

Program Transcripts

For July 2014



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

July 2014

Topics subject to change without notice

JULY 6 – DO WE NEED GOD?

Many assume they have all they need and can live on their own terms. People who think they can do it on their own often forget what God has done for them and their utter need for God for their life and their salvation.

JULY 13 – SEEK YE FIRST

Life is filled with so many distractions and worries that people often lose sight of the need to seek God first. Our task in life is to attain the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We'll explore our need to seek first the kingdom of God.

JULY 20 – ANGRY AT GOD

When painful experiences come our way, we can wonder why God allowed it to happen. Some people get so focused on their hurts they become angry at God or deny His existence. How can we stay faithful in our pain?

JULY 27 – COME HOME

The world is always suggesting they have something better than God's way, but those who follow their own path usually find they way is not as easy as they thought. Thankfully, the heart of God longs for His straying children to come home.

Do We Need God?

People who think they can do it on their own often forget God. Do we need God? The Scriptures open up God's history for us so that we can avoid spiritual pitfalls and live prosperous lives that please God. We find blessing when we seek God because we realize how much we need Him. We find God today in Scripture.

Asa was a good king in Judah. Early in his reign, King Asa saw God defeat the huge army of the Ethiopians and Libyans when he looked to God for help. He put away the sinful idols and humbled his heart. But late in life, King Asa relied on the king of Syria rather than turn to God for help. Hanani, the seer or prophet, told King Asa, "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly (Hanani said) in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars" (2 Chronicles 16:9). King Asa failed to seek God's help and he found his later years filled with misery and frustration. Asa got angry at Hanani and put him in prison because he didn't want to hear the truth.

Don't make Asa's mistake. The Lord is still looking for people who will seek after Him and His ways. Many today never call on God; they never seek His will; or feel a need for Him. They assume some other way is better than following God. Like Asa, they're only bringing misery upon themselves. God would love to draw close to us and to bless us, but we must let Him. We must seek Him with all our heart. Will you?

Our reading today comes from 2 Chronicles 14:9-12. "Now Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and he came to Mareshah. So Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up in battle formation in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, 'LORD, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O LORD our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; let not man prevail against You.' So the LORD routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled."

Americans are famous for their belief in "rugged individualism," not needing anything or anyone. They believe in pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps. Even Christians can fall into the trap of feeling self-sufficient, and of not realizing how much they need God; they need His morals, His guidance, and His truth. On every American coin and dollar are the words, "In God we trust." If we trust in God, why has our nation begun thinking man's wisdom is better, or man's morals are kinder, or man's favor is more important than God's? The more we ignore and forget God, the more miserable our nation will become.

King Asa of Judah had been spiritually strong and a faithful king for many years, and God gave the land rest and prosperity; but later in his life he forgot God. He sought help from the idolatrous king of Syria rather than God. You'd think the great victory that God gave him over Ethiopia would have made a greater impression, but Asa thought he outgrew his need for God. When he did so, he only ruined himself. He got angry at hearing the truth, and he imprisoned the prophet Hanani, and he oppressed some people. War never departed Judah as long as Asa lived. When people ignore God and follow their own path, they'll get angry at the truth. They

hate the good and begin to seek their own ways. They think they're better off, but the truth is they only ruin themselves.

The lukewarm church in Laodicea in the book of Revelation became so prosperous that somehow they didn't need God. Revelation 3:17-18 says, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know (he says to them) that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and the eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see." No wonder Jesus was ready to spit them out of His mouth!

This church was spiritually wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. People often blind themselves to reality—not seeing how vulnerable and weak they truly are. Laodicea had banks and were rich, had clothing business and purple, and had an eye business that had a salve that they sold. But they were spiritually impoverished! One can have all the money, fame, and power of men and yet still be weak and powerless with God. It's easy to feel satisfied with life, that all is okay. Then something happens which opens our eyes to the reality that we don't have all the strings, that strings belong only to God.

Exodus, chapter one, tells the story of Israel's decline in Egypt from a wealthy and powerful position to one of slavery. It all happened when Egypt changed politically. Exodus 1:6-11 says, "Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. He said to his people, 'Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we.' Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.' So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor." Time has an amazing way of changing things in life. No matter how secure we think we are, our whole lives can be shattered in a day. At that point, we know our lives will never be the same. We can't turn back the clock and recover what we lost. It's presumptuous to think we'll never need the help of God, never need Him as our friend.

James talked about assuming too much in life. He said, "Come now, you who say (he's speaking to merchants), (And they were saying) 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, we're going to spend a year there, we're going to engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You're just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that'" (James 4:13-15). The fact is none of us knows the future or what our lives will be like. We act in hope that the things will go as we had planned; but we don't know what will happen to us in coming days or weeks.

People who trust in their own wisdom and their own senses often become deceived by the wisdom and the assumptions of this world. Paul said, "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 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. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God

and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

Some people want a Savior, but they don't want a "Lord", they don't want someone to whom they are accountable and whose Word they must obey. What they may not realize is that everyone has a "lord." They're enslaved to someone or something. Unfortunately many people are enslaved to sin or to the devil. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). A person who commits sin because he thinks it's pleasurable, thinks he's giving himself a boost; but after a time that sin begins to control that person, and he's a slave. Instead of being "in control" of his own life, he is being "controlled" by the sin.

Peter spoke of some false teachers of his day as people enslaved to sin. "These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved" (2 Peter 2:17-19). Sin is cruel to those who are enslaved by it. It brings nothing but harm and shame and regret. Sin is a terrible master.

Everyone has a Lord; wouldn't it be better to choose a master who will love you and bless you rather than one that curses and enslaves you. If we reject Jesus as Lord, we also reject His promises of blessing and the inheritance He has prepared for us. Some people think they don't need a Savior. They might say, "Well, I'm not really so bad as to deserve to be lost." It's the tendency of every person to downplay his own sins. To many people "sin" is an outdated word and "hell" is just a myth designed to manipulate. But if sin and hell are true concepts, you and I need a Savior!

Paul said, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Those wages have never changed in all these years. In Psalm 14:2-3, David wrote, "The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have all become corrupt; There's no one who does good, not even one." Paul said in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin is a universal problem, you have it, I have it, we all have it!

Someone says, "Well, I can't be all that bad." But the apostle John said, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, then 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" (1 John 1:8-10). We all need a Savior. We need Him to save us from sin, to give us hope, and to lead us to heaven. Without the blood of Jesus, we'd all be lost and without any hope of forgiveness or heaven. Instead of getting proud, let's humble ourselves.

Peter said of Jesus, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. And by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). That matters to me. What Jesus did is personal, very personal. The sins I committed and you committed meant that we were guilty and deserved death. God laid on Christ the penalty that you and I should have suffered. He suffered this penalty personally with his body and

shedding his blood. Jesus died for us so that we could be healed from the terrible stain and harm of sin. We should be all the more grateful for the great sacrifice that the Lord Jesus made for us.

Paul said, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8). It's hard to imagine that kind of love. To die for people who were weak, ungodly, and sinners shows the surpassing love of Jesus. We can never forget or ignore that kind of love. You and I can be saved by Him, but at a tremendous cost. Your soul and my soul were not cheap.

Peter said in, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). God took you and me seriously enough to sacrifice His Son Jesus. Jesus loved us enough to sacrifice His life. Let's never walk away from the cross; acting as if nothing went on there that day. What really happened? He took our punishment because He loved us and wanted to spend an eternity with us. Do we need the Lord? Oh, of course we do!

We need the Lord! We need Him every day! We need Him in every facet of our lives! We need saving from sin. We need forgiveness. We need his counsel and wisdom. We need His guidance and leadership. We need to know Him and the power of his resurrection. We need the Father's ear to hear our prayers. We need the Father's care and protection every day of our lives. We need the Lord's help to overcome our sins. The God of heaven, the God of the Bible is a true and living God—the only God. If we don't have Him in our lives, we have nothing at all. The apostle Paul revealed how much he needed the Lord. He said he'd give up everything to have Jesus in his life. He said, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8). When we have Christ, we have everything; but when we fail to have Christ, we have nothing of lasting value. The Lord Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Jesus is the only way to eternal life; come to Him and serve Him. "Take the world, but give me Jesus."

We need Jesus in our personal lives, our homes, our cities, and our nation. We need His teaching, His love to fill every corner of our lives. The story of the cross and the resurrection is not simply good news; it's the best news and the only news that can save us from sin and lead us to heaven. Draw close to God; make Him a part of your life every day! Become a Christian by placing your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He'll never lie to you and wants to save you. Out of love, repent of your sins by forsaking them and by following the Lord. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ, united with Him. We're crucified with Christ in baptism so that our body of sin might be done away with according to Romans 6:3-7. It is God who washes away our sins in baptism according to Acts 22:16. So become a Christian today, and be free from sin!

Seek Ye First

With all the uncertainties and predictions of doom and gloom, it's easy to forget that we have a Father in heaven. Today, we're exploring the answer to anxiety. God's Word provides a foundation for life. It reveals how our Father in heaven created us and cares for us. God's Word provides instruction and training so that we may please Him. His teaching corrects our errors and leads us to the truth.

The mind is a battleground. We have the ability to harbor both thoughts of good and evil. Perhaps the hardest thing we face is learning to control our minds. Proverbs 15:16 says, "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it." God's blessing is real, while riches may not last. The Lord Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-24).

Many people think if they just had more money, all their problems would be solved. Solomon said, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep" (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12). You and I need the Lord!

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to Matthew 6:31-34. "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 'So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'" That's the Lord Jesus Christ Himself speaking, and it's good for us to hear.

When we start thinking about worrying there, are answers that God gives to us. First, the Lord just simply says, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Matthew 6:25). He repeats this command in verses 31 to 32, and He says "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." People who know God should learn to rely on God and not behave like the Gentiles who don't know God.

The reason Jesus speaks out against worry is because worry is filled with doubt and lacks faith. Jesus addresses them as, "O ye of little faith." Worry lacks faith and keeps us from putting our trust in God. It divides the mind! We can't put our whole heart into serving God because we don't know how we'll take care of ourselves. Worry brings uneasiness, fear, and doubt. It leads a person to become distracted with little things and miss what's important.

Scripture tells of two sisters who chose different paths, one of commitment and one of worry. "Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named

Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. She went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:38-42). We too get so caught up in everyday life that we forget how much we need to draw near to the Lord Jesus.

Worry can cause us to take our focus off of God and what He can do in our lives. We can easily forget God is the source of every blessing and good thing in life. God makes us a promise. Scripture says, "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" (Philippians 4:6-7). God will take away your fear and doubt and He'll replace it with a peace that surpasses understanding, if you'll let him. He'll set a guard around your heart and your mind so that fear and doubt won't overwhelm you, if you let Him.

Just as He protected Daniel in the lion's den, God will protect you. Just as He protected Elisha, the prophet, at Dothan when the King of Syria surrounded the city with an army with horses and chariots, so God will protect you. Elisha knew God was with him. He told his servant, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of the servant, and the young man "saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." God protected Elisha, and He will protect you. Let your requests be made known to God with thanksgiving, and He will give you peace.

Second, consider what God is doing. The Lord Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (Matthew 6:26-27). God will take care of you. Again, the Lord said, "And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:28-30). God wants us to look at these matters closely and to think about them; to focus on what God is doing for the birds and the flowers. Think, reason! If God takes care of them, He'll take care of you.

Third, seek! The Lord Jesus said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" Matthew 6:33). To seek means setting aside everything else until you find and possess what you seek! Get in God's kingdom and get right with God. That's what we must seek first and foremost. Nothing else is as important.

Never put Christ in second place, third place, last place, or any place but first. Colossians 1:17-18 says, Christ "is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." He should be first in importance, first in

our time, and first in our choices. Don't speak about one day following the Lord; put Him first!

We must seek first His kingdom. The Lord Jesus said, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and he sold all that he had and he bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46). That one pearl was worth more than everything else. To be in God's kingdom here on earth means getting to be in God's kingdom in heaven. To be in that kingdom Christ must reign in our hearts. First Peter 3:15 teaches us to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, and yet with gentleness and reverence." We should be ready and willing to tell anyone why Jesus is our hope and why He is Lord in our hearts. Is the Lord Jesus first in your heart?

The Lord Jesus urges us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). We know what it is to be hungry and thirsty. We want food! We want water to drink! We want it so badly we have to have it right now! Do you want a right relationship with God that badly? We cannot pursue righteousness if our hearts are filled with worries and sins. The fear and the doubt of worry will rob us of our faith. That's why we need to trust God.

In Luke 13:23-28 someone said to Jesus, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door', saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' Then He will answer and say to you, 'I don't know where you're from.' And then you'll begin to say, 'Well, we ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.' (And then He said) In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (especially) when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out."

This passage reveals how some folks play at religion but never strive to enter through the narrow door. They want to do things their way rather than God's way. They want to live like the world and still be close to God. That won't work. You can't live wickedly and expect God to see you as righteous. Romans 8:12-13 says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." The heart has to make choices. Will we follow God or the flesh? When we change our heart to give up on sin and worldliness and to seek first the kingdom, we're repenting! God demands that we repent. How badly do you want to be right with God?

Fourth, God will take care of you. Jesus challenged us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, "and all these things will be added to you." God will provide food, clothing, and the necessities of life if we seek Him first! Paul said, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). We must trust Him as our God and obey Him. When we put Him first in our lives we know He meets every need. God's supply house doesn't run out. When we seek God, first God also seeks us out to strongly support us. Second Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the Lord move to

and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." God will not forget those who love Him.

When the church at Rome suffered persecution, Paul reminded them that God was on their side. He said, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). Do you imagine the God who would give you His own Son would withhold anything that you need? Trust God! Put your worries in His hands. David said, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22). In a similar passage Peter says, "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). God loves you; He loves you enough to take your burdens. So...once you put your worries into His hands leave them there.

Fifth, live one day at a time. The Lord Jesus said, "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). Yesterday is gone and tomorrow is uncertain, so make today count! Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." Let the past be past, and don't borrow trouble from the future. Don't let the problems of life steal your faith or cause you to doubt God's love. Don't let doubt and uncertainty steal your joy and hope. God is faithful. You can trust Him.

Can you say what Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:12? "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." If you know God like Paul knew Him, you too can trust Him! Do you?

Will you personally seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness? The Lord Jesus asked us to pray to the Father, "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Would you begin praying that every day? Seeking God's kingdom and righteousness means God's will is to be done. We live in a morally and religiously confused world that has forgotten and forsaken the will of God found in Scripture, and they've forsaken it for worldly ways. This moral confusion will lead to nothing but misery and brokenness. The world is confused and selfish in its ways, and these ways lead people to hate one another. God's ways are filled with love and kindness. Sin doesn't cause God's heart to hate; it causes it to break! It breaks because God knows the misery that sin causes.

Let's reason together: if you're going to pray "God's will be done," will you practice what you pray? Will you have Jesus Christ as Lord of your life? Will you submit your will to His teaching? What changes do you need to make in your life in order to do the will of God? Will you deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Him?

To become a Christian put your trust wholeheartedly in Jesus Christ; turn your heart away from sin to the Lord; cease from sin and live for Jesus; confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Acts 2:38 still commands us to "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When we're baptized the Lord washes away our sins (Acts 22:16). He makes us His child (Galatians 3:26-27). Won't you become a Christian today?

Angry at God

When painful experiences come our way we wonder why God allowed it to happen. How can we stay faithful when we hurt? God has the answer. God's Word provides a sacred history of the world. In its pages we see the holiness and the love of God, but also the weakness and wickedness of men. Through it God reveals His great and supreme plan for redeeming man from sin, how to help men live godly and positive lives, and how man might live in eternal joy in heaven. God has done everything possible to help us through the ages.

Some people get so focused on their hurts they become angry with God or decide that God could not exist. One man recently said, "The God I once believed in was a God who was active in the world. He saved Israelites from slavery; he sent Jesus for the salvation of the world; he answered prayer; he intervened on behalf of His people when they were in desperate need; he was actively involved in my life. But I can't believe in that God anymore he said, because from what I now see around the world, he doesn't intervene."

Sometimes people think if God is good, if He cares for us like a loving father, if the Lord watches over us like a shepherd does His sheep, why doesn't God do everything within His power to prevent disease, war, natural calamities, and evil? God certainly does love us. He proved His love by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and to give us eternal life. We may be assuming too much when we dictate to God how we think He should act. Rather than judge God we should recognize that God is wiser than we are and knows what's best.

Our reading from the Holy Scriptures today come through the prophet Habakkuk chapter 3, verses 17 to 19. "Though the fig tree should not blossom, And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail, And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exalt in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like the hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places."

When life becomes bitter, we're all tempted to get angry. Some get so angry they want to curse God. Such anger arises from seeing only the suffering. James 1:19-20 says, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Anger usually distorts our thinking. When people say God isn't treating them right, they're saying God is in the wrong. Often they concentrate on some wrong and forget all the good things God has done. James 1:17 says, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

Some people assume if God loves us, He'll prevent every evil and hurtful thing from happening to us. They think all suffering is bad, but some pain is for the best. We vaccinate our children with shots to prevent serious illness. We discipline ourselves with both mental and physical exercises so that we might be educated and healthy. Sometimes the hurts of life prepare us for better things. I've known more than a few people that didn't come to know the Lord until they went to prison or faced death. Their tragedies helped them to understand their need for God. In the end they were actually thankful that they had the heartache.

Because man is a free moral agent, he can choose to serve or to forsake God and His teaching. In Jeremiah's day the people decided to follow the nations around them, and they

went into pagan idolatry. They made their own gods and worshiped them as they pleased. They lived in sexual immorality and even sacrificed their own children in a fire. Did God intervene? Yes, He did. When? When the people so hardened their hearts that they refused to repent. Jeremiah describes the people, "They have made their faces harder than rock; They have refused to repent" (Jeremiah 5:3). So, God promised calamity on the people, because "they have stiffened their necks so as not to heed My words" (Jeremiah 19:15).

Because they didn't want to hear what God said through the prophet, they began to despise Jeremiah. Preaching the truth of God's Word resulted in the people treating him with "reproach and derision all day long." Paul too once asked, "have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16). Paul had spoken out against hurtful sin, and the guilty people opposed him for it. Sin deceives people and causes them to strike out against others for exposing them. Like the people in Jeremiah's day they can stiffen their necks and make their faces harder than rock. Many today think they should have the right to commit any sin they want. They get angry and they slander anybody who speaks the truth about their sins. They even get angry at God.

King David wanted to bring the ark of the covenant from the house of Abinadab to Jerusalem, but he made the mistake of putting the ark into a new oxcart. Second Samuel 6:6-8 says, "But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God. David became angry because of the Lord's outburst against Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day."

David got angry at the Lord, but David was at fault, not the Lord. When David sought the reason why the Lord struck Uzzah, he found the truth. They did not obey the Lord. Only the Levites were to carry the ark. David told Abiathar, the priest, and the Levites, "Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance" (1 Chronicles 15:13). David got angry at God, but he should have gotten angry at himself for his disobedience.

Second Kings 5 tells of Naaman, the captain of the army of the King of Syria, who became a leper. Naaman sought out Elisha, the prophet of God, to be cured of his leprosy. Naaman brought many riches and came with horses and chariots to Elisha's door. Verses 10 and 11 say: "And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.'" But Naaman became angry and he went away, saying, "Behold, I thought he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper."

Naaman got angry because Elisha didn't act like he expected. Rather than listen to God's prophet, Naaman listened to his own thinking. He wanted a big production, but Elisha simply told him to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River. Thankfully, Naaman's servants showed wisdom and urged him to obey the simple instruction. Verse 14 says Naaman "dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." God graciously cured him when he obeyed.

Rather than get angry and prideful when God calls something sinful, we too should humbly submit to God's will. Many think they know what God will do in certain circumstances and when God does something different they may get angry or write God off. Rather than trust our own thinking about what we think God is like, perhaps we should examine the Scriptures to find what God is really like! Many take their eyes off Scripture and turn to popular, but false notions. Then they judge God harshly for what they think He is, not for what He really is.

What some call "hate speech" from Christians is really "heart-break" speech. The sin and moral confusion of our day breaks the heart of God and those who love God. God grieves over every soul that forsakes Him. Yes, there are things that God hates. God hates sin. Have you ever asked why God hates sin? Is it because He's mean and judgmental? No! God hates sin because He knows how sin destroys the people that He loves. He hates sin because of what it does to people. If God didn't love people, He wouldn't care what they did; but because He does love them, He wants what is best for them. The Scriptures reveal what's good and what's evil, what helps and what hurts, what brings joy and what leads to sorrow.

People today face all kinds of troubles and heartaches because they stopped listening to God. They thought they had a better morality and could tolerate evil with no problems. When Christians quoted the Bible, they got angry and started calling names. They wanted everyone to think God caused all their problems. They did this to take the focus off of their choices and their sin.

I freely admit that I don't understand all the reasons why God permits suffering and evil in this world, why it goes on. But I do know God is wise and good; and since He permits these things, He has a reason. Though some feel they are quite capable of judging God, I know I'm not wise enough. Perhaps you remember Job. In Job 1:1, he is described as "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil." When Job suffered the loss of his ten children, his health, and most of his possessions, he blessed God and did not blame God (Job 1:21-22). Job suffered so badly that he wished he had never been born, and then he had three friends who proved to be miserable comforters. They said Job brought this suffering on himself by all his sins. Job, however, maintained his innocence.

But Job wanted to find God and present his case before Him. Job maintained that he was innocent and didn't deserve punishment. Job wanted an answer from God for what He allowed to happen. God doesn't directly answer Job's questions and his faultfinding. God instead reveals His wisdom and power to Job by asking Job questions, questions that Job couldn't answer. The Lord said, "You now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!" (Job 38:3). Job comes to understand that he isn't God's equal. God asks, "Will you really annul my judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (Job 40:8). Job ultimately said, "I've heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). In the end, God blessed Job twofold for all that he lost.

Some ask why doesn't God intervene in every problem and punish every evildoer immediately? What if God did? Are you ready for God to punish you eternally when you commit evil? If God intervened with punishment for every sin immediately, the whole world would come to a halt. As soon as a person became old enough to be responsible for his sins

God would condemn him eternally. Instead, God patiently allows us to mature morally and spiritually. He grants us a lifetime of opportunity to repent of our sins.

People are free moral agents. We are imperfect people living in an imperfect world. God doesn't force us to love Him; He doesn't force us to obey Him. He's given us reason after reason to do so. God sent prophets and preachers to persuade us to love Him and to serve Him, but He's allowed us to make the choice whether to do so. He wants us to choose to love Him on our own rather than make us slaves or robots. He knew that imperfect men had to grow to love, and to love Him more than even themselves. We have to develop over time the heart and life of a godly person who would deny himself and take up his cross daily.

When you go through a tough time, think about the example of Jesus for a moment. While He suffered greatly through His trial and on the cross Jesus never got angry, never threatened anyone, and never even spoke evil about anyone. He never called on legions of angels for vengeance. Though violent, hateful, and angry men sentenced Him to death, Jesus humbly endured it. Though He was shamed and humiliated on the cross, Jesus never once shamed His captors or humiliated the soldiers that crucified Him and gambled over His clothes. Nor did Jesus get angry at His Father for having to bear His cross.

The Lord Jesus said, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17-18). Jesus knew the Father loved Him for being willing to die on the cross. Concerning that cross, Jesus said, "so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me" (John 14:31). When people do the will of God, love is in the middle of it. Keep on loving God.

Through the ages people like Job, David, Jeremiah, and Paul learned to trust God. They didn't always understand why God permitted evil and suffering, but they never stopped holding fast to God. They knew God could see things that they couldn't see and knew things that they couldn't know. They knew God would make things right in the end and would keep His promises. They suffered greatly for their faith but they never lost sight of God. Like Habakkuk, we too need to "rejoice in the Lord" and to "take joy in the God of our salvation."

Why stay with our faith? Because these men of God knew that whatever happens on this earth is not the whole story. They knew the last chapter of their lives had not yet been written. They knew a home in heaven awaits them. Stay right with God. Keep living a holy life. I love the promise of 2 Peter 1:10-11, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."

Are you sure about your salvation? Are you a Christian? To become a Christian, believe with all your heart Jesus is the Christ, repent by turning away from evil and following what is good, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized God makes you His child according to Galatians 3:26-27. When you're baptized, God washes away your sins (Acts 22:16) and He raises you up to newness of life (Romans 6:4). When you're baptized you're born again (John 3:5). Won't you become a Christian today?

"Come Home"

Are you one of millions who've stopped attending worship at church? Our message today is to encourage you to come home to God. We know God's ways are best. Righteousness is better than wickedness. Love is better than hate. Kindness is better than apathy. Faith is better than doubt. A clear conscience is better than guilt and regret. Truth is better than falsehood, and hope is better than despair. God gives us all these blessings in His teaching. That's why we shouldn't let a day pass without a study of God's Word.

Many Americans used to take their faith seriously, worshiping at church, but no longer attend. For some reason they've stopped following Jesus Christ and started pursuing life on their own terms. One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – say that they're religiously unaffiliated today. This number has been growing steadily for the last twenty years. While some were never affiliated with any religion, many have rejected organized religion altogether. They've come to believe in nothing but themselves. Others who still claim to be church members haven't worshiped at church in years.

The world claims it has something better than God's way. It offers you temporary pleasures, but at the cost of your soul. First John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

Our scripture reading today comes from the words of Jesus found in Luke 15:17-24. "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!' I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.' So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

From the start, the Lord Jesus knew some who became Christians would fail to remain faithful. Jesus said "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13). Many of today's churches have little spiritual substance. Some focus on entertainment and "feel good" religion that speaks much about grace but never asks people to deny themselves or to take up a cross. Such religions never have a firm root in truth or in commitment to Christ. When temptation comes to follow the lusts of the flesh or to follow the crowd they have little ability to remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus also spoke of "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14). People certainly have many

distractions in riches and pleasures that choke out time and desire for God. Others get so concerned with their struggles in life they lose sight of God. They forget all the good God has done for them. They forget the high moral standards God expects of His people. These standards bless everyone, and people settle for something far less than pure.

When we forsake the way of the Lord and settle for a way without God, we're inviting misery and chaos into our lives, into our homes, and into our society. We're courting trouble and calamity. Our society believes freedom to sin is more valuable than freedom from sin and, of course, sin hurts everyone. Some say, "You can't legislate morality," meaning that you can't make people to be moral. No, we can't make people follow God. But if we ignore the morality that God has given and we legalize more and more sin, we open up the floodgates to a wicked and miserable world. We can't sow sin and expect a moral society. We can't desert God's teaching and expect a more righteous world. We can't approve of sin and not expect the sin to increase!

Legalizing something that is evil doesn't make it good or beneficial. Just because our governments stop calling some behavior a crime doesn't mean God approves of it. God said, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And clever in their own sight!" (Isaiah 5:20-21). People who think they can redefine evil as good are fooling themselves. Evil will ultimately reveal itself as evil; and when we tolerate evil behavior the innocent suffer from it.

People regularly complain to Christians, "Who are you to judge?" Christians don't claim that they're judges; they understand that Jesus is the Judge. Jesus Christ will one day judge all people for their thoughts, their words and their behavior. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We cannot escape the judgment seat of Christ. Christ will judge all people everywhere with the same standards of morality and truth found in Scripture. Changes in culture and popular thinking will have no influence.

What some label as judging really isn't judging at all! If someone quotes what God says in Scripture about a behavior or an attitude, he isn't judging. He's simply proclaiming what God has spoken on the matter. Unfortunately, some ignore Scripture and would rather hear a lie than hear the truth. They would rather be comforted today with a deception than to face the hard truth. They think if they can bury the truth deep enough it won't matter. The truth, however, about right and wrong will not stay buried. God doesn't forget.

We can't sin against God and not be affected. Proverbs 6:27-29 asks, "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished." What is true of this sin, adultery, is really true of all sin. When we play with any kind of sin, we're going to get hurt. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." When ancient Israel forsook God and turned to idols, God said, "For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7). What they got for their disobedience was far worse than they figured. Don't be fooled. One can't continue to sin and it not bring misery.

The prodigal son thought if he could take his inheritance to a far country he could live out his days the way he wanted and not worry about anything. He squandered his property in reckless living. Reckless living means to live without thinking, without being concerned about anything. He probably squandered his estate with immoral behavior like drunkenness, women, and gambling. His money didn't last; he spent it all. He didn't count on a severe famine. He was in need, and nobody was willing to help him. The only work he could find was feeding pigs, a disgraceful life for a Jewish boy. He was so hungry he wished he could eat the pig's food.

The prodigal son, in desperation, finally came to his senses. He said, "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I'll say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men'" (Luke 15:17-19). The prodigal son arose and he came home. He left home so he could live like he wanted, but he found living in sin doesn't last. It ends in heartache and misery. So he decided to come home.

He didn't feel worthy to be his father's son, and he hoped his father would make him a hired servant. Sin causes a man to feel worthless in his own eyes. Luke 15:20 says, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." The father heard him confess his sins, but he stopped him before he finished. "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate" Luke 15:22-24). The prodigal son came home to his father, and you too can come home to your Father in heaven.

Perhaps you've seen in your own life how forsaking God has messed up your life. You've learned living in sin doesn't work and false ways will deceive you. You've learned that selfishness brings nothing but misery. You've learned that lust and sin fail to satisfy the soul. You've seen how love is better than hate, and compassion is better than apathy. You've found holding an angry grudge will corrupt the heart and condemn the soul, that the way of the Lord is right and good. The way of the world only leads to suffering.

Psalm 19:7-11 says, "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." The God who made us gave us His teaching so that we might have the best life possible on earth and eternal life in heaven. Nothing can compare or improve on what the Bible teaches. God provides the way, so take hold of it!

God's teaching blesses us with a peaceful and wise way of life. Jesus promised to give us an abundant life in John 10:10 and those who have walked with Him realize that God keeps His Word. God's wisdom is ours if we're willing to study and follow it. The Bible has the most valuable message in the world. Its message is more desirable than much fine gold. Psalm 119:2 says, "How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart."

God's Word strengthens the weak, comforts the hurting, encourages the fainthearted, rebukes the sinner, corrects the misinformed, and trains us in every good work. It keeps the foot from slipping, the eye from coveting, and the heart from hardening. God's Word speaks to every person, whatever their past, whatever their place, whatever their culture. What it says stands and does not change with the times. Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven." You can disagree with God, but it won't change His mind. You can hate what God says, but you can't change what He says.

God's Word is still the standard by which everyone will be judged. The Lord Jesus said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). You may feel you can judge God, you might even decide you can judge the church, but on that day the Lord Jesus will judge how you have treated Him, how you've treated His words, and how you've treated the church. The Bible depicts Judgment Day, "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened; (what books are those? – this Bible) and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds" (Revelation 20:12). We'll be judged by what is written in the books, not by our feelings, not by what our friends say, not by popular beliefs. For this reason, study the Bible.

The Lord Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Christianity is livable. The Lord's yoke is easy, not rough, and His burden is light, not heavy. You can live the Christian life, you can go to heaven. It's easy and light, because it lifts us up above the misery and the enslavement of sin to a life of peace and joy. Come home! Come home to Jesus Christ! When the prodigal son returned home, his older brother wasn't kind to him. It's sad, but true, that some church members aren't as kind as they should be. The son came home anyway and the father embraced and kissed him. When the Father in heaven forgives, we too should forgive. When the Father in heaven welcomes a penitent sinner home, we too should welcome him. The father of the prodigal son told the older brother, "But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." God rejoices over every sinner who repents, and so should we!

Have you stopped worshiping at church? Have you pulled away from God? Have you let sin into your life? Come home! Come back to God! He still loves you and is waiting for you to leave that far country that only wants to exploit you. Sin doesn't give life; it only brings death. Come back to God! At church you'll find a family that loves you and wants to help you stay on the strait and narrow road. Jesus shed His blood to purchase the church. If it means that much to Jesus, shouldn't it be that important to you?

To become a Christian, believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart, turn away from anything sinful, confess Him before others, and be baptized just as the Scriptures teach in Acts 2:38 and Romans 6:3-7. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you obey the gospel of Christ, God forgives your sins and adds you to his family, the church. Stay faithful to the Lord. Don't let anything come between you and God. Come home to God, and do it today!