

Program Transcripts

For December 2013



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

December 2013

Topics subject to change without notice

DECEMBER 1 – LISTENING TO GOD

How seriously do you take your Bible? Did you know it's God's Word and can lead you to eternal life? Everyone has a great need to hear what God has to say about life, about sin, and about eternity. Are you listening?

DECEMBER 8 – THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

Dr. Jeff Miller's new book, *Science Vs. Evolution*, explores how science falls far short of being able to explain the origin of life. In fact, science cannot produce any evidence for how life came to be on this earth.

DECEMBER 15 – THIS MIND IN YOU

Our attitudes about God matter. Many never come to know the Lord Jesus because they have set their minds on other things. The Lord wants you to love Him "with all of your mind" (Mark 12:30). How are you thinking?

DECEMBER 22 – BECAUSE OF JESUS

No event in history can equal the coming of the Son of God into the world. Jesus is no ordinary person! Because of Jesus, we have hope, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life. Jesus is the greatest gift of all.

DECEMBER 29 – HOPE

Hope is as necessary to the soul as oxygen is to the body. The Lord Jesus came into the world that we might have hope. Our hope in Jesus Christ is living and will not put us to shame. Let us hope in Him.

"Listening to God"

How seriously do you take your Bible? Did you know it's God's Word and can lead you to eternal life? Today we're going to see the need to listen to God. We search the Scriptures, because the Scriptures open for us the heart and mind of God. God reveals Himself through the Bible. Paul said, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). The Lord God chose to reveal Himself through the Scriptures, so that we might know the truth.

A man went to the doctor convinced that he was losing his hearing. The doctor pulled out a gold pocket watch and asked, "Can you hear this ticking?" The man replied, "Of course!" The specialist moved several feet and held up the watch again, "Can you hear it now?" "Yes." The specialist moved farther away and held up the watch, "What about now?" The man again said, "Yes." The doctor returned to his patient and said, "Sir, there is nothing wrong with your hearing. You just don't listen."

While the Bible is still the number one bestseller of all time, and while 82 percent of Americans revere the Bible as sacred literature, they simply don't read it and don't know what it actually teaches. In a recent report by the American Bible Society, 79 percent believe that they are knowledgeable about the Bible, but only 45 percent could identify the four gospel accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We have plenty of Bibles available, but people know less and less what they say. We must listen to God.

Our reading today comes from the epistle to the Hebrews 2:1-4. "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Word, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."

Ancient Israel looked to the nations surrounding them and began to ignore the Lord God. They brought many disasters upon themselves. Many don't realize what they have lost until they no longer possess their blessings. Amos 8:11-12 warned Israel, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the Lord GOD, 'When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD. People will stagger from sea to sea, And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, But they will not find it.'" Have you considered how important God's Word truly is? What would you do if you couldn't find God's Word anywhere? What if every available source of Divine truth was missing? The person who ignores the Bible is no better off than the person who has no Bible.

God expects His people to listen to Jesus. The Bible reveals a compelling warning about our need to hear the Lord Jesus. It says, "Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, a bright

cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:1-5).

God wanted them to hear the Lord Jesus even over Moses and Elijah. The Lord Jesus is God's Son and speaks with final authority. We must listen to Him! Recently a highly respected religious leader, who claims he speaks for God, said people who don't believe in God can still go to heaven. But, the Lord Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Again, Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He's a rewarder of those who seek Him." Should I listen to a man who makes such outlandish statements, and ignore what the Lord Jesus said?

Another religious leader not long ago said the apostles were wrong and outdated about certain sins and he rebuked the inspired apostles Peter, Paul, and John for speaking out against sin. He implied that God would accept anyone, even if they had not repented. But, Paul said, "That if anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you, (that is the Paul writes) are the Lord's commandment" (1 Corinthians 14:37). When this leader says the apostles were wrong and outdated about sin, he's actually criticizing the Lord Jesus. He isn't listening to Christ; and he thinks he needs to correct Christ, that Christ needs to be changed.

He's not the first one who thought he had a better plan than God. Many listen to Jesus but think they have a better way, so they do their own thing. The Lord Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rains fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it" (Matthew 7:24-27).

Both of these men built houses. Both heard what the Lord said, but only one did what the Lord said to do. The other listened but disagreed and thought he could improve on the Lord's teaching. He foolishly built his house on sand. When people think they have a better way religiously than doing what Jesus says to do, they too build their houses on sand. In the end they'll find that their "better way" wasn't better at all.

The Lord Jesus said, "All authority has been given unto Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 2:18). Jesus' word is final; there is no higher authority, He has all of it. The Lord Jesus said, "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" (John 12:48). Jesus will judge you by His words alone. The book of Revelation describes the judgment scene, "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done" (Revelation 20:12). Those books are the sole criteria of our judgment; they contain the words of Jesus, and they are found in the Bible, specifically the New Testament. You will not be judged by the thinking of religious leaders who dispute with Jesus or add to what the Lord Jesus says. There is only one Lord, and only Jesus has that place. You won't be judged by councils, creeds, opinion polls, or

talk show hosts. You will be judged by what's written in the books that contain Jesus' own words that are revealed to us and found in the New Testament.

Why don't people hear? Some people have simply placed their focus somewhere else and have neglected or forgotten the most important things. Many have lost sight of God and forgotten the cross of Christ and have become distracted by the world. God's Word reminds us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). When we lose sight of Scripture, we lose sight of God Himself.

Others stopped listening when they heard something they didn't like. They didn't want to hear about sin, or about judgment, or about needing salvation. Some, frankly, would rather have their ears tickled than listen to the truth that they need. Like the Stoics and the Epicureans of Acts 17:21, they spend their "time in nothing except telling or hearing something new." How much better it would be if they were like the Bereans of Acts 17:11 that says, "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." The Bereans wanted to know the truth. Do you?

The Word of God can bless your life if you'll let it. Psalm 19:7-11 describes what the Scriptures can do for us. "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; and in keeping them there is great reward." If you wish to have stronger faith, read the Bible. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

If you wish to please God, if you wish to be saved from sin, and if you wish to live with God eternally, listen to God's Word. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). This book has the words of eternal life. Read it, treasure it, love it, memorize it, and share it with those that you love. Not only will the word bring salvation to you, it will also protect you. David wrote, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." God's Word will keep you from stumbling in sin (Psalm 119:11).

God's Word is profitable for four significant tasks. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God (inspired that is), 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."

First, the Bible is valuable for teaching or doctrine. It teaches us what we must know and what to believe. Doctrine is valuable, because what we believe determines who we are and how we live. Doctrine gives us the basic instructions about why we are here, why there is so much trouble in the world, how we should live, and what will happen to us when we die. It teaches us how to be saved from sin and how to inherit eternal life. It teaches us about the church, God's family and kingdom. It teaches us about God's holiness, His justice, and most wonderfully His grace. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." We've got to be grateful for God's Word.

Second, the Bible is profitable for reproof. That is, it convicts us of sin and it refutes false teaching. I'm thankful that we have an unchangeable standard of truth and an unchangeable standard of morality that speaks out against lies and sin. To overcome any sin, we must know what sin is and realize it violates God's will.

Third, the Bible is valuable for correction. It shows the right way and brings healing by setting things right. 2 Tim. 2:24-26 says, "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. That God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do His will." When we leave error and we repent of sin, the Lord forgives and blesses us. Correction and repentance are blessings. They start us on a new and better path. Correction brings hope and life! We should thank God every day for a new start in life.

Fourth, the Bible is profitable for training in righteousness. It helps Christians to mature and to be equipped for doing good. God's word trains us in what to do and how to do it. It provides the examples of godliness and righteousness that we need. It reveals the life of Jesus Christ, who is the great example of righteousness and service.

I sometimes wonder if God doesn't get frustrated with us as He did with Israel. God is calling to us through His word, but we aren't always listening. God said, "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts" (Isaiah 65:1-2). People today are much like this; they follow their own thoughts rather than listen to God.

The person who neglects to listen to God is no better off than the person who says there is no God. He's lost sight of what a treasure Scripture is. God's Word is here in this book; and we must take the time to read it. Are you listening to God? Do you know what the Bible teaches? If you love Him, you'll listen to Him, you'll hear His voice on every matter. Remember, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:1-3). Don't gamble with your soul by assuming that you know what is in the Bible. Study it for yourself. Be noble like the Bereans; search the Scriptures. Don't accept what some preacher says and not check it out for yourself. Your soul is too important to listen to the wrong sources. Listen to the Lord.

The more you know God, the more you'll want to become a Christian and follow Him. To become a Christian you must hear the gospel and believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Out of love, repent of your sins and turn your life over to God. Confess the Lord Jesus as the Christ, and be baptized. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you are baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16), make you His child (Galatians 3:26-27), and raise you up to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). Oh, I hope and pray you'll believe and obey the Lord today.

The Origin of Life

Dr. Jeff Miller's new book, *Science Vs. Evolution*, explores how science falls far short of being able to explain the origin of life. The Bible says in Hebrews 11:3, "By faith we understand the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of the things that are visible." Some think that because we as Christians have faith that we've stopped reasoning and have no evidence for our faith; but there is an abundance of evidence for believing in God. The starry heavens above, the complexity of our bodies, and the moral lives that live within, proclaim loudly that God created us and designed us in His image. We are more than animals who evolved; we are God's creation.

I'm excited about a book I have recently read, written by Dr. Jeff Miller. Dr. Miller holds an earned Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from Auburn University with an emphasis in Navigation and Control of Biological Systems. He has published research in peer-reviewed science journals and has taught courses at Auburn. Dr. Miller's book, *Science Vs. Evolution*, uses the laws of science themselves to show that evolution's description of the origin of life is more speculation than true science. He reveals that no scientist actually knows how life came to be and that to be alive is much more complicated organically than most folks realize. Dr. Miller says no scientist has ever created life from non-living matter, though they have tried often. You can read more about this matter in Dr. Miller's book, published by Apologetics Press in Montgomery, Alabama. I also recommend that you visit their website, apologeticspress.org if you wish to know more about Dr. Jeff Miller.

Our reading today comes from the book of Romans 1:18-23, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

If Dr. Miller were here with us today, he would argue several things against evolution and for the existence of God. Much of what I'm about to say comes directly from him, and I'm deeply grateful that he allowed me to share this valuable information.

Many evolutionists claim that naturalism has been proven to be true. Naturalism is the idea that everything in existence in the Universe came about naturally—without any help from God, who isn't natural, but supernatural. Cosmic evolution—which is made up of Darwinian evolution, plus some form of the Big Bang Theory—is how they claim the Universe got here. Those who don't believe evolution are, in the words of the atheist proponent of evolution Richard Dawkins, "ignorant, stupid, or insane." According to naturalists, due to the discoveries in science over the past century or so, God is no longer necessary in the equation to explain the origin of the Universe. They think they've figured out how it all happened without Him, and if you continue to believe in Him, then you are considered ignorant and unenlightened.

So based on modern definitions of science, God has been expelled from the science classroom. According to the National Academy of Sciences (the NAS), “The statements of science must invoke only natural things and processes. The statements of science are those that emerge from the application of human intelligence to data obtained from observation and experiment.” So, based on this definition of science, God is unscientific, since He’s not natural, but supernatural, and can’t be directly observed or experimented on.

There are many issues with these claims, but the one significant problem is that in order for something to be true, it has to have evidence that proves it. From the Law of Rationality in philosophy, we learn that a person should only draw conclusions that logically follow from the available evidence. If a person arrives at a conclusion that’s beyond the evidence, he’s being irrational. If a person claims to believe in God or the Bible without evidence, he is being irrational. The same goes for a person who claims to know that naturalism is true. Philosophy doesn’t support the idea of naturalism; science doesn’t support such a claim; and neither does God. The Bible says, “but test everything; and hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The problem is that naturalism or atheism is based on several fundamental requirements that have absolutely no evidence to substantiate them.

For example, scientific laws exist—the Law of Biogenesis, the Laws of Thermodynamics, and the Law of Cause and Effect, among others. But there is absolutely no evidence from observational science that would indicate that a law could write itself. On the contrary, all evidence indicates that a law is always, that is without exception, the product of a law writer. So the observational evidence points to a Universal Law Writer well beyond the capabilities of humans—who have no such ability to write laws that govern the Cosmos. But notice: naturalism allows no Universal Law Writer, since that would be supernatural. Naturalism lacks evidence to prove that a law could write itself, so to believe in naturalism is irrational. Naturalism requires a blind faith to believe it could be supported, but rather it is an unsupported rejection of God. Also, based on the NAS definition of science, if science only involves “natural things and processes”—and the existence of a non-existent Law Writer would be definitely unnatural—then naturalism is itself unscientific and should be removed from the science classroom.

Another example: the Universe exists and had to come from somewhere. Even if you believe in the Big Bang Theory, what was the origin of the cosmic egg that supposedly exploded? And that’s how the universe came to be. We ask where did that egg come from? There are only three options: either it existed forever; it created itself; or it was created by a Being outside of the physical Universe.

The evidence speaks against the first two options. First, it couldn’t have existed forever, according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, since it would have deteriorated long ago and left us with no usable energy. If the universe is eternal and has always existed, then the amount of usable energy should already have been completely spent or used up. Since we still have usable energy available, the universe could not have existed forever. Second, it must have had a beginning, somewhere. Scientists realize that the universe is running down like a clock. Robert Jastrow, the famed astronomer, said, “If it is running down (that is the universe), there must have been a time when it was fully wound up.... Now three lines of evidence—the motion of the galaxies, the laws of thermodynamics, and the life story of the stars—pointed to one conclusion; and all indicated that the Universe had a beginning.”

Second, this universe couldn't have created itself. It couldn't just pop into existence on its own. This is true according to the First Law of Thermodynamics. This law says that in a closed system, the amount of energy present in that system is constant, though it may change in form. If there were no energy or mass in the universe to begin with, it could not create itself into something that is as massive and as powerful as what we see today. So again, the actual evidence points to a Creator. Since there's no evidence that the Universe could create itself naturally or that it exists forever, then believing in naturalism is irrational. And since there is no observable evidence to support the idea of these things happening, the Big Bang Theory is unscientific and should be removed from discussion in science classrooms.

Here is another example, life exists and had to come from somewhere. Naturalism requires that life came from non-life—and that's an idea known as abiogenesis. But all available evidence indicates that in nature, life comes only from life. This truth is so substantiated that it has historically been known as the "Law of Biogenesis." There are no exceptions to this law. If all of the evidence indicates that life comes from life in nature, then in order to explain the origin of life, we have to go outside of nature—that is, to super-nature. Again, the scientific evidence points to God, even though He can't be directly observed or experimented on. But naturalism requires belief in an idea that has no evidence. So, naturalism is irrational and unscientific.

The same can be said of macro-evolution or Darwinian evolution. No rational person denies that evolution occurs. Things do change. The word evolution means change. A species can develop small variations over time. My mother used to raise African violets and she was an expert at it. She and my older brother David learned to make variations in the color of the bloom and even the texture of the leaves; but they were all still African violets. They did not become something else. The World Canine Organization says there are 339 breeds of dog, but all of these breeds are still dogs. These changes in size and color describe micro-evolution. But all available evidence indicates that while small variations can occur, micro-evolution, in different kinds of things, the idea that a kind of creature can change, that there is such a thing as macro-evolution, or Darwinian evolution, has never been substantiated. Those things require change that brings about a completely new kind of creature.

Dogs don't give rise to cats, and fish don't give rise to amphibians. The actual, observable evidence indicates that evolutionary development is always within the strict narrow limits, never crossing set, phylogenic boundaries. God said, "Let the earth bring forth creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind; and it was so" (Genesis 1:24). Every living thing resembles its parents, and there are no exceptions to this law. Macro-evolution is a fantasy that demands blind faith and lacks evidence.

In order for one kind of animal to naturally change into a new, different kind of animal, there has to be a natural mechanism available that adds information to the genome. No such mechanism exists. In fact, the evidence indicates, in keeping with the Second Law of Thermodynamics, that changes such as mutations deteriorate the information within the genome rather than making higher forms of life.

Furthermore, information doesn't just happen; a mind creates it. The DNA molecule inside every cell in your body stores an incredible amount of information. The human body can contain up to 100 trillion cells. Well the DNA molecule in your cells are by far the densest information storage mechanism known in the universe. According to the evolutionist Richard

Dawkins, even a primitive one-celled organism such as an amoeba has “as much information in their DNA as 1,000 *Encyclopedia Britannica*’s.” Only an intelligent mind stores information. It would take a very high intelligence to create a way to store this much information. Naturalism requires that a Mind does not exist. So again think about this: naturalism—evolution—is irrational and unscientific.

The evidence demands creation, a creation by a supremely intelligent, powerful Being. And that being can only be God. Although God can’t be directly observed or experimented on—you can’t see, smell, taste, touch or hear Him—still, we can know He exists by indirect evidence. In the same way the forensic scientist can draw conclusions about an event by examining the evidence left from the event—without actually having witnessed what happened—we can know a Creator exists. The laws of science testify to that truth. And if He exists and has engaged in supernatural activity that affected the Universe in the past— activity which most certainly could have affected the interpretation of scientific evidence—then wouldn’t it make sense to define science in such a way that includes Him in the discussion?

On the other hand, naturalistic evolution contradicts itself. It says only natural events occur; but it requires unnatural events. What do I mean by that? According to evolutionists, life had to come from non-life; but no scientist has ever observed this to occur in nature. Time and again, life coming from non-life has been proven to be impossible. Furthermore, there is no evidence anywhere that one kind of animal evolved into a completely different kind of animal. Here’s the bottom line: naturalistic evolution is irrational. It requires a blind faith and has absolutely no scientific evidence to support it. On the other hand, Biblical Creation is, and always has been, perfectly in line with the scientific evidence.

The Law of Biogenesis says that only life can produce life. Paul Davies of Arizona State University wrote in 2006 in the *New Scientist*, “One of the great outstanding scientific mysteries is the origin of life. How did it happen? The truth is nobody has a clue.” When you realize living cells are incredibly complex, the idea that life could have just happened means that you have to deny this law and place your faith in the belief that life came from non-life. It just makes sense to believe in the living, all-powerful, all-knowing God, who gave us life.

Acts 17:28 says, “In him (that is God) we live and move and have our being.” Why does all this matter? Because we each have a choice to make between believing in an all-knowing, all-powerful God who created us in His image and loves us, or believing in an irrational, unproven, unscientific, human theory that robs us of hope and purpose in life. You are more than flesh and blood. You and I have an eternal spirit within us, and that’s why we have a consciousness and a moral nature. These facts point to God, who clearly tells us where we came from, why we are here, and what will happen in the future.

Have you chosen God? What you believe about the origin of life and the origin of man matters. Without God we end up in misery and without hope. We need God in our lives. That’s why we need to come to the Lord Jesus and serve Him. To become a Christian place your trust in the Lord Jesus, believe in Him and believe in His Word. Turn away from the sin of the world and follow the teaching of the Lord. Confess Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ. Do it for the forgiveness of your sins, just as Acts 2:38 teaches. When you are baptized God will wash away your sins. He’ll add you to His church, and you will become His child. Today is the best day for you to believe in God, believe in the Lord Jesus, and to come Him.

"This Mind in You"

What we think about God matters. Many people never come to know the Lord Jesus because they've set their minds on other things. What is on your mind? What are you thinking about God? Searching for the Lord's way is not a trivial matter or a hobby. It's critical to our eternal life, and we can think of nothing more important than to know the will of the Lord and to follow Him. First Timothy 2:4 says that God our Savior "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Everything God has ever done has been to point humanity to what is right and good. God loves us and gave us His Son to die for our sins and His Word to guide us. We have no greater need today than to walk in the way of the Lord. That's why we take time to study God's Word.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets and in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." God speaks to us today through Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus gave this Divine Message to His apostles through the Spirit. He promised them, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). According to Matthew 23:34, the Lord Jesus sent out inspired men not only to preach the gospel but also to record His words for all time. I'm so thankful the Lord gave us the truth, so that we might know His will for our lives and might learn how to please Him.

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:5-8. "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 created us in His own image and after His likeness. He gave us minds that reason and hearts that feel. He gave us a free will, a conscience, and a sense of right and wrong. He wanted us to love and follow Him by our own choice. Joshua challenged Israel, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). People are still choosing whether they will follow the Lord or listen to the popular voices of our day.

There will always be a spiritual battle for the minds of people, because the devil or the "god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving", according to 2 Corinthians 4:4. A physically blind person knows he or she is blind, but the spiritually blind person may not realize when he's been deceived. The commandment, "Be not deceived," appears four times in the New Testament. Why? Because people tend to fall for lies that allow them to believe what they want to do or want to believe.

In the apostle John's day, people thought they were right with God when they actually were out of fellowship with God. First John 1:6-10 says, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, and He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not

sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” Ignorance of God’s truth is not bliss; it’s a disaster.

Many years ago, Adolf Hitler’s propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, said, “If you tell a lie long enough, loud enough, and often enough, the people will believe it. The secret to get someone to believe a lie is that constant repetition. Just tell it over, and over, and over again.” Hitler led a nation to do unspeakable harm by lying to them. The Lord God hates a lying tongue. A lie that is handed down from one generation to another is still a lie. Hearing it from someone you think is a good person doesn’t turn a lie into the truth. Just because the majority of people believe something doesn’t mean that it’s the truth.

Many people have never taken the time to study their Bible for themselves. This explains why people believe outlandish lies and ideas about God that are completely foreign to the Bible. Many people turn to their feelings for their faith rather than listen to a “thus saith the Lord.” Others listen to people that they consider religious experts rather than study the Word for themselves. They simply grasp whatever they hear without thinking, and not thinking about whether it’s true or not true.

Jesus once told the Sadducees, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Many folks simply accept the traditions of those who came before rather than researching the Word of God. Acts 17:11 says of the Bereans, “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” Human traditions and practices, denominational doctrines, feelings, and emotions can hold people in spiritual slavery for years, because they’ve never questioned what they’ve heard or compared the teachings they’ve heard to Scripture.

People say they are saved by faith alone for instance, and when they are saved they say the Sinners’ Prayer, and then they’re right with God. But where does the Bible ever record the Sinners’ Prayer? People say one denomination is as good as another, but where does the Bible ever give approval to the whole concept of denominationalism? People obey some man-made doctrine and say in their heart they know they’re right with God, but where does the Bible grant us the right to obey Him according to what we think or feel? People say, “Just ask Jesus into your heart, and you’ll be saved”; but where does the Bible say that? Shouldn’t we listen to what God says in His Word?

The Jews were sure they were religiously right, but they rejected Jesus and wanted to establish their own righteousness through keeping the Law of Moses. Paul explains in Romans 10:1-4, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them (that is the Israelites) is for their salvation.” Then he said, “For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Men, through the centuries, have caused so much evil on others through their ignorance of God’s Word; through accepting half-truths; and through believing lies. When Paul persecuted the church, he said he had acted ignorantly in unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13); and when Jesus was crucified, He prayed for His executioners, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). False religions use the name of God to justify their war and justify punishing people with death, but true Christianity calls for peace. True Christianity leaves vengeance and judgment to God.

When the Lord calls us through the gospel, He expects us to use our minds. The Lord Jesus said, “learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). When we come to Jesus, we come to Him because we’ve learned from Him. We use our minds and our hearts as well as our ears to hear His words. First and foremost, the gospel message tells of the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this message has a point to it. It demands a response.

Gospel preachers seek to persuade people to take up their crosses and to follow Jesus. Paul said, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11). Many churches, frankly, have forgotten why we must hear God’s Word. The purpose of preaching is not to have a pep rally, or to entertain, or to tickle somebody’s ears by telling people what they want to hear. The purpose of preaching is to convince the mind and the heart to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul entered the synagogue in Thessalonica, he went there “explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ’” (Acts 17:3). We search the Scriptures, from week to week, so that we might know God and might live so that we may please Him and serve Him.

God expects every one of us to grow in our faith and knowledge. Second Peter 3:18 teaches us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” God expects us to add to our faith, virtue, and to our virtue knowledge, because these things are fundamental to our relationship with Him. If you haven’t learned the will of God, how do you know whether or not you’re pleasing to Him? Paul urged, “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” (Romans 12:2). You can’t prove what the will of God is, if you don’t know what the will of God is. The only way you can be sure that you understand God’s will is to study. Paul instructed the young minister and preacher, Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Sadly, many Christians never grow in their understanding of God’s will. They depend on others to study for them and accept whatever they’ve been told. Many people blindly accept whatever their denomination tells them, whether it’s Biblical or not. Many people think a group of people in their denomination can actually vote on what to believe, as if God hadn’t spoken on the matter. Or, they listen to the popular thinking of our culture and they come to believe the popular lies of our time. One popular preacher said he believed that people who’d never heard of Jesus or never read a Bible were nonetheless going to heaven.

This is certainly different from the teaching of the apostle Paul to the pagans in Athens. Paul told the Stoics and Epicureans who didn’t know anything about God that they were very religious, but ignorant (Acts 17:23). He called on them, first and foremost, to repent, “because He (God) has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31). He didn’t excuse the pagans; he didn’t say they were okay; he called them to repent and taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ignorance, even by people who call themselves Christians, is nothing new. The writer of the book of Hebrews said, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk, not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the

word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). These Christians forgot the basics of their faith and had remained like little children who needed to be taught all over again. Like children, they believe whatever they're told and cannot distinguish right from wrong or truth from error. They're vulnerable to lies, because they don't know the Word of God!

When you haven't closely studied what God says, a deceiver can easily fool you and lead you into error. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29). There are still false prophets and savage wolves speaking perverse things today and leading people astray. The Lord Jesus said of the Pharisees that, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:13-14).

When people make their own traditions and call them God's, they're planting something that God never planted. Those plants won't bear fruit; they'll be uprooted by God Himself. Stay away from blind guides who lead others into the pit. They destroy themselves and those who hear them. Paul told Timothy, “You pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16). Some say, “It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love Jesus”, but that's simply not true.

Why does this matter? Because your soul matters! Get your thinking in line with the Lord's teaching. Because the Lord who calls you is holy, you are to be holy (1 Peter 1:16). Because the truth sets us free (John 8:32), we must know the truth. Because the gospel is God's power to save, we need to hear and obey the gospel (Romans 1:16). Do you know God's will?

God's prophet, Isaiah, said, “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ Says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword.’ Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 1:18-20). God has chosen to reason with us; He's not made us mindless robots, but people made in His own image with freewill and a conscience.

Each day you're choosing whether you'll set your mind on the path that follows Jesus or on a path that follows the world. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14 that many people follow a broad path that leads to their own destruction, while few follow the narrow way that leads to life. The devil is trying to deceive your mind, making you think you're on the narrow way when you actually may be following a man-made path to destruction. Decide now to study your Bible and to find the truth. Only the truth can set you free and give you life.

What is God's will for us to do to be saved? Upon hearing the gospel of Jesus, we must believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We must repent of our sins and turn to righteousness. We must confess our faith in Christ and be baptized. John 3:7 teaches that we must be born again, and baptism is the time when we are born again. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ so that our sins will be forgiven. When we're baptized, God washes away our sins (Acts 22:16). I'm praying that you will do God's will today. Won't you do that?

"Because of Jesus"

If Jesus had not come into this world, life would certainly be tragic. The brightest spot in all of history is the day Jesus came into this world. The Lord Jesus is our hope and our joy. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The greatest gift ever given to mankind was our Lord Jesus Christ. All our hopes and dreams, all our blessings and joys come from Him. He created us, provides for our needs, forgives sin, and gives us eternal life. We must know all we can about Him. We must love and follow Him, so we open the Bible each day and study His words. Only Jesus has the words to eternal life. He is the one and the only Lord of all.

Can you imagine how different this world would be if Jesus had not come? Our lives would be much poorer and sadder without Christ. Jesus utterly transformed individual hearts and lives, but also touched entire nations. Western culture enjoys the fragrance of His purity and kindness. Many advances in society have come from the mindset and heart of Christ. Christians through the ages took a stand against sinful practices, and their Christian love ended the bloody games of the gladiators, stopped much slavery, ended the exposure and death of unwanted babies that was popular in ancient times, lifted women to a higher status, proclaimed respect for the elderly, and protected the sanctity of life. Christian love teaches us to love our enemies, to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and to care for those who are sick. The New Testament teaches us to work for our keep and not steal from others. Yes, our world became richer, kinder, purer, and more loving because of Jesus.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to John 1:14-18. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful that Jesus came into the world to save us from sin, to provide grace and truth for us. Help us to live in His grace and to believe His truth. In Jesus' name, Amen!

No event in all of history compares with the coming of Jesus into this world. He is God's gift of hope and blessing to every person. The birth of Jesus came with a star. Interestingly, in 1991, The Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society noted that Chinese astronomers had observed a long-tailed, slow-moving comet in their skies during March of 5 B.C. This "star," hung in the Capricorn region for more than seventy days. This same comet would have been visible in the skies over Persia, home of the Magi, or wise men, in the hours just before dawn. Due to the earth's orbital motion, the comet's light would have been directly in front of the Magi during their journey – so, they would truly have followed the star.

When the wise men entered Jerusalem and asked Herod where the child was to be born, the priests knew that it was Bethlehem. They knew the prophecy written in the eighth century B.C. and found in Micah 5:2; it says, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem, just as God predicted through His prophet.

An angel told shepherds that day who were watching their flocks by night in that region, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!’” (Luke 2:10-14)

Indeed the Lord has brought peace and favor, or goodwill, to mankind. No one in all history has done so much to bring light and life to you and me. We don’t know when Jesus came to this earth. We don’t know the specific year or even the month of His coming with certainty. We don’t need to know those things, frankly. We do know that His coming was a fulfillment of God’s plan from the beginning and has made all the difference.

Because of Jesus, we can know God and His ways. When Jesus came into this world, Matthew 1:22-23 says, “Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’” Jesus is indeed God with us. He was and is always God. John chapter 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 came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Jesus has existed from all eternity, all eternity past as God and was involved in creating everything that has been created.

Because Jesus became flesh and was found in fashion as a man, we could relate to Him. Hebrews 1:3 says, “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.” Jesus makes the character of God known to us. The Lord Jesus said, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him” (John 14:7). We know about God’s love, His kindness, His goodness, and His grace because of Jesus. When we get to know Jesus, we understand what kind of God we serve and learn what He desires from us.

Because of Jesus, we can have salvation from sin. The angel Gabriel told Joseph that Mary “will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus came into this world, because He knew how terrible and how hurtful sin truly is. He knew people needed forgiveness and the opportunity to live righteously rather than wickedly. He gave people the opportunity to be born again as children of God and to leave an old way of sin and death. First Peter 2:24 says that Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

When John the Baptist introduced Jesus to his disciples, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” (John 1:29). Sin leaves its stain and ugliness on our souls. Though we may not think sin is any big deal, it’s still a very big deal to God. God doesn’t think like we do. Time and culture don’t change the mind and the heart of God. Romans 6:23 says that “the wages of sin is death.” Sin is our greatest enemy and it will rob us of a life with God for an eternity. Because Jesus loves us and knew the great danger that sin poses to our souls, He was willing to die for us. The Lord Jesus said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus wanted to make a difference in our lives.

By touching individuals, the Lord Jesus could make a difference for the whole world. Two thousand years have passed, and He is still changing lives. Everyone who allows the cross of

Christ to touch their hearts and is willing to serve the Lord becomes a new person. Paul wrote that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4). The world of the first century was filled with pagan wickedness and selfishness. Paul explained, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-3). He says, “Among them we too all (that’s you and me) formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

Our world needed saving from sin and needed a higher moral standard than it ever had before. When Jesus came to earth, He gave us God’s moral standard that touches our hearts as well as our behavior. Nothing compares to the standard that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters five through seven. The Lord Jesus said, “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘you shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:21-22). The Lord knew we had to control our hearts to overcome hate and to keep from harming others.

Again, the Lord said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). The Lord knew man would never overcome his lust until he determined in his heart to control his eyes. Jesus knew that “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:19). Jesus loved us and He gave us reason to love what is good rather than what’s evil, to love what is right rather than what is wrong. By changing hearts, He was changing lives; by changing lives, He was changing communities; and by changing communities, He was changing nations; and by changing nations, He delivered us from the present evil age.

Because of Jesus, we know love. First John 4:19 says, “We love, because He first loved us.” He’s the reason for all the love that we possess. He gave us love and taught us how to love. The Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Our love is to be like His love, love that is willing to give everything in order to bless others. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus didn’t merely talk love; He demonstrated it. He gave everything so that we could be saved.

Loving others means we must learn to forgive. People often want to take vengeance and get even. Christians forgive, because He has forgiven us. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Because we know the value of being forgiven, we forgive others who sin against us. We put away our sword and leave vengeance to God. Paul explained, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31-32). If you know what it means to be forgiven, you can find the strength and the love to forgive.

Beyond all this, Jesus came to this world to teach us the truth. Our culture hasn't given much value to the truth; some even deny there is any absolute truth. But the Lord Jesus as the Son of God provides for us an unchangeable and absolute basis for our faith, so that we can distinguish what is true from what's false. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus was indeed full of grace and truth. His words are utterly trustworthy and contain the standard by which every idea and doctrine is judged. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). If the Lord Jesus said it or delivered it to his apostles to say, then we can trust it as the truth. Jesus promised, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Oh, we need the truth!

We can see why the coming of Jesus into this world matters. He's brought life and light; He's brought love and forgiveness; and He's brought morality and truth to all mankind. He's lifted hearts out of wickedness and selfishness to make them noble and virtuous. He's turned anger and hatred into love and kindness. He died upon a cruel cross so that we may become the kind of people that God desired from the beginning. There's one last thing! He gave us hope for life beyond the grave when God raised Him from the dead. Because of Jesus, we have the promise of eternal life with God. Without Jesus, we are nothing. We can possess nothing greater in all the world than being His servant and knowing Him. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful for Your love and for the blessing of the day. And Father, we're thankful that You gave us Jesus. Help us to love and follow Him every day. This is our prayer in His name, Amen!

If you want Jesus as your Savior, you must also take Him as your Lord. You must trust Him and believe everything He says is true. If you cannot trust Jesus but think He's mistaken in what He teaches on morals or doctrine, how can you trust His promises? You can't re-write Jesus' teaching, even on one point, and then trust in Him on another point. When you won't follow Jesus on some point that you don't like, you aren't really treating Jesus as Lord. Instead, you believe in yourself and in your own wisdom. God wants us to trust in Jesus Christ in every step and decision that we make. When we do, His grace and truth surround us. Jesus is indeed Lord of all, whether we recognize Him or not.

You'll not find, however, a Lord so good as Jesus. You're choosing everyday whom you will follow. Some choose sin and some choose self. These choices prove destructive and empty. They lead to chaos and misery. Why not choose the Lord? No one will ever love you and watch over you like He will. No one can bless you with eternal life but the Lord Jesus.

God loves each of us and He wants to be in our lives. To become a Christian, love and believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Turn from all sin and start pleasing the Lord. Then, confessing your faith, be baptized into Christ. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. When you're baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to His family, the church. According to John 3:5, you must be born again in baptism to enter the kingdom of God. According to Acts 22:16, the Lord washes away our sins in baptism. Oh, my friend, become a Christian today.

We ask that you do get involved with a church of Christ. If you're looking for a Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ love and want guests to come.

"Hope"

As a fish without water or a man without air, so is the soul without hope. Today we're going to explore the great hope that we have in Christ. The Lord gave us His Word so that we might have hope. He gives us the truth so that we might put our hope in the truth and not be fooled by half-truths or lies. You can't separate hope from the truth, any more than you can separate faith from the truth. False hope cannot save your soul and assure you of eternal life. That's why we need to know the truth of God's Word and to believe and obey it. This is why from week to week we can't be satisfied with anything less than the truth of God's Word.

Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." When I consider how morally evil this world is, I remember Noah was righteous and saved his family. When I have a giant problem, I remember David defeated Goliath. When I think I'm alone, I remember that God told Elijah seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal. When I hear "people can't change," I recall Nineveh and how they repented at the preaching of Jonah. When I think things can't get worse, I remember the book of Job had an ending. When I walk through a valley, I remember Psalm 23 and the Lord is "with me." When I wonder why I'm here, I remember Joseph; and God had a plan for his life. I remember Moses both as a baby and as a shepherd; and God had a plan for him. God also has a plan for you and me.

Our reading today comes from Psalm 33:18-22. "Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness, To deliver their soul from death And to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. For our heart rejoices in Him, Because we trust in His holy name. Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us, According as we have hoped in You." That's a reading from God's Holy and Divine Word, worthy of thinking about every day. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful for the hope that we have in Christ. May we always hope in what He has done for us and for the future that we have ahead. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

Let's examine the word "hope." Hope is the confident expectation or belief in the fulfillment of something that God promises and we desire. Present hurts and uncertainty over the future create the constant need for hope. We long for something better than what we have now. In trouble we hope for relief, in war we hope for peace, in sin we hope for forgiveness, in death we hope for eternal life. Hope is not merely expecting something; it is a confident, trusting expectation in God's promises. Faith and hope intertwine. Because we believe, we hope. We believe, because we have the assurance of God. We have it in black and white in His Word, the Bible.

Paul said in Ephesians 1:18-20, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." We need to open the eyes of our hearts. As Christians, we have access to our Father; we can enjoy the surpassing greatness of His power and His blessing. We can hope in our calling as Christians and confidently expect to live forever, because our Father in heaven raised Jesus from the dead.

First Timothy 1:1 says, "Christ Jesus is our hope." In 1 Corinthians chapter 15 Paul speaks of some who were denying the resurrection. Paul explained in verses 17 and 18, "if Christ has not

been raised, then your faith is worthless; you're still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." Without the hope of Christ in the resurrection, we will perish in our sins and have no hope of life beyond the grave. Peter urges us in 1 Peter 1:13, "Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought about to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Let being with the Lord and the Father in heaven fill your heart each day. Let hope motivate you to live as a Christian should live.

The apostle John declared, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope, this kind of hope in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:1-3). Hope for heaven and eternal life leads us to put away sin and to serve the Lord in holiness. If you hope for heaven, are you letting sin grow in your life? Purify yourself; get right with God.

When life becomes difficult and painful, we need hope. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Throughout his life, people opposed and ignored his prophecies. Israel abandoned the God of heaven and became more and more idolatrous. They brought devastation upon themselves by forsaking God. God promised through the true prophet Jeremiah to destroy Jerusalem, but the people believed the false prophets who prophesied peace. They thought they could continue in sin and God wouldn't care. They were wrong, and God permitted Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon to destroy the city and even the temple. You might ask, where is hope now? How could evil win and righteousness lose? Here we need to see two lessons.

First, though Jeremiah watched the destruction of Jerusalem, his relationship with the Lord remained unchanged. The world was falling down around his shoulders; Babylon had set the city on fire, killed and enslaved his fellow-citizens, and destroyed the house of God. He said his peace and his strength had perished; he felt so hopeless; and he had forgotten happiness. It was at this low point in his life, that he recalled the love and the mercy of God. Jeremiah wrote, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in Him.' The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him" (Lamentations 3:21-24). If we set our hearts on the Lord, we'll see more than physical circumstances. We'll remember all the good that God does for us each and every day.

Second, Jeremiah learned the present isn't all there is; it isn't the end of the story. When God was about to allow the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah bought a field in Anathoth that belonged to his cousin and he sealed the deed in an earthenware jar so that it would last a long time. The Bible says, "For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land'" (Jeremiah 32:15). Seventy years later, just as the prophecy said in Jeremiah 29:10, the Jews returned to Jerusalem. God keeps His promises in His time. The apostle Paul, even with all his suffering, knew too that God would care for him in the future. He said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" Romans 8:18). God is utterly and ultimately good to us; but He acts in His own time.

Paul asked the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your

sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

Hard times happen to everybody, and some things we'll never understand. We shouldn't imagine, however, that hard times mean God has forgotten or abandoned us. I treasure a promise of God that I've seen fulfilled frequently. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Paul says here, "we know!" It's not "we think," or "we feel," or "we imagine"; but "we know." Not everything, of course, is good; but God is able to make our most difficult circumstances "work together for good."

Tornadoes, earthquakes, fires, and hurricanes aren't good; but the devastation they bring touches the hearts of people and calls them to do good to ease the misfortunes of others. We're called as Christians to "love our neighbors." Galatians 6:10 says, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." Many do loving acts of kindness for people they don't even know, because their hearts of compassion, trained by the love of God and the cross of Christ, leads them to act. God's love moves people to demonstrate their love. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

We can have hope, even when we have sinned. We have hope because Jesus Christ came to save His people from their sins. Sin is real and it'll cost you your soul. If you try on your own merits to overcome, you won't succeed; you'll have no hope because you can't earn salvation. The Lord must save us, because we cannot save ourselves. Some, looking at their sin, begin to imagine they are beyond saving. Remember: the Lord came to earth to save us.

The apostle Paul was once Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church. He was "formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor." The blood of the Lord Jesus, however, cleansed him from sin because he "acted ignorantly in unbelief." So Paul said, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16) Those who humble their hearts and follow the Lord can have hope, because of the abundant grace of Christ, which is greater than our sins.

When I consider the brevity of life, I have hope in the Lord. The Lord's love is not only for today; it lasts forever. We are more than flesh and blood, and the Lord wants us to live with Him through eternity. Jesus has made the way. Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms (or dwelling places). And if it were not so, I would have told you but I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we can have true hope in eternal life.

Hope is a great blessing, but we must exercise our hope in the Lord by taking our faith and obedience to Him seriously. Peter said, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10-11).

I'll never forget my first ride on a commercial airplane. It was bitterly cold and icy at the airport in Memphis, Tennessee. Dark gray clouds filled the skies. Jackie and my four precious daughters had already gone to Oklahoma for the holidays and to be with family, and oh, how I missed them. A friend told me about a new airline that had great prices, and so I booked a flight over the phone. When I got to the airport, I discovered the plane was quite old. The workers were de-icing the plane, which caused me some concern. When we finally boarded the plane, there was no heat inside; and the plane was shaking up and down. That was no comfort.

I was feeling down as we waited to take off, since everything seemed so dark. When the plane took off, I gripped the armrest as we ascended. I didn't expect what I was about to see. We entered dark clouds; but when we burst through them, the sun was shining brightly! I had never been above the clouds. No matter how dark and dreary it is on the ground, the sun still shines above the clouds. God is still in heaven.

We humans are limited by space, time, and intelligence. We see what's happening around us and we forget there is a greater sense of reality. It's so easy to lose sight of God. An unchanging and unchangeable God created us and made us some unfailing promises. When you think all is dreary and lost, remember the Father is still on His throne; the Holy Spirit is still speaking through the written word; Jesus is still coming again; the gospel still has power to save; and prayer still reaches the ear of the Father. Let's pray. Father, we're thankful for the hope that You give to us because of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead, which tells us that you have life beyond this life and that He is our Lord. Father, help us to follow Him. In Jesus' name, Amen!

In an Appalachian art gallery sits a picture of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney. In front of this destroyed home stood an old man with a small boy crying, clutching at his pair of patched overalls. Underneath the picture was the simple caption, "Hush child, God ain't dead!" That vivid picture of a burned-out mountain shack, that old man, the weeping child, and those words "God ain't dead" keep declaring hope. Instead of tragedies being a time to despair, God gives us hope!

No matter how difficult life becomes, don't give up on God. Fix your hope completely on Him! Serve Him! Love Him! Wait for Him! Psalm 43:5 says, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance, and my God." Why should we hope in God? Why? Because God is still on the throne of heaven, and nothing can change that. No army can conquer Him, and no group can vote Him out of office. Jesus is Lord over all!

That's why we must yield our hearts and our lives to Him. We must take up our crosses daily and follow Him. We do this by placing our utter trust in Him and in His Word, by repenting of our sins, by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized in His name. We're baptized into Christ and into His death according to Romans 6:3. While the disciples baptize people in water, God does at the same time unites them with the Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection; and that takes place in baptism. When God unites us with Christ in His death, the blood of Christ does away with our sins according to Romans 6:4-7. Put your trust and your hope in the blood of Christ by being baptized and following Christ for the rest of your life.

Please get involved with a church in your area. They love you and they appreciate you. Well, as always, we like to say to all of our friends and our guests, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.