

# *Program Transcripts*

For July 2017



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**July 2017**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **JULY 2 – A NEW SPIRIT**

Do you ever wish you could start over and put your past behind? Old sins have a way of making us ashamed of ourselves. God can give you a new start and cause you to be born again. Wouldn't you like a new spirit?

## **JULY 9 – A SERVANT'S HEART**

I love the song many young people sing, which begins, "Give me the heart of a servant." While many want to live for their own pleasure and love calling the shots, Jesus chose the heart of a servant. We too need the heart of a servant.

## **JULY 16 – BECAUSE OF JESUS**

Because of Jesus, our lives have taken a new direction, filled with hope. Because of Jesus we have so many blessings. How thankful we should all be for what great things the Lord Jesus has done for us!

## **JULY 23 – ANOTHER GENERATION**

The children of Israel were faithful during the days of Joshua and the elders who served with him, but another generation came along that did not obey God. We must be careful to stand strong in our faith.

## **JULY 30 – BE YE HOLY**

To be "holy" means to be separated from the common to a sacred use. Christians are to live holy lives that are separated from the common to the sacred life in Christ. We are to be separate and not touch the unclean thing.

## A New Spirit

Do you ever wish that you could start over and leave your past behind? Today, we're going to talk about what God can do to give you a new start. God, the Father, is the God of hope and promise. He's the one who causes us to be born again to a new and better life. We don't have to be enslaved to sin and feel ashamed of ourselves. The greatest threat to our self-respect doesn't come from our appearance, or our education, or our health. No! What kills our self-respect arises from sin. We lose respect for ourselves when we realize that we're the kind of person who could do evil things. God offers a way to change and to have a clear conscience, which gives us peace and hope!

Even though some people act like there's no such thing as sin, they must live with their choices in life and the sin that corrupts the heart and mind. Titus 1:15 says, "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." A defiled conscience stings and makes one feel small and unworthy. Even those who don't know God know the pain of a guilty conscience.

Since we cannot go back and change the past, God has provided the way of forgiveness that allows us to overcome our past and to set a new course in life. We don't have to remain enslaved to bad habits and evil ways that condemn us. God can set us free from sin and open the way to heaven, to peace of mind, and to self-respect. If you look in the mirror and you don't like what you see, God offers you forgiveness and the opportunity to be born again with a clear conscience!

Our reading today comes from Romans 6:16-18.

"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

There's a Native American fable about a young brave who happened upon a nest of golden eagle eggs. Deciding to have some fun, he took one of the eggs and he placed it in the nest of some prairie chickens. The egg hatched and the changeling eagle grew up with the brood of prairie chickens. Believing himself to be like everyone else around him, the eagle behaved accordingly. He clucked and cackled and scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to live on. He never flew more than a few feet off the ground, since prairie chickens don't rise any higher. Time passed and one day the young eagle was scratching along with one of his older prairie chicken brothers when a fleeting shadow passed over them. They looked and saw, high in the sky, the soaring form of something gliding on the currents of the wind. "What a beautiful bird!" the young eagle exclaimed. "That's an eagle," the older brother informed him, staring upward. "A golden eagle. And he's the king of the air. No bird can compare with him." Then he lowered his gaze and added, "But don't give it a second thought; you could never be like him." Back to scratching they went. Indeed, the young eagle never gave another thought to that soaring sight. According to the fable, he died as he lived, never rising any higher than a prairie chicken.

Tragically, we see this same story repeated in too many lives. The devil whispers in our

ear, "You can't change. You'll always be what you are now." My friend, that's a terrible lie; it steals our hope. If I could stand on the highest hill and speak with the loudest voice, I would tell everyone you can change! Frankly, people change every day!

The Bible gives us opportunity and hope that we can repent. When Paul spoke to a group of Stoics and Epicureans, philosophers in Athens who knew nothing about God, he urged them to repent. Paul said, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

Repentance is not a punishment or impossibly hard to do, though it's sometimes difficult. Repentance provides an opportunity to become what we long to be. Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change in behavior. The more one loves and trusts the Lord, the more likely he is to change his life. Love for God and for others is a powerful motivator to do what is right. When we consider our sins and how Jesus suffered for us, it causes us to grieve over sin. That grief also leads us to change our ways. Second Corinthians 7:10 says, "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and without regret." When I grieve over sin and want to do right, I don't regret changing and leaving the old life behind.

The Bible emphasizes our opportunity to become new. This newness is not just a new point in time; it's also a point of quality. It is new and different with different promises and different results. We can change, and we know from Scripture that people caught up in sin changed their lives. First Corinthians 6:9-11 says, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

How do we become new? First, our spiritual life begins with a new birth. John 1:11-13 says Jesus "came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Jesus spoke of this new birth to Nicodemus in John 3:3-5. Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The new birth is a birth of water and the Spirit; this refers to being baptized into Christ Jesus.

Second, because we are born again, we have a new way of life. Through repentance, I die to sin; and through baptism, the Father buries and raises me up with Christ to walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-7 says, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have

become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, (that is, when we were baptized) in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.” I’m no longer a slave to sin and no longer living like I used to live. I have new a life in and with Christ.

God gives me this new a life. The Bible says, “having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, (that is, with Jesus) having forgiven us all our trespasses” (Colossians 2:12-13). God takes a person dead in sin and makes him alive by uniting him with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Oh, we truly are raised up in baptism to walk in newness of life.

Third, when a person has new life, he is a new creature. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (a new creature). The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” When one is a new creature, all the old life is gone! Paul explains, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, (God works on us) created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10). As new creatures, we have been created by God in Christ for good works rather than the old ways of sin. Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Faith in Christ changes everything!

God promises us that we can have a new heart. God said through the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 18:31-32, “Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the Lord GOD. Therefore, repent and live.” Our new heart and spirit now loves God; it fears God reverently and it wants to do God’s will. When you have such a heart you no longer hate to obey, but rather you want to obey. With a new heart you don’t see God’s commands as something that you ‘ought to do’ but something that you ‘get to do,’ and ‘want to do.’

Fourth, as new creatures we have a new identity! I love the description of Christians, “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” (1 Peter 2:9-10). God doesn’t see us the same now that we’re in Christ, and we don’t see ourselves the same way. Everything is changed.

Fifth, with a new identity we also have a new citizenship. Philippians 3:20-21 says, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform (change) our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” As children of God, we are citizens of heaven. We have the hope of everlasting life. That is our hope and our goal: to love God.

So, no matter who you are, you can repent and you can change. God will help you make

those changes in your life. Second Corinthians 5:14-15 says, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised." Love motivates us to change our lives and to live better lives.

John said, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He (Jesus) appears (when He comes again for the second time) we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure" (1 John 3:1-3). That's what I hope for each of you. I hope first of all you'll see the love of God and that will make you want to live pure and holy lives. I hope that you will give up a way that makes you ashamed and start living a life that you know pleases your Creator and your Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:1-4 makes this promise, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." Hope gives the power to purify our lives and our souls. When we begin looking to things above, our life will change. Our desires and our values will change. We'll wonder how we could have wasted our life with the old ways. We'll take the greatest delight in the new life that God has given us. I cannot think of any greater joy than knowing that I am right with God and will live with Him through eternity. What is your joy?

When we tell ourselves "I can never change," or "That will never happen," we presume too much and believe too little. We can change! God would not have asked us to repent if it were not possible. Our own weaknesses tell us we cannot change, and presumptuous thinking says that we're hopelessly stuck in sin. But, when we obey the Lord Jesus, God opens closed doors; God takes away the old man of sin; He brings resurrection; He reveals possibilities; God reclaims the lost; God liberates the cursed and possessed; and God changes the unchangeable.

Let's not sell God short. He can do great things in our lives. We can repent and change. We can become what God made us to be. David earnestly cried out to God, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). God heard David's cry, forgave his sin, and gave him that clean heart. Do you need a clean heart and a right spirit?

Having a clean heart starts with faith in Jesus Christ, who died for you so that you can have the forgiveness of sins. A look at the cross will cause you to love the Lord Jesus, to trust in Him, and to turn away from sin. You can't change your life without faith in Christ, and you can't have a new life until you repent of your sins. Once you have confessed your faith and repented, you're ready to be baptized. In baptism, the Lord causes you to be born again, added to His family, the church. In baptism, that's an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ, God washes away your sins (Acts 22:16). If you want a clear conscience and you love the Lord, be baptized into Christ. Don't wait!

## A Servant's Heart

I love the song that our young people sing, "Lord make me a servant, make me like You." Today, we're going to look at a servant's heart. God's ways are wise, and those who follow them find blessing. But, some folks face a lot of trouble all of their lives, because they refuse to listen to the wisdom of God.

If you could choose to be anything in life that you wished, you might choose many things: a doctor, a lawyer, a politician, an executive, or a leader. Would you choose to be a slave? Ah, the word "slave" conjures up for us many negative ideas: chains and labor, pain, and misery. These are not desirable things. We despise the idea of slavery and human trafficking. It's demeaning and wicked. No one would want to be a slave like that.

As many as a third of the population in the city of Rome were slaves in the first century, and one in five throughout the Empire. We should know two important things about slaves in the ancient world. First, in the eyes of the law a slave was not a person, but a thing. A slave was totally dependent upon his master. A master could do absolutely anything that he liked to the slave. A slave had no rights at all. A master could beat him, sell him, throw him out, or even kill him. Second, slaves had no time that they could call their own; every moment belonged to the master.

But, there is a type of slave that is different! This slavery demands, but it also blesses beyond measure. Paul describes himself, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1). When you're a bond-servant or slave of Jesus Christ, you rejoice in the Lord. It's only when you become enslaved to Him that you are truly free!

Our reading today comes from the book of Philippians 2:5-11. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Our world seems to think that the highest point in life is to be the boss, and to control what goes on around us. The rugged individualism of America calls out for self-fulfillment and charting your own course. Many never realize that there may be Someone bigger than themselves; Someone that calls them to a life grander and nobler than living for your own pleasure. One in five Americans think that meaning and purpose comes from working hard to earn as much as you possibly can and to make the most of life. Nevertheless, is this all there is to life?

The Lord Jesus provides a different perspective for us all; one that helps us to see what really counts in life. In Mark 10:42-45 Jesus said to His disciples, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In the

Lord's eyes, the greatest one must be the slave of all. He serves to please the Father and to please others. He sees something bigger than his own pleasures. We see the servant heart of Jesus when we see that He sacrificed Himself upon the cross. Because He knows what it is to serve, the Father highly exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every name.

The apostle Paul grew up in a privileged Hebrew home and he was even schooled under the famous teacher Gamaliel, who was the highest honored teacher in Jerusalem. Yet Paul said, "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them" (1 Corinthians 9:19). Winning souls was more important to Paul than freedom to do as he wished. He was willing to sacrifice himself and serve others that he might win them to the Lord Jesus.

Paul willingly gave up his place among the Jews in order to live for Christ. He said, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:4-11). Some things are bigger, nobler, and worth more than what any of us put on our resumes. This is why Paul would give it all up, and why you should consider serving the Lord.

The Scriptures speak of slavery from the earliest times. The Old Testament Law actually protected Hebrew slaves from being abused. In fact, some people even chose to remain as permanent slaves. The Hebrew Law said, "When you buy (speaking to the Jews) a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever" (Exodus 21:2-6). This man found life as a Hebrew slave in this household to be better than life in the outside world and he wanted to remain!

Every Christian belongs to the Lord. When we become Christians, we confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as Lord. Remember Philippians 2:10-11, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father." To call Jesus "Lord" recognizes that He indeed existed in the form of God; but it also recognizes His authority over my life. He's not just Lord; He is my Lord. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As Christians, we belong to the Lord Jesus body, soul, and spirit.

The Lord Jesus is our Master! He said, "No one can serve (be a slave to) two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve (that is be enslaved to) God and mammon (or money)" (Matthew 6:24). As Master of our lives, Jesus will not tolerate another master. If we belong to Him, Jesus must always be the undisputed master of our lives. We don't ask, "What do I want?"; but rather we ask, "What does God wish me to do?" We serve at His pleasure in His kingdom. We are only servants.

A partial service to God or a faith that's "off and on" is not enough. The Lord said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). We must live each day with God at the center of our hearts. Seeking His kingdom and seeking His righteousness means focusing our hearts on pleasing Him as His people, doing His will.

The Lord Jesus Himself serves as the great example of a servant who seeks to please. The apostle Peter knew the hardships of servants in the first century. He taught them, "Servants, (you) be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly" (1 Peter 2:18-19). Then Peter points to Jesus, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (verses 21-24).

Jesus set the example of how to bear up under injustice. He didn't strike back or berate the Jews who were berating Him. Instead He entrusted Himself to the Father who judges righteously; He left things in the Father's hands. He didn't focus on the pain of the cross, but on the importance of doing what was right and the importance of what He was doing in saving mankind: the Bible says "by His wounds you were healed." He suffered so that you could die to sin and live to righteousness. Jesus chose to please the Father in bringing about the salvation of every one of us, if we follow Him, even if it meant going to the cross. Jesus knew His death would mean something to the Father. He said, "He who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29).

Paul too gave instructions to those who were slaves or bondservants, "Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong that he has done, and there is no partiality" (Colossians 3:22-25). People should do a day's work for a day's pay and be loyal to those that they serve. When you work heartily at the job, you're "serving the Lord Christ." By being faithful to the Lord in this life, even on the job, you can trust the Lord to reward you in the life to come. Whether a master or a slave, the Lord will reward righteousness and He'll punish evil-doing.

As Christians, we must have a servant's heart. Paul urged the Christians, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the

knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10). If you seek to please the Lord, you must know Him and you must know what He wills. Many people praise God but they know little about Him. It does little good to own a Bible but never open it and read it and study it. Study your Bible and then apply the words and the teaching there to your life.

Let's never forget Jesus is our creator, our redeemer, our Savior, and our Lord. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent” (Colossians 1:15-18). Jesus deserves first place in everything; we are nothing without Him.

The apostle Paul revealed his determination to keep his heart and his life right with God. He said, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and I keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Paul went to great lengths not to lose out on his imperishable prize, and that's eternal life!

My friend, you too have the opportunity to enjoy eternal life with God in heaven! Put on a servant's heart like Jesus, discipline yourself, and run in such a way as to win! Don't let anything come between you and your Lord. Please Him in everything!

You choose each day whom you serve. You can serve anything that you want, if you don't care about consequences. You can serve yourself, your money, your lusts, our culture; but these things won't lead to heaven. Only Jesus Christ can give you eternal life. Paul asked, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, that you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). Choosing to serve sin is a disaster. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.” You will earn wages according to whom or what you choose to serve.

Paul said, “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, you've become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). Those folks left their old ways of sin and obeyed the Lord from the heart, and God set them free from sin. God can also set you free from sin, if you too will obey from the heart the standard of teaching.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; believe in Him and in His Word. Repent of your sins; confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God; and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized into Christ and His death, God washes you clean from sin through the blood of Jesus. Peter clearly taught, “baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). In baptism, we appeal to God for a good conscience; and God saves us!

## Because of Jesus

Where would we be? Where would we be without Jesus? Today, let's look at the important role that Jesus has in our lives! The Scriptures are how God reveals Himself to us today; and for this reason, we take time to examine them closely. We want to know everything that we can about the God who created us, sustains us, loves us, and desires to save us eternally. Our life, our identity, and our future are wholly dependent upon God. Every breath that we take, every drop of water we drink, and every bite of food that we eat comes from what He provides. Every blessing of life comes from God. Of course, we want to know all about Him that we can.

One can only imagine how different life would be without Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord, the Messiah, the Christ, the light of the world, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Alpha and Omega, the Holy One, the Son of Man, the Word, the Savior, the Advocate, the Suffering Servant, the Lamb of God, the Great High Priest, the I AM, the Shepherd and Guardian of your Souls, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. No person who ever lived is like Jesus; no blood but His blood can cleanse us from sin; no words but His Words will judge us on the last day; no power but His power can raise us up on the last day; and no way but His way can lead us to the Father in heaven. You may meet some impressive people, but no one compares to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is love; He is wisdom; He is kindness; and He is truth!

Our scripture reading today comes from Paul's Letter to the Colossians 1:13-18.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 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.

Does it matter to you whether Jesus came into the world? Should it matter? My answer is yes; it must matter for many reasons. First, because of Jesus, I know something about God. Matthew tells us much about the birth of Jesus: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:18-23).

Jesus is indeed "God with us." We can know what God is like by looking at Jesus, His Son. John 1:14-15 says about Jesus, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and

we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Someone once asked a preacher why John called Jesus Christ “the Word.” It seemed a strange description to him. The preacher answered, “Words are the means that permit us to communicate with others; John used it to show that Jesus Christ is the only means whereby God chose to communicate with man.” Jesus Christ, then, is God’s speech or God’s discourse to man. John wrote, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” The New American Standard says, “He has explained Him” (John 1:18). Jesus explains to us the character and the nature of God.

The Lord Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:6-7). Because God sent Jesus into this world, we can know the way to the Father; we have life in His name, and we can know the truth about God. Jesus is how the Father speaks to us today. Hebrews 1:1-3 says, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the power of His word.”

Second, because of Jesus, I know what love truly is all about. First John 4:7-10 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The Father’s willingness to sacrifice His Son, Jesus, and the Lord Jesus’ willingness to bear the cross for our sins reveals the love of God in clear and touching ways. No one has ever loved you like Jesus loves you or died for your sins as Jesus did. No one else could!

The love of Jesus is far greater than just being our atoning sacrifice. Jesus understands us and allows us to approach Him with confidence, even in times of weakness. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Not only can we approach the Lord Jesus, our high priest, we can find grace to help you and me in dealing with our temptations. Jesus is doing everything He can to help us. He wants us in heaven with Him.

Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed, and Peter did indeed deny the Lord. But, I want you to see what the Lord said to Peter, even knowing that Peter would deny him. Luke 22:31-32 says, “Simon, Simon, (that’s, Peter) behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I (Jesus) have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Have you considered that even when you fail, the Lord Jesus is praying for you? He loves you.

Third, because of Jesus, I can have my sins erased. I can be clean and justified by the blood of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist “saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29). Jesus sacrificed His body on the cross so that we might be saved from our sins. The passage we read,

Colossians 1:13-14, says God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus’ blood, not silver or gold and not some kind of precious metal, is what redeemed us from sin. Because Jesus suffered, and shed His blood, we don’t have to suffer the consequences of our sin.

The Lord Jesus gave you and me a second chance; He erased all the guilt of our past; and He allowed us to start over as a new person, born again. All this took place when we were baptized into Christ; when we were buried with Him, raised with Him, and received the newness of life. Oh, what a blessing! When I was baptized into Christ, I put on Christ according to Galatians 3:26-27. From that time forward the Lord regarded me as a child of God.

Jesus cares about everybody, even people that are hard to love. He went to the house of the tax collector Zacchaeus, who may have been the most hated man in Jericho. He talked to the woman at the well who had been married five times and was living with a man. He saved Saul of Tarsus, who was the foremost of sinners. He did this to show His perfect patience to those who have sinned against Him. Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul. He said, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16). Jesus is the champion of grace and He’s also the champion of opportunities to start over.

Once we become Christians, the Lord Jesus doesn’t abandon us. He is with us every step of our Christian lives. First John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” The blood of Jesus is continually cleansing the Christian who walks in the light. Nobody can be perfectly sinless, but walking in the light means that we follow Jesus, and we’re forsaking our sins. Again, First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Jesus doesn’t save us and then forget us. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Jesus does indeed intercede for you and me as we draw near to God in obedience and in love.

Fourth, because of Jesus, we can live forever as an heir of God. Some people sadly imagine that there is nothing beyond this life on earth. Some even say that there is no resurrection. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ do indeed have an inheritance in heaven.

Peter explains our inheritance when he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and it’s kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5). According to God’s great mercy, our inheritance is kept in heaven for us, reserved for us. God is getting us ready for heaven and getting a home in heaven ready for us. We

have a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.

Paul speaks of this change from perishable to imperishable when Jesus returns to the earth at the second coming. He said, "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). Christ will raise His people from the dead, change their perishable bodies into imperishable ones, and take them home to heaven. Christ conquered death, and we can also through His power. To live in heaven our bodies must be changed, and Christ prepares us for eternal life!

At the end of his life, Paul could say with confidence, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Christ will not merely give us a home with Him, but will award to us a crown of righteousness and a crown of life. I look to the day that God says, "Well done, good and faithful (servant or) slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Oh, my friend what will He say to you? Will He say well done? When this life is over, the faithful will spend eternity with God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven will be a place of joy and peace. Second Corinthians 5:1 says, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." That's speaking of the new, glorified body that we'll enjoy in a place that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Because of Jesus, we can live forever and ever in heaven. Philippians 3:20-21 says, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself."

Sadly, some will miss heaven because they reject or ignore the Lord Jesus. Because they didn't believe Him or His Words, they won't enjoy His promises. When you ignore or reject the Lord, the Lord responds to your decision; and you will face eternal consequences. You cannot ignore or reject Him in this life and expect His grace and blessing in the life to come. Hebrews 10:26-27 says, "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."

Why not rather place your faith in the Lord Jesus and obey Him by repenting of your sins, by confessing Him as the Son of God, and by being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? Because of Jesus, you have hope and promise. Don't miss out on all the blessings and joy that the Lord Jesus has prepared for you in heaven.

## Another Generation

Many people question what has happened to our culture and why have our morals and values changed. This isn't the first time people are confused at change. The Bible reveals to us God's history of humanity. It reveals how God has perceived the events and changes through the ages. It's easier to understand the present when we see what happened in the past from God's perspective. It's clear that our present day has abandoned many of the morals and values that were held to be sacred in the past. Many have lost any sense of the sacred or holiness. The morals of our day seem turned upside down, where good has become bad and bad has become good. Our young people are left very confused morally and spiritually with little sense of direction. A return to the teaching of God's Word is needed more today than at any time that I can remember!

Perhaps you feel a little like Rip Van Winkle, Washington Irving's character that fell asleep for twenty years and then woke up to find that his world had changed. The government changed, the money changed. Things he took for granted were no longer the way he remembered.

Many problems are actually spiritual problems that affect our daily lives. When the hearts of people change, and when people forget God, their moral lives change, too. God revealed through Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!" (Isaiah 5:20-21). Many today think that they have outgrown God, or outgrown the Bible, or outgrown the church; but they're deceiving themselves. You can't reject God, follow your heart's desires, and expect to remain in good God's favor.

Our scripture reading today comes from The Book of Judges 2:6-10.

"When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel."

That's a lot about life. One generation passes and another comes along that may not know what the first one knew. Many of our older preachers used to say that we are just one generation away from apostasy—that is, a falling away from the Living God! As long as selfish ambition and evil exist, Christians will face the temptation of pulling away from God to live life on their own terms. Adam and Eve wanted to know good and evil and be like God. In Noah's day, the Lord "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Then God brought a flood to destroy the world, because of the people's corruption and violence.

God told Noah and his descendants to multiply and populate the earth in Genesis 9:7. However, in Genesis 11 the people rebelled against God's command to multiply and fill the earth and instead built the Tower of Babel. God confused their language and scattered them through the whole earth. Life changed rapidly when people could no longer communicate with each other. People set out on journeys to establish their own nations.

Joshua and his contemporaries served the Lord faithfully, but another generation arose "who

did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. They abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. And they went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And this provoked the Lord to anger” (Judges 2:10-12). As you read The Book of Judges, you see how God punished Israel for their idolatry by putting them into the hands of people who plundered them. Israel found itself abused and unable to stand before their enemies. When they repented and called out to God, God then sent them a judge to relieve them of their misery. Sadly, after the judge died, Israel would turn back to idolatry and act more corruptly than their fathers did. When people refuse to listen and obey God, they find themselves in misery.

In my lifetime of 65 years, I’ve seen many changes to the morals and values in society. Many of those changes have forsaken Biblical morals for a secular way of life that leaves God out and brings human passions in. I would never have imagined some of these changes in the 1960s. I’ve seen the morals and the values of the family erode. More than 40 % of children are now born to parents who are not married. Nearly 40 % of adults in America say marriage is now obsolete. Two-thirds of Americans now say that divorce is no longer sinful, and divorce plagues more than a fourth of all adults. There have been nearly 60 million abortions since Roe v. Wade took place in 1973. This is a greater number than the population many of nations of the world.

Television, movies, and the internet are plagued with nudity, violence, and gross profanity. Some are willing to embrace every form of corruption. One survey revealed that 13% of Americans say that the word “sin” is obsolete. People no longer regard many things that the Bible calls sin as even a moral issue. For instance, 58% say that cohabitation is moral; and 36% say getting drunk is okay; 37% would say profanity is not a sin; and half the people in America say watching a sexually explicit movie is morally acceptable; and 43% say reading pornographic magazines is okay. Because faithful Christians admit these things are sinful and oppose them, many of those who accept them have decided to bash and persecute Christians. These moral changes have led people to stop worshiping at church, because they don’t want to hear the will of God.

Over the last fifty years or so, we’ve seen four trends take place. First, we must become secular, according to some, and silence God’s voice. People don’t deny that God exists; they just don’t want Him to have any voice in their lives. Second, they decide to do what’s right in their own eyes and make their own moral rules. Third, if everybody can do what is right in his own eyes, then we can all become pluralists who say everybody is right to do whatever he pleases. This religious pluralism and moral pluralism means there’s no longer any standard of right and wrong, no longer a standard of morality. So, fourth, we end up with a confused blend of relative morality and relative truth and relative spirituality. Know when we follow God, we have a firm and unchanging truth, and we have unchanging morals; but when we follow these trends, we end up with confusion and chaos and misery.

Because many have gotten used to the moral decline of our time, they’ve become desensitized to sin. They don’t think sin is wrong or feel guilty or ashamed for the sins that they commit. The things that they used to despise, they no longer think are any big deal. They regard those who oppose sin as more wicked than those who commit it. Our postmodern society has portrayed Christians as hypocrites, mean-spirited, ignorant, and judgmental. This day in time, it’s unacceptable to offend anyone except the Christian who wants to live a righteous life.

The best-known passage of scripture in the New Testament is Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge so

that you will not be judged.” Jesus spoke this to a Jewish culture that was given to judging people by their own human standards rather than by Biblical law. Jesus also taught, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Realistically, everyone makes judgments in life. Even those who don’t want anyone to judge them, find themselves judging others. False judging is indeed wrong, but some things demand judgment. Victims of sin and crime deserve justice.

God warned Israel through the prophet Isaiah, “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! Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine, And valiant men in mixing strong drink; Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!” (Isaiah 5:20-23).

So we ask, in a culture that doesn’t always understand or appreciate us, “What can we do to keep faith with God?”

First, we should become better Bible students. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” God blesses those who hear and obey Him. Acts 17:11 says of the Bereans, “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.” They were not afraid to check the Scriptures for themselves rather than depend on others to do it for them.

You can find the truth for yourself by studying God’s Word. Paul told the young preacher Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Whether you’re a preacher or not, be diligent to study God’s Word, so that you can handle the Word of Truth accurately. When you know the Scriptures, you won’t be deceived by foolish doctrines.

Christianity is NOT a blind leap in the dark; it’s a faith built on solid evidence from the Word of God! If Jesus is the Son of God, He is Lord. If Jesus is Lord, then His Word is inspired and true. If the Words of Christ are inspired and true, then they have authority in our lives. If the Words of Christ have authority in our lives, then we are accountable. Hebrews 4:12-13 says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

Second, we need to know who our real enemy is. Our enemy is Satan. First Peter 5:8-10 says, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” The devil has never been your friend; he only wants to ruin your life. James 4:7-8 says, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” Whenever we allow Satan’s lies and schemes to deceive us in following after the world, we make a big mistake. Instead, let’s draw near to God and His teaching.

The devil has always been a liar, and he confuses and deceives people to gain their souls. The Lord Jesus said to some rebellious Jews, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he

is a liar, and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

For this reason, we must fight against the devil and his ways. Ephesians 6:10-13 says, “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” So stand firm in your faith and be strong in the Lord.

Third, change your heart and your life. Ephesians 4:17-24 says, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Last, share your faith. Don't be afraid to speak the truth. Teach your neighbors, your friends, and your children. Tell the story of Jesus to anyone and everyone who will listen. Help them understand why we believe what we truly believe. Open the Bible and read about the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Read not only His commandments, study also His promises. I recommend also to everyone to study Christian evidences, so you may know the reasons for your faith. There are now hundreds of books available to help parents and teachers provide the information needed by seekers to build their faith in Jesus Christ, in the resurrection, in the Bible, in creation, and in the existence of God. The more you know about Jesus, the more you'll love Him and the more you'll want to serve Him.

You can choose to live a moral life; you can go to heaven; you can return to God in faith; and you can live for God. You don't have to be fooled by the confusion that's in our culture. All is not lost; God is giving us time each day to get right with Him. The changes in our culture should call us to a greater commitment to Christ, to the truth, and to godliness. Even if we live in a culture that doesn't understand us, we can still draw near to God and love Him. God's grace in Christ has appeared to give us an opportunity to change our lives and to serve the Lord.

Titus 2:11-14 says, “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.” The cross of Jesus is calling us all to forsake sin and to live godly lives.

So place your trust in Jesus Christ and in His teaching. Because you love and believe in Him, turn from everything sinful to follow Jesus Christ. Repentance isn't always easy, but following Christ is liberating. Loving the Lord ought to lead you to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Through baptism, God washes away our sins, adds us to the church, makes us His child, and gives us newness of life. If you're tired of the chaos and confusion of our postmodern culture, come to the Lord Jesus in faith and obedience. You'll never regret doing what is right!

## Be Ye Holy

Have you thought about what it means to be holy? Today, we're going to take a serious look at our need to be holy like God is holy. God is completely holy; and sin is against His very nature. First John 1:5 says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." His judgments and His ways are righteous altogether. God doesn't think like we do. God said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

As society becomes less formal and more secular, some churches are losing their sense of the sacred. They've blurred the line between the sacred and the common. People have lost a sense of reverence and awe for God. Some have seen little use for worship and turned their assemblies into concerts. The Lord Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and take up our crosses daily. Much of what passes as religious activity has little to do with carrying a cross.

Holiness in the Bible calls for separation from all that is common or unclean. In respect to God, holiness not only means that He is separate from all that is unclean and evil but also that He is positively pure and thus distinct from all others. This purity sets Him apart from his world. Habakkuk 1:13 says about God, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor." God calls upon His people to become holy so that He may dwell with them and so that they may worship Him. We must distance ourselves from the ways and the values of the world.

Our reading today comes from 1 Peter chapter 1:13-16.

"Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.'"

That's something that all of us need to strive for – to live a holy life. Let's pray together. Father, help us in every way to please You and to be more and more like You every day that we live. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

God wanted Israel to regard Him as a holy God. When people failed to listen and obey Him, God punished them. Leviticus 10:1-3 says, "Now Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, (that is, made holy) and before all the people I will be glorified.'"

On another occasion, David was bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. He erroneously brought it on an oxcart rather than follow the Lord's instructions to have the Levites carry it. Uzzah was also on the oxcart. "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" (2 Samuel 6:6-7). Uzzah should not have touched the ark, which is holy. God expects His people to show Him reverence and

awe; and nothing less will do.

Sin has always separated people from God. You can't live in sin and expect to grow close to God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." When you sin, you separate yourself from God's holiness and from His favor. Iniquity and sin are acts or feelings that transgress God's will. Perhaps they do what God forbids, or perhaps they ignore what God requires. In either case, sin and iniquity treat God with disrespect. They treat Him as if He were common or a "nobody." God will not tolerate sin.

Just as the Father in heaven is holy, so our Lord Jesus Christ is holy. You can see His holiness demonstrated in His life. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Peter said, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:21-22). Even when Jesus suffered, He didn't sin against others. Do you remember how Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing?" (Luke 23:34). No one who has ever lived, can measure up to the godliness, purity, and holiness of Jesus Christ. Jesus asked, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46).

Surprisingly, many people, even some Christians, believe that Jesus committed sins while on earth. That's just wrong. They ignore the fact that as the Son of God He was indeed holy and without sin. If Jesus had not been holy, He could not have served as a sacrifice for our sins. As an atoning sacrifice, Jesus offered Himself without blemish to God (Hebrews 9:14). If Jesus had not been holy, He could not be the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5-6). If Jesus had not been the righteousness One, He could not be our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). John chapter one tells us that Jesus was the Word in the beginning who came to earth and took on flesh so that He might take away our sins. As the Word, He was divine and holy!

Since God is holy, He isn't like you and me. He doesn't take pleasure in sin. As a holy God, He cannot tolerate sin but must punish it. God said to the wicked, "For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you" (Psalm 50:17-21). We must never presume that because God doesn't strike us dead immediately, that somehow God doesn't care whether we sin or not.

God has called us to follow in the steps of Jesus. It makes sense that we are to forsake our sins and pursue righteousness and godliness. First Peter 1:14-16 says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Peter was writing to young Christians, many of whom had come out of a pagan lifestyle filled with drunkenness and immorality. But God calls us to something better than living for our fleshly lusts.

Paul laid it out clearly: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their GOD, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘and do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a Father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Living holy lives allows us to be His sons and daughters. We must avoid what is evil and unclean so that we may be a temple where God can live. If we live in sin, God can't live in us. Second Corinthians 7:1 concludes this point: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” By the grace of God and through the blood of Jesus, we can be washed from sin; but our cleansing means that we can no longer live like we used to live. We must grow in the fear of God by perfecting holy lives. Romans 8:12-13 says, “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Because we want to be holy like God, we must take what God teaches to heart. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” The more we allow God's Word to transform our lives, the more we show the world that God's ways are good, acceptable, and perfect. This means taking what God teaches to heart and applying them to our lives.

God never intended us to own a Bible that we ignore. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that we not only are responsible for what we do but also for what we think and what we say. The Lord Jesus said, “You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:21-22). We need to think twice about our attitudes and what we call others. God is listening!

The Lord Jesus said, “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). It may be popular to call names and slander other people, but God will hold us accountable for our words on the day of judgment. The Lord Jesus wants us to rise above a hateful attitude. “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:43-45). Holiness means being sons of our Father, sons who love even those who don't appreciate our love. We love rather than hate, because our Father does. We pray for and bless others who persecute us because, God is our Father.

The Lord Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). God knows our actions begin with our hearts, and a lustful heart will lead to a lustful way. The Scriptures are clear; "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (you see that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:1-5).

There is no greater blessing in Christ than God's grace and forgiveness. But grace is not a license to continue in sin. Paul asked, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). Jesus died on the cross to set us free from sin, so we can't return to the sins of our past. We must not! We've got to repent and continue to follow the Lord.

God has blessed us richly; and this should make us want to serve Him even more. First John 3:2-3 says, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." Do you have this hope of being able to live with God forever? Are you living a pure life and are you purifying yourself as He is pure so that you may live with Him one day? Let's pray together. O, Father, help us to live pure and holy lives that bring glory and honor to Your name. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord. May His will be done. Amen.

The apostle Paul by inspiration said: "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.' Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:19-22).

If you're living as you ought to live, God knows it; but if you're not living as you should, God knows that, too! You cannot fool God; He always knows our hearts and sees every aspect of our lives. Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good." What is God seeing in your life? If you aren't living as you should, then you need to make a change. You can't continue in sin and expect to please God.

The Lord can transform your life if you'll let Him. But you have to let Him. Turn from doubt to faith. Believe in the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and that He died for your sins and was raised from the dead. Turn from sin to obedience. Repent of your sins by changing your thinking and deciding to live as God wills. Confess the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. And be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and God will make you one of His sons and daughters (Galatians 3:26-27). Oh, my friend get right with God today!