

# *Program Transcripts*

For December 2014



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**December 2014**

**Topics subject to change without notice**

## **DECEMBER 7 – IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH**

Each Lord's day the Lord's church gathers to praise God in worship. What is God's will for us as we worship? God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.

## **DECEMBER 14 – WHY AM I HERE?**

At one time or another everyone asks, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" Finding our identity demands that we connect with the God who created us and loves us. Without God life is vain and meaningless.

## **DECEMBER 21 – THE GIFT OF LOVE**

The coming of Jesus into this was truly a gift of love from beginning to end. No one has touched the lives of mankind so wonderfully as the Lord Jesus Christ. In this lesson, we'll see the impact He has made.

## **DECEMBER 28 – A DOER WHO ACTS**

As we face the coming year, we need to be doers who will act not merely hearers of the Word. Christianity is no spectator sport; God wants His people to get involved in their faith and worship.

## **"In Spirit and Truth"**

Each Lord's Day the church gathers to praise God in worship. Today we're going to explore the great privilege and responsibility of worshiping God. Every day we seek to please God by worshiping and serving Him. When we worship God, we enter into an act that honors, adores, thanks, and reveres God. Our worship should proclaim that He is worthy of our praise, gratitude, and devotion. In worship, we humble ourselves and exalt the Lord for His glory, His purity, His holiness, and His goodness. In worship, we recognize God as our creator and sustainer; He is indeed the giver of every good and perfect gift. In worship, we seek the things above, where Christ is. We set our minds "on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Worship renews our minds and transforms our spirits so that we may focus on living out the will of God, "that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

When we worship God, we seek to magnify Him, not ourselves, to declare His majesty, and to be in awe of His love and His power. Psalm 34:1-3 says, "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" We exalt God not only with our voices but also with our hearts and our lives. Hebrews 13:15-16 says, "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to John, chapter 4:19-24. This is Jesus and His conversation with the woman at the well. "The woman said to Him, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'" When the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar asked Jesus about worship, Jesus explained what God desires from those who worship Him. The Lord Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." God Himself is spirit; and true worship always comes from the spirit, the inner person. Our spirit should cry out love, honor, and thanksgiving to God. Our worship should be heartfelt. David cried out, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you" (Psalm 63:1-3). True worship arises from a heart that is full of love and gratitude for all the blessings that God has given.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Our worship must never become a meaningless ritual without heart or thought. We must be careful not to let our worship become old and stale. Our worship must be intentional and directed with love and gratitude toward God. When we give at church we should give lovingly and cheerfully. Second Corinthians 9:7 says, "Each one must give as he has

decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Worshiping the Lord must never become a boring drudgery, but what we do out of genuine love and a desire to honor and please.

The Lord also tells us that we must worship in truth. God wants us to worship Him honestly and genuinely; and to worship this way means that our hearts must be right and that we must be devoted to worshiping the Lord biblically. Genuine worship seeks to please the One that we worship. We can't please the Lord if we haven't asked what the Lord desires from us. True disciples listen to the Lord and abide in His Word. They aren't focused on pleasing themselves but on pleasing the Lord. Real worship in truth comes from a genuine heart that honestly serves the Lord. Only the Bible can tell us what God genuinely wants in our worship. When we move away from the Word of God, we ignore the will of God. You can't genuinely worship God if you ignore Him.

God never intended our worship to be self-focused or people-focused, but rather to be focused on Him. Many have turned the worship of the Lord into something that God never intended. They have focused more on pleasing themselves than on pleasing God.

First, God never intended worship to be a form of showy entertainment where the performance of people outshines the reverence that we should give to God. The Lord Jesus cautioned the Jews, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). Saying this, Jesus illustrated what He meant by giving three examples of showy religion. He spoke of the hypocrites in verse two who when they gave to the needy, sounded a trumpet that they may be praised by others. Jesus said they already have their reward in the praise of men, but they cannot expect a reward from the Father in heaven. The Lord instructed them, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Jesus next spoke of the hypocrites in verse five who “love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” Jesus instructed, “But when you pray, you go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Jesus last spoke of the hypocrites in verse sixteen who look gloomy and “disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” The Lord instructed, “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Problems with showy religion don't usually happen like this today, but there are still many who make a show out of their faith. Much of what is called musical worship today is actually a performance for an audience. For many, the Christian music industry has turned worship into an enterprise with recording artists and stars who are praised and lauded for their talents. This isn't what the Lord intended for worship. That focuses not on God but on the fame and the skills of the artist. Anything that takes the focus off of God in worship isn't worship in spirit and in truth.

Second, God never intended for people to worship Him in vain. How can worship be vain? The Lord Jesus reveals the answer. The Pharisees, in the time of the Lord Jesus, followed human traditions. These human concepts and practices had become so entrenched in their religion that

they considered them as authoritative as God's own written Word. They actually thought that breaking one of their traditions was sinful. So they deceived themselves, thinking that what they had always done was from God; but God never commanded them. When people initiate their own doctrines, their own ways of worship, and their own traditions, they cease to follow God. They may think that they are following God because they're doing things that are religious; but they're deceiving themselves and making their worship vain.

The Lord Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes, "So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Matthew 15:6-9). The Lord distinguished Scripture from oral traditions handed down from men. Man-made religion causes our worship to be useless and it accomplishes nothing. God wants worship that pleases Him by following His written instructions. When people follow human traditions for a long time as the Pharisees did, they assume that it pleases God. The Pharisees deceived themselves.

The Lord Jesus explained, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:13-14). Men may establish human traditions, but God will uproot them. Men may seek their own ways to worship, but God will not accept them. If we follow blind guides who think their human traditions are God's will, we won't worship God in spirit and truth but will worship God in vain.

Third, God never intended for people to worship Him in ignorance. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, "You worship what you do not know" (John 4:22). In the same way, Paul told the pagan and idolatrous Athenians, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown (or in ignorance), this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22-23). Sadly, many today still don't know much about the God who created them. Some have forgotten how glorious, how majestic, how loving, and how powerful is the God who made us.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the grandeur of God, "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. And each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke" (Isaiah 6:1-4)

Today people often lose sight of the holiness and the exalted nature of God. They gather to worship Him but with little reverence in their hearts. They come as if they were coming to a concert, or a ball game, or a social function. Hebrews 12:28-29 says, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." Each Christian should think seriously about what he's doing in worship. God is holy, and our worship must reflect our respect for His holiness. We must never lose our sense of the sacred. We must never treat God as if He were common.

Before you worship, pause a moment and think about what you're about to do. Consider carefully God's majesty and glory. In God's presence, Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Isaiah knew he was a sinful man coming into the presence of a sinless, holy God. He recognized the difference between God and man.

Some people think God ought to be grateful that we came to worship Him, when it's we who ought to be thankful to God for the opportunity to worship. Some think God ought to be happy with whatever we have to offer Him, but God expects us to offer acceptable worship. To offer whatever we like rather than what He desires isn't treating Him as holy.

Do you remember the offering of the two brothers, Cain and Abel? Genesis 4:3-5 says, "In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." Why did God reject Cain's offering and accept Abel's? Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks." God didn't accept Cain or his gifts because Cain didn't have faith. If we come into God's presence and ignore His instructions or treat Him as one who is common, do we have faith?

The Lord asks His church to gather together each Lord's Day (which is the first day of the week or Sunday). In worship, they sing from their hearts; they pray fervently; they commune in the Lord's Supper they listen to God's Holy Word, and they give cheerfully. By faith they offer up their hearts in a sacrifice of praise and adoration to the Lord. If you're able, worship with the Lord's church this Lord's Day. Be with them. Pray and sing with them, give, and listen to God's Holy Word.

Do you remember what the Lord Jesus told the woman at the well? Jesus said, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him" (John 4:23). God seeks worshipers who will worship in spirit and truth. He wants people to worship sincerely, not pretend or put on a show. He seeks people who truly worship and serve Him, as He prescribes it. Are you focused on serving God, or are you focused on yourself?

Christianity isn't a "me-focused" faith whose sole purpose is to make me feel good about myself. When worship is all about me, it actually cheapens Christianity. We hunger for righteousness with God not merely religion; and God hungers for those who rightly worship in spirit and in truth. Do you hunger for righteousness? Joy and peace come as a byproduct of righteousness. Do you want to be right with God?

Righteousness comes by the grace of God when people respond with love and faith to the good news of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds, we are healed. We die to sin when we repent and are baptized into Christ. Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change in behavior. We leave sin and follow Christ. Romans 6:3-4 says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Get right with God today and worship the Lord every day.

## Why Am I Here?

At one time or another everyone asks, “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” Today we’re going to explore who we are and what our purpose is on this earth. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. We can trust Him to teach us what we need to know. Only He can give us the wisdom and the grace that leads to eternal life. Only He can help us find purpose and meaning. Man is more than flesh and blood; we also have a soul and spirit. Only God can fill our spiritual needs and help us to know who we are and why we are on this earth.

Many people suffer from what is commonly called an “identity crisis.” They don’t know who they are or why they’re in this world. They can’t seem to “find themselves,” and, in part, that is because they lack purpose in life. Many people are searching for something that gives them meaning and purpose. They’re hungry for something, but they aren’t sure what. So they go from thing to thing, searching for some satisfaction, only to find life frustrating again and again. Why? They’re looking in the wrong place. They’re looking for satisfaction from what is temporal rather than from what is eternal. They’re looking inside to their desires rather than upward to God.

We must all realize that there is One greater than we are, to whom we owe our very existence. Paul explained to the philosophers at Athens that God desired that “they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:27-28). He is the reason we exist, and without Him we have no reason to exist.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to John 1:1-4. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.” Let’s pray together. O Father, we’re thankful that the Word became flesh and came and dwelt among us. We’re thankful Father for Jesus our Lord; and Father, may we come to love Him more and more as days go by. We’re thankful for the Light that He brought to us. And Father, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The Old Testament tells of a man who had everything, I mean everything. He was the king named Solomon, the son of David. He had wealth, power, wisdom, possessions, wives, servants, and everything a man could dream about. Yet the wisest, richest, most admired man in the world said, “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What advantage does a man have in all his work which he does under the sun?’” (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3). He found that all his advantages in this life under the sun didn’t bring him the satisfaction that he longed for.

Solomon said, “All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there’s nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:8-9). Life “under the sun” for Solomon had become boring and wearisome. He had seen and heard it all, and there was nothing new. If all we know is life “under the sun,” we too might grow bored and weary of life. Life here can feed the body, but life “under the sun” cannot always feed the soul. When the soul remains unfed by God, life grows empty and meaningless.

Solomon tried wisdom. Solomon said, “I set my mind to seek and to explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under the heaven. It’s a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted” (Ecclesiastes 1:13-15). The wisest man in the world found wisdom “under the sun” an unanswerable riddle, beyond his ability to solve.

Solomon next tried pleasure and possessions. “I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’ And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What does it accomplish?’ I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there was for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives” (Ecclesiastes 2:1-3). Laughter and wine didn’t take away the emptiness of the soul. Solomon needed more than what he could find under the sun.

Solomon continues, “I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also, I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines” (Ecclesiastes 2:5-8). What did he find?

“Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11). Life “under the sun” is not like life with an understanding of God. As wise as he was, Solomon was missing God in his life. He foolishly let his many wives turn his heart from God.

The book of Ecclesiastes takes a number of twists and turns; but in the end, Solomon admits, “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Many people, like Solomon, don’t get that point until they have tried everything else first, and they’ve left God out of their lives. Life without God in our souls is empty; it’s vain; and futile. Solomon was right: “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity... a chasing after the wind.”

Sadly, our lives may not fare any better than Solomon’s while he lived “under the sun.” It’s not until we exalt God in our lives that we can understand life under the sun at all. Only then can we begin to answer that most important question, “Why am I here?” Even with every physical and material advantage, life without God is boring and empty. Faith in Jesus Christ gives our lives meaning and purpose. Because Of Him, we can figure out who we are and why we’re here. Nothing can take His place. Nothing can give us the fulfillment that a loving relationship with Christ can give.

The Bible teaches that we were created, but men began saying less than two hundred years ago that we came about by evolution. Whether we were created with purpose or whether we evolved by chance matters. It determines how we see ourselves, what we believe about



morality, and how we live our lives. Some who believe that we evolved from apes and deny there is a God, cannot answer the question, “Why are we here?” We’re simply a product of nature in their minds, with no accountability to a higher power. Such people have little reason to live a life above the level of “eat, drink, and be merry.” This life is all there is.

But with God in our lives, in our understanding we have a completely different perspective. We have meaning and purpose in life, a moral compass, and a future hope. God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26-27). God made us to be like Himself with a soul and spirit. Hebrews 12:9 tells us that God is the “father of spirits.”

In Revelation 4:11, the twenty-four elders sang around the throne of God this very song, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” We were created by God for His glory. We’re here to be His children and to live close to Him in this life and in the life to come. Paul said, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14). God gives you all His love and grace to help you to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. He wants to redeem you from a world that doesn’t know Him or live for Him. He wants to live in you and do good to others through you. I can’t imagine anything more meaningful and satisfying than truly living for Christ.

The Lord has a plan for our lives. Paul told the Ephesians, who once did not know God, “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, and excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that’s in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you didn’t learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, that you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Ephesians 4:17-24). God wants us to live a life that is above those who don’t know Him. He wants to help us find the joy, peace, love and purpose that only He can give. He has a life of joy, service, and fulfillment that is truly abundant! It can be ours in Christ Jesus!

Jesus said, “I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). That life that Jesus wants for us is not merely life on this earth but also the life that He’s planned for us for all eternity. We’re not here on this earth just to live here. Jesus is preparing a place for us to dwell with Him through all eternity. The sad thing is that many people never think of life beyond this life and their accountability before God. Jesus spoke of two different “ways,” two different “roads,” each going in a very different direction. Our choices and purpose in life will indeed affect our destinies.

Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14). This passage surprises many people. Most folks think that nearly everyone is going to heaven. A recent poll said that 88% percent of Americans “feel accepted” by God, yet Jesus said that most people choose the easy way that leads to destruction. Could it be that we’ve lost sight of true faith and have become believers instead in popular religion, rather than what God teaches?

The grace of God is available for those who will love Him, believe in Christ, and will serve Him. That’s the purpose of our lives, why the Lord created us. Paul said, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ— (and then he says) by grace you’ve been saved— and He raised us up with him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

Augustine of Hippo wrote many years ago, “Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” Until our lives come into harmony with God’s purpose for us, we will never find the fulfillment and the reason why you’re here. God makes all the difference in the world. Without Him, there’s a hole in your heart and a hole in your soul. Only God, the God of the Bible, can fill that empty place. Will you let Him? Let’s pray together. Father we’re so thankful that Jesus came into the world so that we might have life and light. And Father we’re thankful that You’ve created us and made us to be Your children through Jesus. And Father we pray that we may always serve You and do Your will in everything. It’s in Jesus name we pray, Amen!

God knows you personally. He knows everything about you, because He created you. God loves us. We’re important to Him. First Timothy 2:3-4 says, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” He wants you to be His child. If we love and obey Him, He promises to prepare us a dwelling place in heaven, so we can live with Him forever. Jesus cares so much for you, He was personally willing to bear the agony of the cross for you.

Paul said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). God extends His saving grace to you, just like He did to Paul. What will you do with it? Will you become God’s child? We’re here on this earth to be lights to the world, to be the salt of the earth, and to tell the message of Jesus to everyone, and to be zealous for good works. Don’t let the grace of God prove vain for you and miss out on His love and His blessing.

To become a Christian you must believe with all your heart Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. You must repent of every sin and turn your heart to the Lord. You must confess Jesus as the Son of God, and be baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of your sins. When you’re baptized, God washes away your sins and unites you with Christ. From that day forward you’re a child of God and an heir with Christ. Why not become a Christian today? Find your true identity, the one God intended for you. Come to the Lord today and follow Him forever.

## God's Gift of Love

When God sent His Son Jesus into the world, He was sending His very heart filled with love. Today we're going to remember God's gift of love. We seek to please the Lord and to follow Him. When we follow the Lord, we know we'll find a joyous, abundant life filled with peace and purpose. God's ways are always righteous and kind. They lift up rather than tear down. They give hope rather than discourage. They lead to wisdom rather than to foolishness. The more you know about God, the more you'll love and praise Him.

God is love. Everything about Him reveals His love. The Lord Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). Jesus didn't come to this world to condemn us, but to save us. He knew sin was our real enemy, and He suffered on the cross so we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

God planned to send Jesus. An angel of the Lord told Joseph, "'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matthew 1:20-23). Jesus is indeed God with us, and we're so thankful He came into the world.

Our reading today comes from the first Epistle of John 4:7-11. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Many people think of the infant Jesus when they think of God's gift of love. God gave us Jesus to be one of us. He was like us physically and endured all the challenges of growing up in this world. Because He became one of us, He understands all our strengths and weaknesses. John said that Jesus "did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25). Though Jesus was the Son of God, He became flesh and dwelled among us. The Hebrew writer observed, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16). Because Jesus understands us and was tempted like we are, He can help us in our greatest times of need.

God knew that we needed Him! No one else would do. The Lord Jesus said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). There are many prophets in the Old Testament, but only one Son of God. Moses gave us the Law, but Jesus gave us

grace and truth. The prophets warned people, but Jesus sacrificed Himself for people. Angels could tell us God's message, but Jesus Himself was God's message, the Word. No one else could do what Jesus did for us. Revelation 5:12 reminds us that because Jesus was slain as a Lamb for our sins, He is worthy "to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

The Lord Jesus gave three reasons why He came into the world. First, He came to save us from our sins. He said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus came looking for the lost, that He might save them from sin. Because of sin, we're all lost; and we're lost in sin and needing a Savior to redeem us. So many of the heartaches of life come from sinful behavior. When people reject God, they fill their lives with every kind of evil. Jesus wanted to bring salvation to our lives so that we could have hope and true life and escape all that evil. Jesus isn't trying to manipulate us but to bless us. The Lord Jesus said, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Sin separates us from God and it also enslaves us to evil; but Jesus redeemed us with the price of His blood. He redeemed us by giving Himself, His very own body and His very own blood. There could be no greater price, and no greater gift.

Jesus not only died for us as individuals, He also wanted to rescue us from this sinful world. Paul greeted the churches of Galatia in Galatians 1:3-5. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

One can truly describe the world into which Jesus was born as "evil." The predominant religion of His day was a mixture of superstition with paganism. Because it was a world with a warped understanding of God, people lived with warped values and morals. Romans 1:28-32 says, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." Our world today is much like the world of the first century; and each day it seems to grow more and more evil. More and more people participate in that evil with the approval of others. How tragic that people think a sinful world is more enjoyable or better than a world where God is honored.

Second, Jesus said He came to bless our lives with a better way, an abundant way of life. The Lord Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). In Christ our lives overflow with His love. Titus 2:14 says Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works." Jesus not only saves; He changes people. He transforms them from sinners to saints. His love, His truth, and His life show us a better way to live and a better way to treat our fellow man. The Lord taught us kindness, respect, integrity, honesty, and justice. He's the Prince of peace, the hope of mankind, and the balm of Gilead.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it's the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." When people live in sin they spread misery and heartache everywhere; but when they serve the Lord they become a blessing to everyone. They encourage; they give hope; they show love; they bring peace; and they spread joy and good news. Christians do not speak out against sin because of hate, but because they know the agony and hurt sin brings. The Lord offers something better than sin. He was indeed God's gift of love. What God gave to us was not things, but a Person.

Third, Jesus said He came to bear witness to the truth. John 1:14 says of Jesus, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld, or have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (that is, the only begotten Son), full of grace and truth." Jesus proclaimed, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus was the very embodiment of truth and honesty. Because of Jesus, we can know what God is like; because of Jesus, we can know what righteousness truly is; and because of Jesus we have the ability to distinguish truth from error.

When Jesus appeared before Pilate, Pilate wanted to know if the rumors he had heard were true. So John 18:37 reads, "Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' And Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. And everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" Jesus and the truth are inseparably bound to each other. If we wish to know the truth, we must listen to his voice.

Our world is filled with contradictory lies, myths, and false hopes. Jesus came to give us an undeniable and unvarying path to the truth. How wonderful to have an unchanging moral and spiritual standard that provides a basis for our values. Since God has raised Jesus from the dead, we can have confidence that the Lord's teaching is true. We can trust His promises, His morals, and we can believe that heaven is waiting for us. First John 5:20 says, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." It is a great gift to know what and Who is true.

The Lord Jesus wants to bless us with His love. He wanted His death on the cross to make a difference in our lives. If we take seriously the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins, we will come to love Him. The Lord Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). Let His sacrifice on the cross for you matter! The Lord Jesus was willing to pay the ultimate price to get your attention and to demonstrate His utter love for you. He wanted to draw you to Himself. He wanted you to love Him the way that He loves you.

Romans 5:6-8 says, "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." We were once weak and needed saving; we were once ungodly and didn't take the ways of God seriously; and we were once sinners who violated God's

teaching and were offensive to Him. In spite of these things, the Lord Jesus willingly died for us to show His love.

When we respond to His love and become Christians, we reveal that the cross matters to us. Surely the God who created us and gave us His Son has many more blessings in store. Romans 8:32 says, "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?" In Christ, God's love never ends! Romans 8:35-39 asks, "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 persuaded, 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." Nothing can separate you from the love of God; but don't take His love for granted. Never turn away from God as some do.

When Jesus redeemed us with His blood He gave us His utmost. We all need to be reminded of how God values us as Christians, and as His children. First Peter 2:9-10 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Don't let anybody or anything rob you of a close, loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Love Him and serve Him.

Jesus came into the world to save us from sin, to give us a better way, and to reveal the truth to us. Does this make any difference to you? Does it matter whether you are lost or saved? Does it matter whether you live with wisdom or with foolishness? Does it matter whether you know the truth or whether you have been deceived with falsehoods? There is one thing you must understand: while some people ignore Jesus, the Lord Jesus is the most relevant and important Person in your life. No one else can bless you, love you, forgive you, give you hope, and save your soul but Jesus Christ. You need Him in your life.

The love of Jesus is indeed a gift. The Lord loved us even when we didn't deserve it, even when we were lost in our sins. He took the initiative and offered His body and blood on the cross because He didn't want to leave us where He found us. He came to lift us out of darkness and out of hopelessness. Don't take this marvelous gift of love and salvation for granted; it's priceless. Nothing else compares.

If you wish to enjoy the love of God, you must accept His gift of love. Believe in the Lord Jesus, turn from the sin that only destroys, confess Jesus Christ as God's Son, and be baptized into Christ. When you're baptized into Christ, you're "crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (Romans 6 and verse 6). Now this baptism is an immersion in water, just as Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and just as Philip baptized the eunuch. When you're united with Christ, the Lord sets you free from sin and He makes you God's child, a fellow-heir of heaven. Will you accept His gift of love? Will you love and obey Him?

## A Doer

It's not enough simply to believe in Christ; we must live our faith. Today we are going to look at the need to be a doer and not merely a hearer. God's Word is beyond doubt a marvelous gift of wisdom and spiritual truth. God graciously provided His will for us to bless our lives on earth and to lead us to eternal life. Psalm 19:10-11 says of God's teachings, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; and in keeping them there is great reward." I hope you study your Bible daily and treasure its words in your heart. The Bible is valuable because it is the Word of God. If you know it and practice it, it will indeed reward you.

God's teaching is indeed a gift to be treasured. However, its value isn't in simply listening to it. Its value comes from putting the Word into practice. God wants His people to do more than talk about their faith; He wants them to live it. James 2:17-19 says "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" Our actions tell the world whether we really believe. The demons believe so strongly that they shudder at the thought of God, but they still live in rebellion. Do you believe? Can people see your faith by the way that you live and how you treat people? Can they see your faith by your love, your generosity, and your joy?

Our reading today comes from James 1:22-25. "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." Let's pray together. Father, we're so grateful that You gave us Your instructions and guides to help us to be the kind of people You want us to be. Help us to live our faith and not merely talk about it. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Christianity not only gives us a faith to be believed, a love to be embraced, and a hope to be enjoyed; it also gives us a life to be lived. God does not measure our spiritual health by our claims to be religious; God measures us by our faith, our love, and our obedience. Some think how we live makes no difference to God, that God only looks on the heart and never judges our behavior. Such thinking fails to take into consideration the whole teaching of Scripture; it overlooks many passages. Whether we practice our faith certainly matters to God.

For many the concept of works and salvation in the same sentence causes many problems. The Scriptures are also clear: we cannot earn our salvation by good works; we are saved by grace. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it's the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Salvation is a gift, and that gift is the greatest reason for us to live godly lives. Romans 3:24 says that we are "justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

No matter how much we have done, we cannot repay what the Lord has done for us. The Lord Jesus said, "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'You come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? He doesn't thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we've done only that which we ought to have done'" (Luke 17:7-10). Even with all of our efforts we stand in need of the grace of God. The salvation and daily blessing that God gives to us exceeds our ability to repay. We should be thankful for the privilege to serve our God.

Nor are we saved by keeping the Law of Moses. We are saved by grace, not the works of the Law; that is, the Old Testament Law. Paul said, "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Galatians 2:19-21). Paul died to the Law of Moses so he could be justified by the grace of God in Christ. Why did Paul say this? Paul understood the difference between the old covenant and the new. Paul told the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia, "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man (speaking of Jesus) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39).

Ephesians 2:8 says we are "saved by grace through faith," but some have assumed it says more. Some say we are saved by faith alone. The word "alone," however, isn't found in this passage. Words like "grace" and "faith" are much larger and richer in meaning than some think. The grace of God does far more than merely save us from sin. Every blessing, every talent, and every opportunity we enjoy comes by the grace of God. The apostle Paul recognized that God's grace affected every aspect of his life. Paul spoke of God, "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which (he says) I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher" (2 Timothy 1:9-11). God's grace and purpose touch all of our lives as Christians as well.

In the same way, faith is more than merely believing. It is more than mentally agreeing that something is true. Faith is a package word that encompasses every aspect of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is a whole mindset of devotion to Him, His teaching, and His ways. John 12:42-43 says, "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." These rulers believed, but would not make their faith known. They did not want to lose their status in the synagogue, so they sold out their faith for the love of men. God does not approve a faith that will not make a life commitment. Faith alone cannot save or please God. The Bible teaches of the need for faith, but it never teaches the doctrine of faith alone.



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

To believe means you are willing to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow the Lord. The Lord Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37-38). The Lord expects us to give ourselves fully to Him; it takes more than mere faith. Our faith must demonstrate itself in a full life of commitment. Jesus told the saints in Smyrna, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). Believing means remaining faithful to the very end, through every challenge.

The Lord knows our hearts by how we live. God said, "I the LORD search the heart and I test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10). If we serve the Lord, He will bless us; but if we fail to put our faith into practice, we'll face His wrath. John 3:36 says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." We reveal to God and to the world what is in our hearts by our behavior.

We must never imagine that our behavior doesn't matter. We should never fool ourselves by thinking we can live in rebellion to the will of God and still find peace and be saved. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he 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." The reason it says "Do not be deceived" is because people tend to delude themselves that they can live as they please and won't face judgment. It is an undeniable truth: we reap what we've sown. You cannot mock God by thinking a life of sin will bring you eternal life. Planting wheat will not produce corn, and living in sin will not produce righteousness.

One day we will all face a day of judgment. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." If we are right with God and have lived for Him, we will be blessed; and if we have lived in sin and rejected Jesus, we will be recompensed for that, too. Our behavior matters. Revelation 20:11-12 explains this scene: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From whose presence earth and heaven (or the sky) fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and 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."

Everyone from every age and every continent will be present on that day. Some will wish they could escape judgment, but they have no place to go. They will be judged, every one of them, by the things written in the books. What books? 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). The words of Jesus found in books will judge us at the last day. Jesus promised in Matthew 23:34 to send forth prophets, wise men, and scribes to spread His Word to the whole world. We have those words in the New Testament, and that is why we study the New Testament so diligently.

We must learn to receive His Words and to be obedient to His ways. The Lord Jesus once asked His disciples, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). Jesus obeyed His Father in heaven, and He expects us to be obedient to Him today. Hebrews 5:8-9 says this about Jesus: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." The way to heaven requires us to obey the Lord Jesus. Nothing less will do.

Putting our faith to work is not only a demonstration of faith; it also demonstrates our love for the Lord. First John 2:3-6 says, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked." Are you walking in the steps of Jesus? What is your life saying about your faith in Christ and about your love for God? Would those who know you best say that you truly believe in Jesus and that you love God? Would those who know you best really be able to look into your heart and into your life and see the kind of person you are? Do you really believe, and do you demonstrate your faith? Let's pray together. Father, we are so grateful that You love us and You gave us a way to live. Help us to be obedient to Your will that we may show You our faith and our love. And may Your will be done in our lives. In Jesus name, Amen!

Our faith is not merely something to be believed; we must practice it. Acts 6:7 says this about the early church: "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." True faith obeys! If you do not obey the Lord, how can you claim to believe in Him? Romans 6:17-18 says, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

What standard or pattern is that? Romans 6:4-7 tells us: "We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we become united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him (that is, in baptism) in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For the one who's died has been set free from sin."

Put your faith into practice. Repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. When you are baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins, He will add you to His church. The Lord Jesus loved you enough to sacrifice His life upon the cross. He did more than claim He loved you; He demonstrated it! Will you demonstrate your love for Him by obeying Him. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."