lawless person is one who will not keep the laws of God morally or spiritually.

Mark 3:31 to 35 says, "Then His mother (that is the mother of Jesus) and His brothers arrived, and standing outside (and) they sent word (in) to Him and called Him. (well) A crowd was sitting (all) around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." (well) Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

When people do the will of God, the Lord Jesus considers them as family. They're not legalists but loving children of God. Jesus told His disciples that love for Him is measured by obedience to His commandments. Jesus simply said in John 14:15, that "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." He explains this idea more fully in John 14:21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Do you wish to be loved by the Father and the Lord? Then keep the commandments. You see you change your relationship when you love God enough to keep the commandments. God loves those who love Him and obey Him.

The Lord Jesus expressed the idea a third time in John 14:23 to 4. He said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me." You see keeping commandments is God's measure of whether or not we love Him. When we love God and keep His commandments, He loves us enough to make His home with us. Do you love God? And do you make, allow Him to make a home with you by your loving obedience to Him? You know if you won't keep His commandments, you show God that you don't love Him. And one who claims to be a child of God demonstrates His love by continuing to obey the commandments of God.

Do you love the Lord? 1 John 2:3 to 6 says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, (that is have a relationship with Him, love Him that) if we keep His commandments." The one who says, "I have come to know Him, God's my friend I love God" and he does not keep His commandments, that person is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He (that is Jesus) walked."

Let's pray together. Oh, Father we pray that our obedience will not just be in word or an idea, that is will be in deed. That we'll show you our love that we show you our faith by how we live and how we honor the things that You have taught us to do. This is our pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Obedience is not simply a response; it's the right response to God's commands. It does what the Father requires without complaint. It does what God commands without editing, adding to or taking away from His words. Some people have the notion that God ought to be glad that they did anything at all, but obeying the Lord means we have listened closely and carefully enough to do exactly what He says.

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

Obedience demonstrates our love and faith. Obedience is an act of faith. We don't earn salvation by obedience alone or faith alone. We receive the grace of God by our obedience of faith. And we urge you to obey the gospel in faith and love by placing your faith in Christ Jesus, repenting of your sins, confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized into Christ, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Now when you act in faith by being baptized Colossians 2:12 to 13 says that, "God will make you alive and forgive all your transgressions." Trust and obey the Lord.

## The Kingdom of God

Did the Lord's kingdom become a reality in the first century? In this lesson we're looking at the kingdom of God and when the Lord set it up.

When we have a spiritual question, the best way to answer it is to look closely into the Scriptures to find out what God said about the matter. We don't want to rely on guesses or opinions for the most important spiritual questions of life. We want to know what God has said in the inspired Scriptures. We know the Scriptures come from God and are true.

The word kingdom generally refers to the reign of Christ. The fact is the Lord Jesus from the time of His resurrection has reigned everywhere over all people. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Colossians 1:16 to 17 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

Paul explained in Ephesians 1:20 to 21 that God raised Jesus "from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

Our reading today comes from Acts chapter 2 verses 30 to 36. And here Peter on the day of Pentecost announces that Jesus is killed.

And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

The word of Christ is the Messiah, the king of Israel. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that we serve the king of Israel. That we can have a messiah who is a savior, who loves us and that we can be close to Him. And be one of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

The Old Testament prophecies of a kingdom that will be set up by the Lord Jesus. Isaiah 2 verses 2 to 3 says, "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

Isaiah gets more specific in Isaiah 9:6 to 7. "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

When Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a great statue, Daniel revealed that God would set up an eternal kingdom. He predicted that it would happen in the days of the Romans, the fourth great kingdom. Daniel 2:44 says, “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”

Luke 1 verses 30 to 33 reveals how the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Now eighty-four inspired preachers in the first century proclaimed that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand.” That is it's near in time. First, John the baptizer said in Matthew 3 and verse 2, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Second, Matthew 4:17 says that the Lord Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Third, in Matthew 10 and verse 7 Jesus sent forth the twelve apostles and instructed them to preach “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And fourth, Luke 10 says the Lord appointed seventy others to go into every city and place and proclaim, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” The phrase “at hand” in reference to an event means the time is close or it's “about time” that this was to happen. Now according to Jesus and the others it was about time for the kingdom to be established. This was to happen in the first century, not the twenty-first.

Occasionally the Scriptures speak about inheriting the kingdom of God. Those who continue to live in sin cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Now this inheritance is in heaven. 1 Peter 1 verses 3 to 4 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” Now we enter heaven itself at the end of time when Jesus returns and on Judgment Day. Yes, the ages to come are in the future! But the suggestion that God's kingdom is not on earth today simply denies clear passages of Scripture.

Some suggest that Jesus failed to set up His earthly kingdom in the first century and established the church to fill in the gap, but this denies the Old Testament prophets and the prophecy of the 84 preachers and how they were not fulfilled. It denies what Jesus said about the kingdom being “at hand.” It denies that some alive then entered the kingdom. And it makes Jesus a false prophet and a failure. Now that's just not true. The church is not a physical nation like Israel that's true; it's a spiritual kingdom that can be found in the whole world. The Scriptures speak of how the church itself is God's kingdom.

The Lord Jesus said in Mark 9 verse 1, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” Well when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:26 to 29, He told the apostles, “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.” You see the church of the Lord, however, they started partaking of the Lord's Supper from the day of Pentecost, when the apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues. And it is clear from Acts 20 and verse 7 and 1 Corinthians 11:17 to 32 that the early church was eating unleavened bread and drinking fruit of the vine, communing with the Lord in His kingdom, each Lord's Day. That is the first day of the week.

When the day of Pentecost came, Peter said about David in Acts 2:30 to 31, "Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption." And He concludes in verses 34 to 36, that "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus (and then He pointed his finger at the people and said) whom you crucified." Jesus has been on David's throne over the kingdom of God since He ascended to heaven. Friends, the church is also the kingdom of God. And Jesus reigns over all people in both heaven and earth!

Well, how do we know that? The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 to 19 "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell (or hades rather) shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Now if Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom to Peter, the kingdom had to be opened in the first century, not at some future time.

Paul told the church at Colossae in Colossians 1:13 to 14 that God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." If the kingdom did not yet exist how could God have transferred the Colossians into it?

The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 12 and verse 28, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." They were to treat God with reverence and awe because they were already part of the new covenant kingdom of God.

John in Revelation 1:4 to 6 was writing "to the seven churches of Asia: (and he said) from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Now Jesus, and notice that He's already the ruler of the kings of the earth. His blood not only freed the Christians from sin, He also made them a kingdom, priests to His God and Father. Now Peter wrote to the Christians in his day in 1 Peter 2 verse 9, "But you are a chosen race, (and then he said ) a royal priesthood, (royal means kingly priesthood) a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

That John believed he was in the kingdom during his life in the kingdom of God is undeniable. He wrote in Revelation chapter 1 and verse 9, "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Now John who was a fellow partaker of the persecution in the first century. And this is the same John who says that he is in the kingdom.

Paul told the elders of the church of Ephesus in Acts 20 and verse 28, that Jesus purchase "the church of God" with His own blood." Scripture explains more about the blood. Revelation 5:9 to 10 explains the Lord Jesus "purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Again, the kingdom is a present reality, not a future hope. The song speaks of the making of the kingdom as a past event. That's what they were singing about in Revelation 5 when Jesus shed His blood. If indeed Christians are also priests (1 Pet. 2 and verse 9), then the kingdom on earth has been a reality since the first century!

If the kingdom of heaven was not to be a reality until the 21st century, why did John speak of it as a present reality? Of course, the church is the kingdom (Colossians 1 verse 13). Hugo McCord observed that one cannot spend the same dollar twice. And the blood of Jesus which purchased the church (Acts 20:28) also purchased the kingdom (Revelation 5 verses 9 and 10). Now this fulfills the prophecy of John the Baptist, Jesus, the Twelve, and the Seventy that the kingdom of heaven was "at hand" or has "come near." That is in the first century.

John 3:3 to 5 says that: Jesus answered and said to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This is clearly a reference to being baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2 and verse 38).

Our new birth happens when we respond to the preaching of the truth. 1 Peter 1:22 to 23 says, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." The seed that causes our new birth into the kingdom, is the gospel itself. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says that, "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." When we obey the truth of the gospel message by being born of water and the Spirit, we enter the kingdom of God.

Do you want to be a citizen of the kingdom of God? Become a member of the Lord's church. When the Lord frees you from sin by His blood, He adds you to His kingdom. The kingdom that will last forever. When we're baptized into Christ, we're freed from sin we're added to the church. And when we're born of water and the Spirit, we enter the kingdom.

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You have set up kingdom so many years ago and that we can be a part of that kingdom in this life so that we can enter into the kingdom of heaven in the days to come. And Father we're thankful for Your love. Help us to always obey Your will. To love You and to serve You in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The Lord Jesus declared in the parable of the Sower, which deals with the kingdom of God in Luke 8 verse 11, that, "The seed is the word of God." The only way you can be born again into the kingdom of God is for the word of God to be planted in your heart. The divine seed, the word of God, germinates in the hearts of sinners to produce Christians, members of the Lord's church. The church or kingdom of God exists wherever souls are born. And they're born again by obeying that word of God. The gospel can only bear fruit after its kind. What God's imperishable seed produced in the first century, you know what, it'll produce now. I'm glad the word is imperishable because it means you and I can be born again and enter the kingdom.

To be born again, believe the gospel. Place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for your sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead. Now if you believe, you will please God (Hebrews 11 verse 6). Because you believe and love God, turn from your sins in repentance to a life that follows the Lord Jesus. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Be baptized into Christ, so that you can enter His kingdom and be born again to walk in newness of life, freed from sin (Romans 6 verses 3 to 7). And when we repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, we receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2 verse 38); and our sins are washed away (Acts 22 verse 16).

Perhaps you have fallen away from the church and from the Lord. Why not come back home to the Lord and His kingdom, the church. Confess your sins, repent, and ask God to forgive you.

## The Epistle of Joy

When life is filled with troubles and uncertainty, how do you find joy? Let us examine the path to true joy.

When all of life seems to be going the wrong way, we need to stop and see the larger picture of what God has provided for us. There's always a reason to give thanks and to rejoice for the Christian. The Christian life shown to us in Scripture opens the door to contentment and abundant reasons for hope and joy. Now if you're torn up inside, look up to the One who can help you. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and want to be a part of your life each week.

Suppose you had been in jail for two years in Caesarea, had slowly been shipped across the Mediterranean Sea enduring storms and a shipwreck, and had come to Rome where you spent two years in a rented house, constantly chained between two guards, and awaiting your trial before Caesar, Nero. You didn't know whether you would live or die. While you're there, a church you loved remembered you, collected funds, and once again sent gifts to supply all your needs. With Timothy at your side, you wrote with joy to thank and encourage them.

Because you wanted them to realize your unjust situation would turn out for the best, because God was with you. You wanted them to know that your chains didn't keep you from your task of winning souls to Christ. You wanted them to see the tremendous blessing of being a Christian and to encourage them to stand firm in their faith. You wanted them to realize that heaven awaits them, and you didn't want them to miss this eternal blessing of joy and peace. And I too don't want anyone to miss the joy and peace that heaven provides.

Our reading today comes Philippians chapter 4 verses 4 to 9.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Oh what a wonderful bit of advice for joy, true joy. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You provide for all of our spiritual needs including peace and joy. Help us to follow Your will. To love You always and to serve You. In Jesus name, Amen.

While Paul was living in chains in Rome, a church he loved remembered him, collected funds, and sent gifts to supply all his needs. With Timothy at his side, he wrote with joy to thank and to encourage them. He wanted them to have the same joy that he had. And he expressed his love in Philippians 1:3 to 8. He said, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, (he says) that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Then Paul prayed, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and

blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Verses 9-11).

Now he said his while he had chains on. He said his chains didn't keep him from preaching the gospel. He said, “Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (that's verses 12 to 14).

Now even those people who envied him, those opposed him, and caused him trouble, he could rejoice could rejoice about them. He said in verses 15 to 18 of chapter 1, “Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this (he says) I rejoice.”

He rejoiced that Christ is exalted, even though he was in prison and may die. He said in verses 19 to 20 of Philippians 1, “Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Paul expects to live and work but he realizes being with Christ is “very much better.” He said in some verses Philippians 1:21 to 25, he says, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. (he says) But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; (and) yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. (now) Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.”

Paul encouraged the Philippians in verses 27 to 30, he said, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

There were some personal conflicts in Philippi, and Paul wanted them to remain unified. He wrote in chapter 2 verses 1 to 4, “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

So he pointed to their need to imitate the mind of Christ. So he wrote in Philippians 2:5 to 8, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”



God saw Christ's obedience and blessed Him. Verses 9 to 11 say, "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

How then should they act? Paul explains, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." How we live today affects where we will spend eternity.

Paul then begins chapter three, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you." Paul then describes his past accomplishments in order to show there's something more valuable. And so he said in chapter 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."

But what Paul had before he knew Christ didn't compare with what he had in Christ. He wrote in verse 7 to 11, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (and) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Paul was determined to follow the Lord and to reach for the prize. He said in verses 12 to 16, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (then he said) Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, (that is mature) have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, (he says) let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained."

Now he says all this to say to the church at Philippi in verses 17 to 19, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern (that) you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." I tell you my friends, it matters how we live. We're citizens of heaven and followers of the Lord Jesus, not followers of Satan or our desires.

He says in Philippians 3:20 to chapter 4 verse 1. He says, "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 (the one we have right now) into conformity with the body of His glory, (we're going to have a glorified body like His and He'll do this) by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and (my) crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

In chapter four, Paul present the path of true joy and peace. And as we read a moment ago he wrote in Philippians 4:4 to 9, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, (he says) whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

Now he assures the Philippians that God will care for them. He wrote in 4:11 to 13, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Verse 19 he reassures them and says, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Yes God cares for His people. He will be with them, bless them and give them His promises. Would you pray with me. Father we're thankful for the reassurance of the book of Philippians the epistle of joy. And Father help us to follow those things that are taught there. To stand firm in our faith and to set our minds to be like Jesus and to do what is right. Father we pray that You will forgive our weaknesses and help to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20 to 4:1, "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. Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

Many of the Roman soldiers who retired in the first century were given citizenship and land near the city of Philippi. These soldiers took great pride in their Roman citizenship. And Paul too was a Roman citizen, but he reminded them that they were citizens of heaven. There's more than this life, and none of us is destined to live on this earth forever. I don't want anyone to miss being a citizen of heaven and having an eternal home with the Father and the Lord.

Now to become a citizen of heaven, you must first become a citizen in the kingdom of God in this life. To do that you must believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He's Lord. Treat Him as Lord by turning from sin in your behavior and your attitudes; do what is right. You must confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God and be baptized into Christ. Now baptism is an immersion in water; that's what the word baptism means. That's what people who became Christians did in the book of Acts. They didn't sprinkle water on infants. When they were immersed in water, they received the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38 and 22:16). Now follow the biblical example not some human tradition.