

Program Transcripts

For July 2019



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

JULY 7 – ONE NATION UNDER GOD

In the pledge of allegiance we speak of the United States as “one nation under God.” We must ask whether we as a nation really are “under God.” How does God think of this nation or any other nation?

JULY 14 – THE ANSWER IS GOD

Someone commits a violent crime in America every 26 seconds and a murder every 36 minutes. Why? Sin has crept in their lives. The problem of sin starts in the heart, and the answer is in the Lord.

JULY 21 – PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Being in Christ and his kingdom contains a value greater than all others. When one counts the blessings of being a child of God, one quickly sees that being right with God is worth every sacrifice.

JULY 28 – WHATEVER

Our world has grown increasingly indifferent to God and His ways. Someone has called this the “whatever” generation that seems undisturbed about anything. We may ignore God, but no one can ignore God for long.

A Nation Under God

What would America, or any nation, be like, if it truly lived as a nation under God? What can we do to be the nation that God desires? This week our country has been celebrating the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the day we generally regard as the beginning of America. Many of the founders of this country were dedicated students of the Bible and frequently quoted it and alluded to it. The Bible was important to them, and we hope the Bible's important to you.

When the Pledge of Allegiance was first written in 1892, it didn't contain the phrase "under God." The United States Congress added those words in 1954. They added those words because they realized this nation—as every nation—exists under the Almighty hand of God. President Dwight Eisenhower, on August 17, 1954, expressed how Americans felt about that phrase "under God." He said, "These words will remind Americans that despite our great physical strength we must remain humble. They will help us to keep constantly in our minds and hearts the spiritual and moral principles which alone give dignity to man, and upon which our way of life is founded." In 1954, Congress and President Eisenhower understood the difference between living "under God" and living without God.

We pledge ourselves to "one nation under God." On every coin and dollar bill is the motto, "In God We Trust." When we sing the patriotic song, "America the Beautiful," we are asking God to "shed His grace on thee." Our Declaration of Independence acknowledges that all men are "created equal and endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights." Yet, I wonder if we, today, are a nation "under God." Has our nation not forgotten the moral and spiritual values found in the Scriptures? Are we a nation "under God"?

Our reading today comes from Paul's First Letter to Timothy 2:1-6. Here he talks about our need to pray and God's taking care of our people.

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

Are we a "nation under God"? No thinking person would say America has the same mindset today that it had in 1954. Since then our country has spoken clearly that prayer and Bible reading cannot be done in public schools. Our courts have upheld the rights of women to end the lives of the unwanted in the womb. More than two of every five children born here are born to unmarried parents. Are we a "nation under God"?

Some states have redefined marriage in ways contradictory to the teaching of God. Nearly 40 percent of Americans say marriage is obsolete. Today the government sponsors gambling. Freedom of speech permits taking the name of God in vain. Pornography fills the land. Are we a "nation under God"?

We can hardly build prisons fast enough, and many of our prisons are so overcrowded they're releasing prisoners early. In some places, our children cannot even open a Bible privately and read it. In many states, schools can teach evolution but cannot teach about

God or creation. Are we a “nation under God”?

While the first amendment of our Constitution grants us the free exercise of religion, many have reinterpreted that to mean freedom from the Religion of Christianity. We ask again: are we a “nation under God”? From our human standpoint, we might say no; we’re not a nation under God anymore. But is that the viewpoint of heaven?

We can rebel against God, but that does not mean that God has ceased to be God. We can throw Him out of our lives, ignore Him, deny Him, and even despise Him, but the Lord is still the one and only God. He is still the one and only ruler of this nation or any nation. The Bible says, “There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD. The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD” (Proverbs 21:30-31).

Job proclaimed, “I know that You can do all things, (speaking about God) and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). God deals with mankind on the basis of how people respond to Him. If we are obedient, He will bless us. If we are stubborn and rebellious, we’ll suffer His wrath. The real issue is whether we will live obediently “under God” or whether we’ll live our lives according to our own terms.

Romans 2:5-11 says: “But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.”

What can be said about our country can be said about any country. The Lord God blesses those countries that obey Him and in His time shows His wrath to those that reject Him. Many have lost sight of how we bring sorrows on ourselves by rejecting the will of God. We’re causing so many of the problems of our time by tolerating sin. The Lord gave us His laws to protect us and to bless us. God loves us. When we reject the law of the Lord and embrace sin, we do so to our ruin.

Psalms 1:1-6 says, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.”

You can’t thumb your nose at God; you can’t blaspheme Him, or rebel at His will and then expect things to go well at judgment. The Holy Spirit gives us a look at the empty, pagan world in Paul’s day when He inspired Paul to write, “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” (Ephesians 4:17-19).

When people stop reading the Bible, they delude themselves with empty, imaginary notions. They start thinking about aliens, vampires, werewolves, witches, and genies. These are all figments of people's imaginations just like the pagan idols. Those who focus on such things are darkened in their understanding and become alienated from the life God wanted to give them. Without God, people then begin to harden their hearts toward the truth and what's good and become totally selfish, greedy, and filled with lust.

God wants something better for us and has provided Jesus Christ to show us the way to an abundant life. Paul contrasted this life with the Christian life, "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" (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Democracy can be a good thing when people are righteous; but when the unrighteous are the majority, everyone suffers when the majority tolerates and promotes sin. Good men who realize their accountability to God will rule wisely, but evil men bring disgrace to their nation. The Bible says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Proverbs 11:11 says, "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down." Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, people groan."

If we want to see change for the better, we must set our hearts on serving God. We must be a nation "under God." We must stop rebelling against God and start pursuing God's will. It's never enough simply to say that we believe in God and in Christ. The Bible says, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?" (James 2:19-20). Faith that is unwilling to obey God is dead and useless indeed!

Obedience means we carefully listen to a command or instruction and place ourselves under the authority of the one we hear. Simply speaking, obedience is doing what you're told. I can recall my parents saying to me, "Did you hear me?" I knew what they meant, and that I needed to obey what they told me. You can't obey until you seriously listen to the instruction and submit your will to God.

Jesus obeyed the Father and went to the cross. By His obedience, we have the way of salvation opened to us. The Bible says, "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" (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Obedience was not trivial to Jesus Christ; it was His passion. The Lord Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And 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 8:28-29). If we're to follow Jesus, then we too should set our hearts on pleasing the Father in all we do. We need to say what David said, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). Do you delight in doing the will of God?

It seems so human to see a problem in our lives and then just ignore it. We're too easily satisfied with our own sinful weaknesses and put off our need to repent. The Bible says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a

hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:22-25).

Obedience has so much to do with mindset and attitude. Many people are like the little boy who was told to sit down. He muttered under his breath, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside.” You won’t keep on following the Lord if your heart is not in it. But when your heart is in it, it becomes a pleasure, not a pain. The Bible says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). When we realize God’s commandments are for our blessing, we’ll gladly do what God instructs and quit following the selfish ways of the world.

Our attitudes set the direction of our souls and our destiny. The Bible says, “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh (that is, sin) is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:5-8).

Our task is to please God in all that we do. We can’t change in a day everything that has corrupted this country, but we can, each of us, determine to change our individual lives. We can return to the Lord’s side and stop tolerating sin. We can speak up for what is right and speak against what is wrong. We can’t live our lives in neutral, sitting silent and letting evil have its way. We must restore our faith in Jesus Christ and commit ourselves to follow the will of God.

In 1938, as the war in Europe threatened the United States, Irving Berlin wrote a song that stirred the hearts of every American. He called for Divine help in the song, “God Bless America.” He wrote, “While the storm clouds gather far across the sea, let us swear allegiance to a land that’s free, let us all be grateful for a land so fair, as we raise our voices in a solemn prayer. God Bless America, land that I love. Stand beside her, and guide her through the night with a light from above. From the mountains, to the prairies, to the oceans, white with foam God bless America, my home sweet home.” That song still stirs my heart.

Don’t you think that God wants to bless America? The question is not whether God will bless His righteous people, He will, but whether we’re living lives worthy of His blessing and favor. Nations are made up of individual people, and faith in God is an individual decision. So decide to be a genuine Christian who lives what he believes and stands up for God’s way! Maybe you’ve been complacent about your faith and commitment to God. Isn’t it time you turned your heart back to God?

If you care about the society that your children will inherit from you, you’ll commit your life to Jesus Christ. If you pray for God to bless America, live a life worthy of His blessing and grace. You can do this by placing your faith in Christ as the Son of God; turning away from sin and demanding righteousness in your own heart and life; confessing Christ before all; and by being baptized. When you’re baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to His church according to Acts 2:38, 47; and Acts 22:16. Won’t you turn your life around today?

The Answer is God

Someone commits a violent crime in America every 26 seconds and a murder every 36 minutes. Why? Today, we're exploring the cause of violence and the solution. The Lord's way is a way of love, joy, and peace. It blesses everyone who follows it. Psalm 1:2 tells us about the blessed man. God said, "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." If you want a better world, it begins with you. Don't wait on others. Today, seeking the Lord and meditating on His Word can make all the difference. Learn what God desires from you and then practice it. The Lord Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). I know you love the Lord and you want to serve Him.

Lately we've seen lots of violence and hearing the word "evil." The nightly news carries story after story of assault, rape, and murder. Violent crime in America has grown dramatically in the last 50 years. According to the FBI, there were 288,000 violent crimes in 1960; but in 2018, there were over 1.2 million violent crimes reported. We've grieved over violent school shootings, terrorist acts, and bombings. We wonder how anybody could be so cruel and hard-hearted.

While some psychologists speak of violent people being mentally disturbed, others say they are evil. Perhaps it takes crime so horrific as this for us to remember that there is such a thing as evil. Postmodern America has spent so much time excusing itself and justifying its sins, it's forgotten how wicked and how evil humans can be. More than anything, we need the teaching and the love of Jesus to change our hearts and to live righteously.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:1-5. Here he's warning Timothy about the evil changes that will take place as time passes.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

From the earliest days, the Bible speaks of the violence in this world. In Genesis 4, God had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering God had no regard. Cain became very angry and his face fell. God warned him, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:6-7). But Cain let his anger grow in spite of God's warning. Verse 8 says, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."

What Cain did was evil. He planned to kill Abel out of his jealousy. God said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Genesis 9:6). God has always considered taking the life of another as evil. The Lord's Ten Commandments say, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Murder is and has always been wrong. Revelation 21:8 says, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

The New Testament warns us not to follow Cain. In 1 John 3:12, the Bible says, "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder

him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous." Cain first thought evil and then he put his deadly plan into action. We too must master our thoughts and not allow evil to overcome us.

The Lord Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:21-22). The Lord condemns evil in the heart, even if we don't act upon it. Anger, hate, and vengeance is as evil as murder itself. We should not even entertain the idea of harming or slandering another person.

The Lord Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21-23). Because our inner thoughts affect how we behave, we must be careful to keep our hearts free from evil. We have to decide that we're going to live above ugliness and malice.

According to Jesus, murder begins when people lose respect for another person. Spitting in the face of another, looking with contempt upon another, or releasing one's anger are signs of a murderous spirit. Jesus forces us to consider our thoughts and our words so that we don't allow our anger and hatred to overwhelm us. The Bible says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). We must learn to let go of evil thoughts and be kind to others, even if they're not kind to us.

Evil in the heart leads to the most terrible sins. Even religious people, if they allow jealousy or hatred to build up in their hearts, can do unspeakably cruel things to others. The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees were behind the death of Jesus Christ. They chose Barabbas, the criminal, to be spared, while they cried out for the blood of Jesus Christ. They didn't fool Pilate, however. Mark 15:10 says, "For he (Pontius Pilate) perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up."

Why were they envious? First, because Jesus could perform miracles, but they couldn't. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some men ran and told the chief priests and Pharisees. John 11:47-48 says, "So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.'" The second reason came from their fear of losing their livelihood at the temple. They figured it was better for Jesus to die than for them to lose their nation. Many people today do horrible things out of jealousy and envy.

Another cause of hatred is something you might not expect; it's the truth. People don't want the truth told if it exposes their sins. The Lord Jesus said, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). Sinful people want the darkness to cover up their sinful ways. They hate for their sins to be exposed and hate anyone who exposes them.

Herod had John the Baptist arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip. John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her" (Matthew

14:4). Herod was grieved about the matter, but Herodias plotted to have John beheaded. An evil person who has hatred in his or her heart has no compassion and will take vengeance into their own hands.

Selfish desire can lead people to commit murder. People who are greedy for power and gold will do anything to eliminate their competition. The Bible says, "When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Israel" (2 Chronicles 21:4). Lust for power causes people to do horrible things, even to their families. James 3:16 says, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

Unrestrained sexual desire leads to evil. When David lustfully committed adultery with Bathsheba and got her pregnant, it led to many other sins. He tried to cover it up by getting Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to come home to her. When nothing else worked, David arranged for Uriah to die in battle. Nathan, the prophet, told David, "Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites" (2 Samuel 12:9). When we sin against others, we're also sinning against God Himself. If you love God, you'll not allow selfishness to dominate your life.

The apostle Paul listed a number of fleshly sins in Galatians 5. Each of them arises out of selfishness. When people rebel against God and must have their own way they lose sight of everyone else. They grow callous and don't care who they hurt. Paul said, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). People who hold to fleshly sin cannot live with God forever.

We must be careful to set our hearts on serving the Lord rather than living like the world. First John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." Sinful desire has led many men and women into ruin. Selfishness leads people away from God, and loving God leads people away from selfishness. The answer to evil is God's love.

Paul explains how loving God and loving people leads us away from evil. He said, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8-10). Just as filling your heart with anger and hate leads to sin, filling your heart with what is good and loving leads to righteousness. There's a stark contrast between the person who loves God and his neighbor and the person who loves only himself.

Keeping God in our hearts isn't trivial. It's not a game. It's the most important thing that you can do. It affects your life and the lives of everyone around you. Don't let anything come between you and the Lord. Jude 21 reminds us to keep ourselves in the love of God. When God

is our focus, we love what is right and good; and when we push God out, every evil thing comes into our lives. The Bible 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" (Romans 1:28-32).

Why are we so angry and violent? Why has evil become so prominent? It's because we've forgotten God; we no longer "see fit to acknowledge God." We've stop reading the Bible and worshipping at church; we've convinced ourselves that we're an accident of evolution rather than created beings with intelligent design. We've let sinful behavior politically correct God's Holy Word, so what God calls sin is now morally acceptable. Without shame we've loved darkness and hated light; we've loved sin and blasphemed righteousness. We fill our media with every ungodly thought, every ungodly word, and every ungodly act. We glorify sin and mock righteousness. When we choose to be godless, why should it surprise us that our society becomes wicked? When we reject the love of God, why should it surprise us that we become angry, hateful, and callous?

When we shut God out of our hearts, we let the devil walk in. When God cannot enter our schools, Satan and his followers will. When we can't read the Bible or pray in public any more, why should we be surprised that sin fills our cities? We won't let the Bible into our schools, but we sure want them in our prisons. Shouldn't that teach us something? We need God in our hearts and in our lives.

The solution to violence is this: the love of Jesus must be in our hearts and His teaching in our lives. When Peter cut the ear off the high priest's servant, Jesus healed the man and said, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

The Lord Jesus knew people get angry and are violent. He taught a better way. He said, "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" (Matthew 5:43-45). If we're to be like God, we will love and even pray for our enemies.

Jesus practiced what He preached. Remember how Jesus prayed when they were crucifying Him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The grace of God can even forgive the violent. Peter spoke to the Jews at Pentecost, the Jews who were responsible for the death of Jesus. He said, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus (and then He pointed His finger) whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

They were cut to the heart over their sin and asked what they could do to be forgiven. Peter responded in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When we change our hearts and are baptized, we too can find God's forgiveness. The closer we draw to God, the better our world will be.

The Pearl of Great Price

Is there anything so valuable to you that you would sell everything you own to possess it? Today, we will see how valuable Jesus holds His kingdom, that is the church, to be. The gospel of Jesus Christ is God's means of reaching lost souls. Romans 1:16 says, "the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." The Bible gives us great reason to believe in Jesus as the Christ and to love the God who created and sustains us each day. If you believe and you love the Lord, you'll want to obey Him and live for Him all your life.

Years ago, my mother gave Jackie and me a precious treasure that she made with her own hands, a beautiful quilt made from silks and satins. It has bright colors—red, blue, green, gold, pink, and purple. Each stitch, she said, was made with love. I treasure that quilt, not only for its own beauty, but even more so because she made it. I treasure her. Her quilt is valuable in its own right for the materials and the hours that she put into it, but that's not why it's so valuable. To me, it's priceless, an irreplaceable heirloom, made with love.

The Lord too has given us great treasures in Jesus Christ; they're given in love. We have the forgiveness of sin, eternal life, the peace that passes understanding, a home in heaven, the joy of our salvation, and the Word of God to guide us each day. God's treasures are priceless because they affect our souls and they are everlasting. These treasures are available to us, but we must be willing to sacrifice other things in order to possess them. What we give up is hardly worth anything compared to what we gain in Christ. We must take advantage of the opportunity to follow Jesus.

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to Matthew 13:44-46. Here Jesus, in two very brief parables, presents the value of the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

There are many kinds of treasures. Some are valuable monetarily; some are valuable to the heart; but I want to talk about the treasures of the soul. These treasures last beyond this life; they're eternal. The treasures of the soul are the real treasures. If you possess them, you have everything. Without them, you have nothing that will last.

First, God, himself, is a treasure. Having a relationship with God is the greatest of treasures. God is our Creator, Savior, our sustainer, our hope, and our life. God loves us, hears our prayers, provides for us, and guides us. Isaiah said, "The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure" (Isaiah 33:5-6). It matters that the Lord God, the one you read about in your Bible, is your God. If money is your god, you'll be disappointed because you can never get enough of it. Solomon said, "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it" (Proverbs 15:16). If pleasure is your god, you'll tire of it. If work is your god, what will you do when you get too old to work? The only god of any value is the God who will not perish, the One who is above this physical world—the God of heaven, the God of the Bible—Jehovah God. God is so good to us all.

Second, Christ is a treasure. Paul wrote, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:1-3). There is nothing more precious, more spiritual, wiser, purer, or more loving than simple New Testament Christianity. We’re thankful to God for Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He is indeed the Christ, the Messiah, who brought life and truth and salvation to this world. We may easily say that in Christ we have “A love that can never be fathomed; A life that can never die; A righteousness that can never be tarnished; A peace that can never be understood; A rest that can never be disturbed; A joy that can never be diminished; A hope that can never be disappointed; A glory that can never be clouded; A happiness that can never be interrupted; A light that can never be darkened; A strength that can never be enfeebled; A beauty that can never be marred; A purity that can never be defiled; A wisdom that can never be baffled; resources that can never be exhausted.”

No wonder the apostle Paul, though he was a respected Jew, gave it all up for Jesus Christ. He was indeed a blue blood, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, a persecutor of the church, blameless, and respected. However, he said, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7-8). To Paul nothing was more important than knowing Christ.

Christ was on Paul’s heart and his mind day and night. He said, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Paul gladly sacrificed himself for the cause of Christ. He didn’t count his life as dear to himself if he could but fulfill the ministry to preach the gospel (Acts 20:24). He said, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). That was the focus of his life—it was his treasure! I hope that it’s also yours. I know that I can’t live without the Lord Jesus in my life.

Third, heaven is a treasure. Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). We live only a short time on this earth, and we must prepare for the time when we cross beyond this life. We must treasure our eternal home. What treasures are you laying up in heaven? They won’t be earthly treasures, but they’ll be heavenly. Perhaps it’s a friend whom you’ve converted to Christ. Perhaps it’s a gift that you gave to the Lord to bless others. It’s only what you give to God that survives this life. Everything else will perish. Your life here is just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Don’t waste your life today by failing to prepare for eternity.

The Lord Jesus told this parable in Luke 12:16-21, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have

ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." You may think you have all the right strings to pull, but there is one that never belongs to you—and that's the string to your soul. You'll either spend eternity with God or without Him. What are you doing with your life?

Fourth, the Word of God is a treasure. Solomon said, "My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:1-6). Solomon spends nearly ten chapters of the book of Proverbs trying to get his son's attention. He wants his son to hear what he has to say, because he realizes what a treasure the truth is.

Solomon said, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it; get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). Truth is available to all, but it's not cheap. You have to search it out of the pages of the Bible. The more you study, the greater treasure you'll find there. Many people are spiritually impoverished, because they've never studied the Word of God. They're willing to accept whatever they hear from others, never questioning. If someone tells you a lie and you believe it, you've missed the truth and the wisdom it brings. Acts 17:11 says the Bereans "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." I hope you are also examining the Scriptures.

David said, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). The Word of God treasured up and cherished, has great ability to help us in time of temptation. In Matthew 4, when the devil tempted Jesus, the Lord answered every challenge with a quotation from the Word of God. He boldly told Satan, "It is written." It is written might be better stated or translated, "It stands written." God wrote it, and it's still authoritative, and it's still true, and it still teaches us how to live. The Lord Jesus said, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The Word of God makes us alive, and it will last. Everybody is interested in things that last. The Lord said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19-20).

Fifth, the church is a treasure. Some people ignore or put down the church, but how these people think and how Christ thinks are two different things. The church is the Lord's treasure. He treasures the church more than we can imagine. The church is not a building but people. God treasures every member of His church. Peter said to the church, "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 sees in the

church a people for his own possession. They are precious, chosen, cherished, and beloved. He considers every member of the church a royal priest, called out of the darkness of this world and called into His marvelous light. The church is His means of telling the world about the excellencies of God and of His Christ. God treasures His people, and you can tell how much He values her by what He is willing to give for the church.

Acts 20:28 simply says that Christ purchased the church with His own blood. Christ gave up everything for the church. God can manufacture gold and silver very easily. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Things don't matter to God, but the blood of Jesus is something else. The Lord poured out His blood for the church. We should treasure the things that Jesus treasures and love the church the way Jesus loves it.

The Lord Jesus taught, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44-46).

Hidden treasures today are rare. In the ancient biblical lands, however, they were common. Israel, which was a land bridge between Egypt and the East, was repeatedly invaded, ravaged, and captured. To protect themselves, people hid treasure in the ground, in walls, in tree trunks, or wherever they could. On some occasions, they died or were captured, and no one knew where the treasure was hidden.

These parables talk about the kingdom, which is the church. I hope you have found the kingdom of God in one of the churches of Christ near you. Become a part of a local church and treasure it. I know the church isn't perfect, but it is divine in origin. When the church lives the way God intended it to live, there's nothing in all the world better and more noble than the church of the Lord. I want everyone to be a member of the Lord's church.

The Lord Jesus said, "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:20-21). What matters to you? What are your treasures? I hope that God, Christ, heaven, the Word, and the church are your treasures. I hope you've obeyed the gospel and have received the priceless grace of God.

"How much do you treasure the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of your sins, or the grace of God? Paul said, "by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul didn't want a gift so great as the grace of God to be taken lightly or thrown aside. He wanted God's grace to matter in how he lived and what he did. Do you?

Are you putting Christ first in your life? Would you give up everything to know Him? Are you worshipping with the church? Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying regularly? Have you obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ? You can do that by believing in Jesus, repenting of your sins, confessing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by being baptized into Christ. When you are baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to His church. There is never a better time to obey the Lord than today. Today! Tomorrow may be too late. Don't wait another day to put your life in order. Treasure up God in your soul. Cherish the Lord Jesus, and live a life that honors and pleases Him.

Whatever

Most people say they love God, but do you love the truth? Someone has called this generation the “whatever” generation because people will accept nearly anything. Is this wise? I love the Bible because it reveals God’s eternal, unchangeable teaching. God’s Word is never fickle. Since God’s Word doesn’t change, we can count on His promises to remain true. When God promises to forgive sins, we can be forgiven. When God promises the obedient a home in heaven, we can freely choose to be obedient and enjoy that promise.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point has a simple but rigorous honor code. It simply says, “A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do.” Honesty and integrity have always been important to our nation’s military. But I wonder how important it is to the rest of us. Sometimes gullible and sometimes deceptive, Americans today seem all too ready to believe whatever they like, whether it’s true or not. Many have lost their ability to distinguish between what is true and what is not, between what is right and what is wrong. Many believe “whatever” is popular at the time, and are undisturbed when “whatever” is false or harmful.

In a pluralistic society where people feel pressured to believe everything is okay, many believe that all religions are the same and end up believing in nothing with any conviction. Many have ceased to search for the truth or to love it. If every belief is true, then no belief can be counted on. If every belief is true, then nothing is sacred, nothing matters. People who say all religions are okay are actually confused and deceived. I often hear people say that we cannot say any doctrine is false, but is this true? What has happened to loving the truth and being faithful to the Lord Jesus?

Our reading today comes from Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 2:6-8. He is warning this small town about the problems of believing just anything that comes along, and encourages them to focus on Jesus Christ.

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Yes, we must follow Christ in all things, and really hold to Him!

Colossae was a small town in the Lycus River Valley on the main route from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Other nearby cities were larger and more important. Colossae had lost much of its importance. Romans, Greeks, and others had transplanted there. Jews lived there, and the frequent visitors made it a place susceptible to every new idea that came along. The inspired apostle Paul wrote the Colossian letter to deal with a strange doctrine arising among some members of the church. He wrote to warn them of the false teaching and deception in this worldly philosophy.

God’s Word says, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge. I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:1-8). A smooth talking stranger can easily fool a naïve person with false promises and worldly traditions that sound good. Paul warned them not to be fooled by such nonsense. They wouldn't find the truth in listening to anything but Jesus Christ.

Learning to distinguish what is true from what is false is one of the most important lessons of life. Some traditions are true, while others are false. A tradition is merely a belief or a practice that has been passed down from one generation to the next. When a belief is in error in one generation, it'll be in error in the next; but the second generation has never heard anything else and so assumes what it has heard is true. Once a deceptive tradition becomes accepted and is passed down from generation to generation that idea can hardly be shown to be false. So, people get convinced of a lie, think it's the truth, and remain in error. Oh, how very sad!

Disbelief is the rejection of a belief, a refusal to accept it. To disbelieve in Jesus is to reject him as the Son of God. This might come in the form of denying His miracles or refusing to believe in His resurrection. It also might come in the form of refusing to believe the things that He teaches. 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). Failure to believe Jesus is a serious matter. Many people will find themselves rejected on the last day because they failed to believe what Jesus teaches.

People misbelieve when they're convinced that something false is correct. Some deceive by causing others to believe a lie and to fall into error. The Lord Jesus condemns those who teach falsehoods and errors. Paul was shocked when some false teachers were misleading the churches of Galatia. In strong language the apostle of the Lord said, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9).

Why did Paul say teaching a false gospel leads one to be accursed? Because changing what God teaches leads people to believe a lie. When people believe a lie, they follow after something other than God and separate themselves from God. Satan separates people from God by lying to them. The Lord Jesus said about the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). The devil lied to Eve and caused her to sin against God and to die spiritually and physically. Lies still lead people into sin and spiritual death. It matters what you believe.

People today are deceived by all kinds of falsehoods and half-truths. A half-truth is when someone tells you a fact that leaves out other relevant information. For instance, it's true that Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. Sarah was also Abraham's wife. So when Abraham in fear

told Pharaoh that Sarah was just his sister, he was only half right. Abraham's lie caused lots of trouble. Half-truths are some of the most dangerous lies. There's enough truth to fool people into accepting them, but there's enough falsehood to lead to destruction. A Christian must be very careful to examine everything he hears.

Some false prophets, in the days of Jeremiah, began fabricating their prophecies. Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD'" (Jeremiah 23:16). False prophets in every age have led countless souls away from the will of God. We don't want to be led into error and lose our souls. This is why we must examine everything carefully. Acts 17:11 says, "Now these (the Bereans) 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." We too should test every belief by God's Word to see what is true and what is false.

We hurt ourselves greatly when we lie to ourselves. God said, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). Our hearts may tell us what we want to hear rather than what is right. If we listen to our hearts and our desires rather than to the Lord, we can easily do the wrong thing spiritually, morally or practically. Solomon said, "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

When people wish for something to be right to believe or do, they can begin justifying it in their own minds, whether it's right or not. These folks set their minds to follow this error and can hardly be persuaded to repent. They must find out the hard way. The prodigal son was like that. He had to have his inheritance and live the way he wanted. When his father gave in, he took his money to a far country and wasted it in a sinful lifestyle. He had to ruin himself before he'd admit how foolish and sinful he had been. I hope that you haven't allowed your heart to deceive you into making foolish choices. The prodigal son lied to himself until he couldn't believe his lies anymore. Then he came to his senses, repented, and went home.

Many people are ready to believe a lie if they think it will benefit them. In a politically correct world, people turn a blind eye to the truth and focus on what's convenient and popular. They'd rather give in to a popular lie than embarrass themselves by taking an unpopular position. Some people think it shows wisdom or love to take a position of neutrality on every controversial issue. Others think we can never determine what is true, so every view is as good as every other. This view is miles away from the heart and the teaching of Jesus. It may appear kind to accommodate others, but sin shows no love for the will of God. God did not create every religion, and not every religion teaches His will. God wants His people not only to love Him but also to love the truth!

The Lord Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23). Being religious does not guarantee that one is righteous. Some people say they are saved by faith alone, but this passage makes it clear that one must in addition to believing also do God's will. These people who lived lawless lives deceived themselves into thinking that they were still all right with God.

Jesus, however, told them to depart. He never knew them or had a relationship with them.

It matters what we believe and how we live. For years I've heard people embrace the doctrine of salvation by "faith only." They suggest all one must do to be saved is believe, and once saved one cannot be lost. But this doctrine didn't come from Jesus. People who believe in the "faith only" doctrine or the "once saved always saved" doctrine always have to take it back. They will confess you can't be saved without loving God, or without repenting, or without obeying the Lord Jesus. Oh yes, faith is essential, but you have to do more than simply believe. It takes more than simply believing to please God.

People say one religion is as good as another and all religions are the same; but the Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The only way to the Father, the only way to heaven, is through Jesus Christ. Again, Acts 4:12 says about Jesus, "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." It's popular to say all religions are the same, but the Scriptures teach otherwise. We need to choose Jesus.

Why should I confess Jesus as Lord? Why should I serve Him? I serve Him because I love Him; He died for my sins, nobody else did that. I serve Him because Jesus only tells the Truth. His teaching remains true until the end of time. Why would I hold to beliefs that change with the wind? William Inge said, "He who marries the spirit of an age soon finds himself to be a widow." We need eternal truth that doesn't change or compromise. We find eternal truth in the Words of Jesus. No one but Jesus can forgive my sins. No one but Jesus will come again in the clouds. No one but Jesus will judge me on the last day. No one but Jesus can take me to heaven. I want, and I need, Jesus Christ.

The psalmist David wrote, "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more" (Psalm 103:15-16). Life on earth is temporary; we won't live here forever. The devil loves for you to be undisturbed about your soul. He would love to keep you confused about life, about the church, and about the truth. He would love for you to wait till another day to decide. When you want to do what is right, the devil will tell you, "later," to get your mind off spiritual things. He doesn't want you thinking about the cross, about the church, about your salvation, or about heaven and hell. He wants you to live for the present and to ignore your soul and the future. He wants you to remain confused and even apathetic.

Today is the only day that you have to make your soul right with God. Yesterday has passed, and tomorrow is not assured. If you love the Lord and want to be right with Him, put your faith in Him. Repent of sin and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you obey the Lord by repenting and being baptized, God washes away every sin and adds you to His church. You become a child of God and have the hope of eternal life. There are no good reasons to think about "later." Why not attend one of the churches of Christ near you. Tell them that you want to obey the gospel and to be right with God. Study with them. Get involved in the church, serve the Lord, and make your faith a priority. Won't you do this today?