

Program Transcripts

For January 2020



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

January 2020

Topics subject to change without notice

JANUARY 5 – STARTING AGAIN

As 2020 begins, I hope you're thinking about starting fresh and making a new commitment to the Lord. You can turn things around in your life with the Lord's help. Why not start today committing yourself to God?

JANUARY 12 – DOES IT MATTER?

We hear many talk about “my truth” and “your truth,” but does God have a truth? God has spoken and we must listen to Him, because He always tells the truth. Today we're exploring God's truth, and it matters!

JANUARY 19 – WERE YOU THERE?

An old hymn asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” In this lesson, we'll take time to remember what the Lord Jesus endured as He suffered on the cross. When it comes to the cross, were you there?

JANUARY 26 – GOD WITH US

Does it matter whether God is with us? If we live in the favor and blessing of God, we have hope and a future with God; but if we are far from God, our hope and destiny is far different. Is God with you?

Starting Again

As 2020 begins, I hope you're thinking about starting fresh and making a new commitment to the Lord. Someone has said that the God of the Bible is the God of second chances. The Scriptures reveal God's love for all people and His willingness to accept those who penitently humble their hearts and seek for a new and better life. With God's help, you can change your ways and start over. God wants to help you become the godly person you've always wanted to be.

Eleven years ago, I moved to Edmond, Oklahoma and became part of In Search of the Lord's Way. Your love, support, and prayers have encouraged me, and I thank you. I've deeply appreciated working with Chris Lyon, my fellow-workers, and all the volunteers who make this program possible. The Search ministry requires many people working together to bring the gospel to the world by television, radio, and the internet. Please let us know you're watching and be sure to thank the entire team of Christian servants who truly care about you and your souls.

If you look in the mirror of your soul, you may not like what you see. We all have consciences that monitor our moral and spiritual lives. When we fail to live as God desires, our conscience pricks our hearts. We feel guilty when we know that we've sinned, and we feel shame when we consider that we're the kind of people who could do such immoral things. All people sin, but God has provided His grace to forgive.

Our reading today comes from the Book of Romans 6:15-19. Paul talks about how we can make changes to our lives.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 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. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

People say, "I don't need God to forgive me of my sins. There's no such thing as sin." In fact, 13 percent of Americans say there's no such thing as sin, and nearly forty percent say that the word sin is obsolete. Some people deny the existence of sin because they don't believe in God. They assume they won't face any consequences for their sins, that God won't hold them accountable, and they can go on living as they please. Sadly, they ignore what sin does to their consciences and their memories. There's an inescapable moral law within, and that moral law within speaks to a moral lawmaker, God. Even if people say there's no such thing as sin, they will have to admit there is such a thing as crime. Those who don't want to be judged, judge the behavior of others every day. All humans have a moral sense, and that moral sense is God-given.

When people commit a sin, they may not suffer any immediate punishment; but they do feel the prick of guilt in their hearts. They may think they can rid their guilt on their own by denying

they've sinned, or by blaming others, or by blaming God; but these methods don't work. Just because you can act like sin doesn't matter doesn't mean that it doesn't matter to God. Unresolved guilt doesn't go away when we know the truth about our sins; the weight of guilt can linger for a lifetime. God doesn't ignore or forget unresolved sin; He punishes it. God told His people, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). Beyond that, people with a stained conscience find it hard to respect themselves because they're ashamed of what they did.

Over time, one may become callous and refuse to repent. Jeremiah spoke of the Jews in his day who would not listen to God or repent of their sins, even when God punished them. God demands that we be honest about our sin. He said, "O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent" (Jeremiah 5:3). Some will do anything, anything to keep from admitting that they have sinned.

When people refuse to repent, God takes notice. With a broken heart, He punishes them for their wicked deeds. Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God said through the prophet Ezekiel, "'But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD,' rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'" (Ezekiel 18:21-23).

God has always been interested in our being saved and in changing our sinful ways. Zacchaeus, as a chief tax-collector in Jericho, was despised by the Jews as a sinner who had compromised with the Romans. Many thought he became rich by stealing from them. Zacchaeus had climbed a sycamore tree just to see Jesus pass by. Jesus, however, when He saw Zacchaeus up in the sycamore tree called for Zacchaeus to come down. Jesus was going to His house that day. Luke 19:7-10 says, "When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.' Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.'"

Jesus, in spite of the crowd, took an interest in Zacchaeus, something Zacchaeus lacked from his fellow citizens of Jericho. His willingness to be with Zacchaeus so touched the tax-collector that he proclaimed his willingness to share his wealth and to right any wrongs that he'd committed. He was a changed man, changed in his heart and willing to demonstrate it. That reveals repentance. Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of ways. Repentance, like faith and love, is essential to a new life.

The prodigal son also shows the value of repentance. This disobedient young man decided to live the life of sin and caused himself great misery. He left everything good and found only loneliness and misery. He came to his senses and decided to go home. Luke 15:20-23 says, "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him,

'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.'" In sin the son was dead and lost; but coming home to repent he was alive and found. He came home repentant, and His father took him in. Today, many estranged children of God need to come home to God repentant!

For those who've never become Christians, consider Nicodemus who came to Jesus acknowledging that He came from God. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus about a new birth, "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. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:3-7).

Though Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews, he still needed to be born again. No matter who you are, you too need to be born again. The Lord made it clear that unless you're born of water and the Spirit you cannot enter the kingdom of God! Being born again means you're a new and different kind of person. You have a new life unlike your old ways. Your thinking, your speech, your choices, and your behavior conform not to the world but to the ways taught by the Lord Jesus. 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."

This new birth begins with a washing away of the old way of sin and taking on a new life. This regeneration and salvation happens when a person is baptized. Titus 3:3-7 says, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

God saves us by washing us clean from sin and regenerating us, giving us new life. We cease living like the world and we begin living like Christ when we're washed or baptized into Christ. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Paul explains this in more detail. "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, 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" (Romans 6:3-7).

Baptism unites us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. In baptism, we're

crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, and raised with Christ. Just as Christ had newness of life when God raised Him up, so God gives us newness of life when we are raised up with Him. This takes place, of course, in baptism! The old body of sin is crucified with Christ, so that our body of sin might be done away with. In baptism, we are free from sin and can now live new lives in Christ!

You can choose to live as a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. I hope you will choose to be a slave of the Lord Jesus. The prodigal son chose to be a slave of sin and suffered for it. You will, too. Romans 6:16-18 says, "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."

Sadly, some who've been right with God at one time leave God and sin grievously. When David sinned with Bathsheba and was guilty of causing the death of Uriah, her husband, he felt great guilt and shame. He knew how he had sinned against God and what he'd lost. David said, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:3-5).

David cried out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). God gives us a clean heart when we repent. Once forgiven, David could say, and what we ought to say, "I'm not all I ought to be, I'm not all I want to be, I'm not all I hope to be or going to be, but thank God by His mercy and grace I'm not what I used to be." There's no greater blessing than knowing your sins are forgiven and that you're right with the living God!

Paul said, "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9). Perhaps you've felt, "I am not fit to be a Christian because I've sinned." You may feel there's no hope. Paul called himself the chief of sinners. He also said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain." Has God's grace saved you? (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Paul explained, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

You too can come to the grace of God by faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. Ananias told Paul, who was Saul of Tarsus, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). Paul knew that one is baptized into the death of Christ, where the blood washes away his sins.

What Matters?

We hear many talk about “my truth” and “your truth,” but does God have a truth? Today, we’re exploring God’s truth, and it matters! Occasionally in my conversations, I hear people say, “That’s just your interpretation!” They mean that one belief is as good as any other. They don’t believe that God has spoken clearly enough to make His will understandable. However, God has spoken, and He means what He says, and He speaks with authority. That’s why we study what He says.

I sometimes hear people say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you love Jesus.” For them, loving Jesus is all that matters. Some quote John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” They correctly see love for others as an identifying mark of Christianity. The problem is that they think love is the only identifying mark of a disciple. Are there any other things that identify a true disciple of the Lord?

God desires all people to be saved, but He also desires that they come to “the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Why? Because God holds the truth to be vital to our salvation. The Lord Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). A true disciple listens to the Lord Jesus and doesn’t try to edit or rewrite His Words. He doesn’t try to remake Christianity in the image of 21st century culture. “The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24-25).

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to Matthew 17:1-5 when Jesus is upon the high mountain and transfigured.

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

Jesus distinguished his disciples not only by their love (John 13:34-35) but also by their willingness to remain in His Word. The Lord said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32). Continuing in His Words matters to the Lord. It has always mattered what we believe. We can’t claim to be true disciples of Jesus if we’re not willing to abide in his Words. That’s how the Lord distinguishes His true followers from people who claim to be His followers. Authentic disciples actually hear what He said and live by His Words. Jesus once asked, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).

For Jesus to be our Lord means that He must rule our lives. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Loving the Lord means obeying His Word; we need to do what He says the way that He says to do it. The Bible warns us not to change the gospel. Paul said, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by

the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing 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 what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:6-9). This is strong and frightening language.

Not only must we be careful what we teach, we must also be careful what teachers we support. The apostle John said, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. Now, if anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds" (2 John 9). While some say this passage speaks only about the deity of Jesus, and certainly that's under thought, we recognize that there is a principle that cannot be ignored. The principle is to change God's teaching is offensive to God and considered by God evil.

All of God's Word is sacred. To change any part of it or to go beyond its teaching is to ignore what is Divine, and if we just please ourselves we can offend God. When we change things, we aren't listening to the Lord. Man-made teachings step into a realm that belongs only to the Lord. We have no right to say to God, "We think our way is better than Your way, so we're going to change the teaching to suit ourselves." Those who teach false doctrines choose what is human over what is Divine. They actually defy God. Whether we teach a false doctrine or support a false teacher, we're guilty of committing an evil deed. It matters to God whether or not we support error. Love means staying with God and His Word.

What God says matters to our destiny! Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). We can't select what we like in God's teaching and ignore what we do not like. The standard, which will judge us on the last day is God's Word. God is God, and He doesn't take opinion polls to determine the Truth. We live in an age that stresses political correctness, but God is not subject to our culture. While we see changing opinions in our culture, God has spoken to all people in all places for all time (Jude 3). His will doesn't change. We cannot assume that God's grace will include every idea that people embrace.

Rather than thinking that we can say and do religiously what we please, we should seek God's face and follow His will. The real issue is: Are we willing to yield our will to God's will and make Him Lord of our lives? Are we willing to listen to Him and obey God? Many people think they can live and believe as they desire and God won't know or care! But God does know and God does care. We can't believe man-made doctrines and practice man-made traditions and expect God to be pleased about it. He wants us to follow His will and to give glory to His name. You can't serve God and also serve yourself!

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). These verses surprise most people. They think that nearly everyone is on the right road, but that's not the way things really are. The broad way is easy and filled with people. It's going to be popular, but tragic. Not many people are willing to study for themselves and find the truth by

looking to the Words of Jesus.

Acting on our own wisdom, our own judgment, rather than obeying God reveals a lack of faith in the wisdom of God. Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." We must believe in God's wisdom and not our own. God sees and knows things that we can't see or know. His understanding is unlimited, and we need to trust that what He teaches is right. Even when we don't understand why He says what He says, we need to trust His wisdom.

Let's take a look at ourselves. Let's consider what we believe and practice as Christians. "Are my beliefs the will of man or the will of God? Are my religious practices the will of man or the will of God?" Can we read this teaching or find this practice in the New Testament? Or did this belief or practice come in later centuries by the design of men? If we can read that the Lord or the apostles taught this belief or practiced it, we can have confidence that God approves of it. But if it's something that began much later, and is a departure from the Truth, it should have no place in the life of a faithful Christian. We should leave the humanly designed theology and return to the Lord's will!

People should investigate their beliefs and practices, asking the question, "Is this Biblical or is this something from men?" This would mean that we have to do some deeper study into the Bible to see what we would find. If we find it's Biblically approved, let's stay with it; but if it departs from the New Testament, we should abandon it. Forty-five years ago I was preaching in a country church in Oklahoma. I met a sweet, wonderful lady named "Oleta." She had been sprinkled as an infant in her church. When she became an adult, she got acquainted with some members of the church of Christ, and they began studying the Bible.

When some members of the church told her that we baptize by immersion and only baptize people old enough to believe and repent, she was surprised and began asking questions. The members replied, "That's the way they did it in the Bible." This upset Oleta. She was just sure that what she had been taught as a child was in the Bible! So, she got out her Bible, and she studied for days, looking for verses to show baptism includes the sprinkling of infants. The more she read, however, the more she realized that the Scriptures taught the immersion of penitent believers. Oleta was honest and said, "I was studying to prove them wrong, and what I found was that Oleta was wrong." This honest lady saw that even cherished beliefs can be wrong. It wasn't easy for Oleta to reach that conclusion, but she was honest with God and with herself. The baptism into Christ is a burial. The very word "baptize" means immerse. The Bible says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

The Bible also teaches that the early church baptized only penitent believers. Acts 2:41 says, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Again, Acts 5:14 says, "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." Acts 8:1, says, "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." These were penitent people old enough to believe and receive the Word. They weren't infants.

I've also known some who believed that they were saved by faith alone and didn't need to be baptized. However, Mark 16:15-16 says, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." According to these verses, preaching and believing take place before baptism, and one is baptized before he is saved. Once people heard and believed the gospel they were baptized, and this resulted in their salvation. Acts 2:38 says, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Ananias told Saul, after three days of prayer, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). If you're being taught that baptism isn't necessary to salvation, I ask you to study the Scriptures. While faith is necessary to salvation, the Bible also teaches the need for baptism. God washes away our sins at the time of baptism.

Some think that every doctrine of every church is okay, and every doctrine is as good as every other doctrine. But is that so? Doesn't the truth matter to God? It may sound neighborly to get along with everyone, but to believe everything is to believe nothing. It doesn't make sense to believe contradictory teachings are still all true. Those who hold this idea aren't listening to God; they're listening to modern culture.

Galatians 1:6-9 says there is but one gospel. If there is only one, there cannot be many. Would you want to accept a "distorted" gospel? What if you were given false hope? Wouldn't that be tragic to believe a doctrine that departs from God's Word? Believing everything is all right isn't listening to the Lord Jesus; it's listening to ourselves. Wouldn't it be better to stay on safe ground? In the Bible, we can read the things that God approves and teaches. We can know what He wills for our lives, and for our churches, and for our beliefs. We need to conform to His Words in the New Testament. So why not study the Scriptures and find out for yourself? You might find that you're like Oleta. Examine what you believe! See if it's according to what the Bible teaches.

God's declaration in Matthew 17:5, "Listen to Him," is still relevant today. A thousand voices seek our attention, but God points only to His Son, Jesus. Moses was a great lawgiver, but God points to His Son. Elijah was a great prophet, but God points to His Son. Only Jesus has the words of life (John 6:68). "Listen to Him!" Love Him, follow Him, obey Him, and serve Him. Study the Scriptures and examine your life. Are you walking in the Lord's way?

If you can't read in Scripture what you believe and practice, abandon those things and come to the Lord. Let Him lead you to eternal life. Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil."

Love moves us to trust Jesus. Love moves us to confess faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. We gladly acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and we belong to Him. Love also moves us to think of sin differently. We realize that sin will ruin our lives and so we repent of sin and turn to the Lord's way. Love moves us to clothe ourselves with Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27). We're baptized into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3), where Christ shed His blood. In baptism God washes away our sins and gives us newness of life (Acts 22:16; and Romans 6:4-7). Why not take the necessary step of being baptized into Christ? That's when you'll receive the forgiveness of your sins. Today, is the best day for you to do that.

Were You There?

An old hymn asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” In our rush to judgment over who was responsible for the death of Christ, we often overlook our own role. Christ died for each of us. Were you there? I’ve always loved the old spiritual song, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Nothing in life reaches into my soul as does the story of Jesus Christ dying upon the cross. I can’t think of it without several emotions coming up inside of me. The cross is at the heart of what we believe.

When I think of the cruelty of the scourging and the crucifixion, I become angry and ask, “how could they treat an innocent, good person like that?” When I think of Judas, I wonder how he could betray the Lord Jesus. When I think of Pilate, I wonder why he gave in to the Jewish leaders and washed his hands of my Lord. Where was his courage? Then I look at myself and my own sins. I wonder how my Lord Jesus could love me enough to bear such agony for me. I’m very grateful He loved me so much that He was willing to redeem me with His blood. Yet, I am ashamed for all my sins. I’m so sorry for all the evil things I’ve said and done, all the pain I’ve caused, and all the times I’ve failed to do the right thing. Remembering the cross humbles us and yet blesses us at the same time.

Our reading today comes from the Book of Acts 2:22-24. Peter is preaching on the Day of Pentecost and giving the gospel for the first time.

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

Yes Jesus did arise from the dead. The four gospel accounts Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are inspired by the Holy Spirit and describe the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. I’ve merged these four accounts from their words to give a fuller picture of what happened.

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus. They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he wouldn’t drink it.

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

Pilate wrote an inscription and put it on the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene, were there. And when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on His right and one on the left. Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you’re the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

So the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” The robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!”

One of the criminals who was hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling (for) Elijah.” One of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” All the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.

Behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. Many bodies of the saints who had fallen

asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” Again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

The death of Jesus was unlike any execution ever known. He was innocent but bore the sins of the guilty. While being nailed down, He prayed for His Father to forgive his executioners, because they didn’t know what they were doing. The Lord Jesus, because He was Divine, could see what we cannot see and know what we cannot know. The Father planned to offer His body as a sacrifice for their sins, but they didn’t realize it. First Corinthians 2:8 says, “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had (known), they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

When a person was executed, the Romans posted the charge against the man on the cross to warn others not to commit the same crime. His accusers charged Him falsely with blasphemy in saying that He was the Messiah, the King of the Jews, yet they resented the sign that proclaimed Him the King of the Jews. Pilate sought to offend the Jews with the statement, but he spoke more of the truth than he knew.

Peter speaks of the remarkable courage and inner strength of the Lord Jesus in His suffering. “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:21-25).

There’s no wonder the centurion who saw to the crucifixion proclaimed “Truly this man was innocent.” Guilty men don’t act the way that Jesus acted. They don’t refuse a drink that would help them with the pain. They don’t ask God to forgive their executioners. They don’t keep quiet when being mocked. They don’t have the sun darkened and the earth shaking when they’re being crucified. Jesus was indeed, righteous and innocent.

Pilate said more than once that he found no guilt in Jesus. Pilate offered Barabbas, hoping to free Jesus; but the high priests and scribes incited the people to insist on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Pilate washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.” And all the people said, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!”

Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!" So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." Jesus was no ordinary person. The Jews delivered Jesus up to Pilate, not because He was guilty but because they were envious of Jesus.

At the sixth hour the sun became dark. The sun was not darkened for a few minutes, as it would be in an eclipse. This was different; the sun was darkened for three full hours. The earth shook so violently that it split the rocks. God did this.

The veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. The veils were 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and four inches thick. They were so heavy they needed 300 priests to move each one. The Veil being torn from top to bottom means that God's own Hand had torn it in two. That veil separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Once the veil was torn, that place ceased to be separated or holy.

By dying, the Lord Jesus opened a new and living way for us to enter the holy of holies. Hebrews 9:12 says, "He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

Jesus died an agonizing death for you and for me because of His great love. God was in Christ at the cross offering us redemption, offering us forgiveness, offering us reconciliation. God showed this amazing wonderful love in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus upon the cross in order to reach into our hearts and souls, to bring us back into a right relationship with Himself. No one, will ever love you like Jesus Christ. No one will ever care for you like that.

My friend, you were there when they crucified the Lord. Oh, no, you weren't there physically; but yes, you were there spiritually. Remember: Jesus died for you to save you from sin and to begin a relationship with you. He died so that you and I could be reconciled to God in a new covenant, so that you could have a loving relationship with God that would last forever. Yes, you were in His heart then; and you're in His heart now.

God took the initiative to show His love for us all, on the cross, hoping that we would respond with a total commitment of our love. We should love the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds, and all our strength (Mark 12:30). Committed love is willing to go to any length to comply with what the Lord desires. We're saved by God's grace, and His offer of salvation extends to every person. We can't earn our salvation, but we can meet God's conditions for salvation. God wishes everyone would respond to His love.

You respond to that remarkable love of God with a love of your own. That love leads you to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, to repent of your sins, to confess Jesus, before others, and to be baptized. Baptism into Christ is the immersion of a penitent believer in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). You must do this if you wish to show your love for God and become a Christian. If the cross means anything to you and if you realize your sins were involved in sending Jesus to the cross, you won't wait even one day until you come to the Lord in love and obedience. Won't you do that today?

God With Us

Does it matter whether God is with us? Today, we're exploring the blessing of having God with us. The Bible is like a mirror that allows a person to see himself as God sees him. If you wish to look into your soul, read and meditate on the Scriptures. They will sometimes assure you, and they will sometimes show your faults and weaknesses. They will surely tell you what God sees, thinks, feels, and says. We're wise to pay close attention to what God says if we wish to have His blessing.

An angel of the Lord told Joseph, when he considered Mary's condition, "'She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name IMMANUEL,' which translated means, 'GOD with us'" (Matthew 1:21-23). We can certainly see God with us in the life of Jesus who revealed what God is like.

Jesus promised, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Paul often closed his epistles with a phrase similar to "the Lord be with you." He told the Romans, "Now the God of peace be with you all" (Romans 15:33). Later he said, "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you" (Romans 16:20). He told the Corinthians, "the God of love and peace be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). Such greetings speak of God's favor and blessing for those who love and obey Him. Do you love and obey Him? Is God's favor with you?

Our reading today is probably the best known Psalm of David. It shows his close relationship with God. Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd,
 I shall not want.
 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
 He leads me beside quiet waters.
 He restores my soul;
 He guides me in the paths of righteousness
 For His name's sake.
 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I fear no evil, for You are with me;
 Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
 You have anointed my head with oil;
 My cup overflows.
 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,
 And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

A beautiful and wonderful psalm.

Jesus came into this world as Immanuel, "God with us." It matters whether God is with us. Having a relationship with God is the most important relationship of all. When God is with us, we have His favor and blessing. If God is absent in our lives, we're spiritually alone and without hope. For this reason, I want God in my heart and in my life. I want to cling to Him and like Jesus I always want to do the things that are pleasing to Him (John 8:29). So, what happens when God is with us? What difference does it make? We might consider the case of Noah. In the days of Noah, 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. The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the

earth, and He was grieved in His heart.” God determined to blot out man, “but Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:6-8). Noah and his family, eight persons, were saved; but the rest of the people on earth perished in the flood.

Even though Joseph's older brothers hated him and sold him into slavery, God took care of him. Genesis 39:2-3 says, “The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.” Stephen said about Joseph, “God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt” (Acts 7:9-10).

In later years, God was with the judges after Israel had taken the land of Canaan. Judges 2:18 says, “When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.”

David was a man after God's own heart. Though he suffered through many trials, “David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him” (1 Samuel 18:14). Second Samuel 5:10 says, “David became greater and greater, for the LORD God of hosts was with him.” When God is with us, He blesses us and helps us through our struggles and challenges.

King Hezekiah “did right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.” Hezekiah “clung to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments.” As a result, “And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he prospered. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city” (2 Kings 18:7-8). God blessed Hezekiah because he clung to the Lord and kept His commandments.

The Lord God said to Israel, “Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10). When we cling to God, He clings to us. 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.”

When God is with us that doesn't mean that we'll never suffer or be tempted. We all face trials, heartaches, and difficulties. Anyone who has read the stories of Joseph, David, or Hezekiah knows that their lives were not always easy. What God being “with us” does mean is that we are never alone in our temptations, our struggles, and our suffering. We look to God for our strength, our comfort, and our hope.

What happens when people forsake God and no longer have His blessing? I can think of a few illustrations. Do you remember Samson and Delilah? Samson's power came from God. As long as he observed God's ways, God was with him. Delilah wanted to know the source of Samson's strength. Judges 16:16-20 tells the story: “It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, ‘A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man.’ When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, ‘Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart.’ Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. She said, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ And he awoke from his sleep and said, ‘I will go out as at other times and shake myself

free.' But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him." When his hair came off, Samson's favor with the Lord ceased. He could no longer defeat the Philistines. Thankfully, Samson's hair grew back, and when Samson prayed, God restored his strength.

Scripture gives us more than one picture of God's view of Solomon. When Solomon became king, 2 Chronicles 1:1 says, "Now Solomon the son of David established himself securely over his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him and exalted him greatly." But, Solomon's many wives led him astray. First Kings 11:6-9 says, "Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." He no longer pleased God, because he loved his foreign wives.

The people of Judah, God's people, in later years turned away from God and followed Baal and other Canaanite gods. They believed they could practice idolatry and immorality and still be right with God. Jeremiah 2:12-13 says, "'Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate,' declares the LORD. 'For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.'" They left the God who loved them for worthless gods who were only man-made pieces of stone and wood. "'Shall I not punish these people?' declares the LORD, 'On a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself? An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?'" (Jeremiah 5:29-31).

We too must ask the question, if we have forsaken the Lord what will we do at the end of it when God holds us responsible. They chose sin over righteousness and they hardened their hearts against God. We must be careful to keep our hearts close to God. Jeremiah 6:15 says of Jerusalem, "'Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be cast down,' says the LORD." I see, even in our own culture, some who are never ashamed of immorality and don't know how to blush over their sins. This, my friend, is great weakness of heart and mind.

Hebrews 3:12-13 warns, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." The idea that Christians who turn from God cannot lose their souls is a myth. God urges us to stay faithful to Him and to continue worshiping with the church. Hebrews 10:25 says, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Some have decided to forsake assembling with the church altogether, to forsake the Lord. Hebrews 10:26-31 says, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The LORD will judge his people. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'"

God has a track record of punishing those who forsake him and lose all respect for what is good and right. We must not, as Jerusalem did in the days of Jeremiah, listen to the wrong people and take the grace of God for granted. The Jews hardened their hearts and refused to repent, so, God punished them. God will punish us too if we harden our hearts and refuse to repent. God is the God of grace, but He is also a holy and just God who punishes sin.

My friend, will you refuse the blessing of God so that you can live a worldly life without God? Would you gain the world but lose your soul? Will you stray from the truth? James 5:19 -20 says, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Won't you return to God if you're away from Him?

Most people know John 3:16, but do you know John 3:18? It says, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." You can't expect God to be with you and bless you, if you do not believe and serve the Lord. According to Ephesians 2:12, people outside of Christ are "separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." It matters whether you are with God and whether God is with you.

The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:23-24). Those whom God loves and with whom He makes His home, His abode, are those who love Him and keep His commandments. Do you?

If the Lord is with you in this life, you can live with the Lord in the life to come. Paul said, "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). If you wish to be at home with the Lord in eternity, then let the Lord make his home with you in this life.

To begin a relationship with the Lord, you must place your faith and trust in Him. Believing in Jesus Christ is more than acknowledging His existence; it means that you believe Him and in Him. You believe His words and His promises. You want to serve Him. You turn away from sinful things and you begin living for the Lord—that's repentance! With your love, your faith, and penitent heart, then you can confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, just like the Bible teaches in Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16 and Romans 6:3-7.