

Program Transcripts

For February 2020



IN
SEARCH
OF THE LORD'S WAY[®]

SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

FEBRUARY 2 – THE LORD’S RESURRECTION

The Christian faith rests on the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Can we place our hope and trust in His resurrection? Let’s look at the evidence!

FEBRUARY 9 – THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Why should we believe the New Testament? Is there evidence that Jesus really lived? Are the events and messages described in the New Testament reliable? Can we believe what was written? Yes, we can believe!

FEBRUARY 16 – LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Loving God with all our heart and soul is the first commandment, but loving our neighbor as ourselves is a second like unto it. God not only commands us to love, He also shows us what love looks like.

FEBRUARY 23 – OUT OF DARKNESS

It is better to light just one little candle than to stumble in the dark. Light is so precious! In this lesson we’re going to explore the blessing God’s light. In His light are love, wisdom, and freedom from evil.

The Lord's Resurrection

The Christian faith rests on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Let's look at the evidence! We love the Lord and are determined to show that love by examining the Scriptures to see what God desires of us. God regards searching the Scriptures to find the truth as noble. Today, we're examining the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Whether Jesus arose matters. If Jesus arose, there is life after death. If Jesus arose, He has fulfilled the ancient prophecies and proven Himself to be the Son of God. If Jesus arose, then His promises are true. If Jesus arose and is the Son of God, He is Lord of all and has authority over our souls. If the Lord Jesus arose, then He will one day come again and judge you and me according to His Word.

Since what we're studying today affects each of us and has eternal consequences for our souls, we need to pay close attention. If Jesus arose from the dead, we can't ignore Him or what He requires of us. We can't hide our heads in the sand. The Bible says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:12-13). One day you and I will give an account of ourselves to Jesus Christ.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to Matthew 28:2-7.

And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

The Lord Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. Jesus said, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up" (Matthew 20:18-19). This is an amazing and specific prediction! Jesus not only predicted He would be scourged and crucified at the hands of the chief priests and the Gentiles but also that He would rise from the dead the third day. Only the Son of God could make such a specific prediction about His death and resurrection and see its fulfillment just as He predicted.

Before we speak of a resurrection, we must first examine the evidence that Jesus actually died upon the cross. All four gospel accounts speak of the beatings and His scourging. A Roman scourging led many men to die. The whip they used lacerated the skin with sharp objects and caused the loss of much blood. Scourging left a person so weak that they couldn't fight being crucified. The Romans, unlike the Jews, did not limit their stripes to 39. The cross killed a person slowly and very painfully. While the nails through the hands and the feet were not of themselves fatal, the physical position of a crucified person, on a cross, created tremendous pressure on the heart and lungs. A person had to pull himself up to breathe in and out. The cross gradually wore a

person down so that he couldn't breathe. In the case of Jesus, fluid surrounded his heart until it failed.

The reason soldiers would break the legs of a crucified person was to hasten their death. A person with broken legs couldn't push himself up to breathe and would die more quickly. They broke the legs of the two thieves; but these experienced soldiers found Jesus was already dead, so they didn't break His bones in fulfillment of Psalm 34:20 that "not a bone of Him shall be broken." Instead, a soldier pierced His side with a spear, "and immediately there came out blood and water" (John 19:34). This flowing of water and blood is a sure sign that Jesus was indeed dead. If Jesus had not died from the crucifixion, He could not have survived this spear.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, but Pilate wouldn't release the body until he had proof that Jesus was already dead. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared his body for burial in a new tomb a short distance from where he was crucified. John reveals that they bound the body in linen wrappings with myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight, that's at 12 ounces to the pound. This burial process would have sealed Jesus in a mummy-like wrapping with the spices sealing the cloth together. Bound up like this, Jesus—even if He by some remote chance survived—could not have breathed and lived. Jesus was dead in the tomb.

The Pharisees and priests went to Pilate and requested a guard for the tomb. Matthew 27:62 and a little bit later, records what they said. "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first."

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." They went and made the grave secure, and they set a seal on the stone. They were determined to not let anything happen to that tomb. They didn't merely post a couple of guards at the tomb. They made it as secure as they could. Some scholars suggest that there were as many as 28 guards there, and they would have been particularly watchful on the third day, when the threat was greatest. The governor's seal meant that it would be criminal to mess with the tomb.

The Scriptures tell us that women came very early on the first day of the week to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. This was their first opportunity since the Sabbath had passed. They wondered, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" They realized that the stone was "extremely large" according to Mark 16:4. Scholars suggest that this stone weighed between one and a half and two tons. They knew moving this stone was far beyond their ability and that it would require several strong men to move it.

Coming to the tomb, they saw an angel had rolled the stone away. The stone sat in an inclined track. To open the tomb they had to roll this stone up the incline. John 20:1 tells us that they took away the stone. Apparently it was picked up and moved out of its track away from the sepulcher. How could a group of disciples tiptoe among some sleeping soldiers, pick up an extremely large stone, as much as 2 tons, and then move it away from the tomb? How could they break the seal, move the stone, and remove the body of Jesus undetected by the soldiers?

When the women reported to the apostles that the tomb was empty, many of the apostles laughed and doubted their word; but two apostles wanted to find out for themselves. Peter and John ran to the tomb. John 20:5-7 says that they looked in the tomb and saw the linen wrappings lying there. They saw "the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings,

but rolled up in a place by itself.” This is curious. Why would the disciples, if they stole the body, unwrap him and fold the face cloth, and leave the wrappings in the tomb, knowing that the guards were just outside?

Whatever understanding you have of this event, you must explain who moved the stone, how the tomb became empty, who took the linen wrappings from the body of Jesus, and folded the facecloth and left them there. The eyewitnesses who examined these events argue without hesitance that Jesus arose from the dead. According to Matthew 28:11-15, the soldiers reported all these events to the chief priests, who paid the soldiers a large sum of money to lie and promised to keep them out of trouble with the governor. But down deep these soldiers and the chief priests knew the truth.

Knowing this is the testimony of Scripture, let’s ask whether the testimony about the empty tomb is true. Can we test the credibility of the report of the resurrection? Is it believable?

First, let’s remember that Jesus believed and taught His people to be honest. The Lord hated hypocrisy and deceit. Jesus praised Nathanael for being a person in whom was no deceit (John 1:47). Jesus spoke of the devil as a liar and condemned it in John 8:44. How could His disciples abandon everything that they had been taught and spread a lie throughout Jerusalem. By the way, all the Jews had to do to prove that Jesus had not resurrected was merely to produce the body of Jesus. If the Jews produced the body of Jesus they could stop Christianity. They never tried because they knew they couldn’t. All they could do was bribe the soldiers to lie and try to punish the disciples.

Let’s look at the change in the disciples. Before the disciples knew for sure that Jesus had been raised on the third day they hid in the upper room with the door locked for fear of the Jews. They doubted and laughed at the women’s testimony. Their doubting hearts kept them from believing until Jesus revealed Himself to them. One apostle, Thomas, persisted in his disbelief even when the others insisted they had seen the Lord. Thomas said, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

John 20:26-29 says: “After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ And then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’”

Jesus appeared to the disciples and proved Himself to them in a variety of ways. Luke 24:36 -39 says: “He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be to you.’ But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’”

Acts 1:3 tells how Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” So strong did He convince them that we see a very different group of men at Pentecost than on the day that Jesus arose. At first they disbelieved, hiding as cowards, and doubting the prophecy of Jesus; but Jesus showed Himself alive with many convincing proofs.

At Pentecost, they were bold and unrelenting in their preaching of the gospel. They told everyone that they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They called the people to repent of their sins, because they crucified Jesus whom for certain God had made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The early disciples endured beatings and imprisonment, but they wouldn't stop preaching Jesus as the Christ resurrected from the dead (Acts chapters 3 through 8).

When the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answered, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). They were convinced that they must obey God and continue preaching the gospel.

In Acts 5, the Council arrested the apostles, flogged them, commanded them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, and then released them. But the apostles rejoiced "that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42). They later suffered imprisonment, beatings and even death for their faith, but nothing kept them from continuing to preach Jesus as the Christ, risen from the dead.

The disciples didn't become rich or find life easy from their preaching. They suffered much to tell the story of Jesus. They stoned Stephen in Acts 7 and beheaded James the son of Zebedee in Acts 12. Not one, not one, of the disciples ever denied the resurrection. They died for preaching it. According to tradition, they were all martyred for their faith except John. Let me ask you, would you die for preaching something that you knew was a lie?

The disciples gained no earthly advantage by preaching Jesus Christ. The only reason they spoke out so boldly about their faith was they believed Jesus truly was the Christ, the risen Son of God. Their bold faith assures us that we too can place our faith in Jesus as Lord.

Saul of Tarsus was originally devoted to Judaism and a persecutor of the church, but He saw Christ on the road to Damascus. His conversion is especially important in view of his earlier zeal against Christianity. He gave up everything to become a Christian. What he wrote about in the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is the earliest documentary evidence that we have. No one can satisfactorily explain the conversion and later life of the apostle Paul except in the way that he himself explained it. He had seen the risen Christ.

Some say Jesus fainted on the cross and revived in the cool of the tomb; but this doesn't explain how Jesus survived the linen wrappings, how He moved the stone, or how He frightened the guards to get away. Others say the apostles only imagined that they saw Jesus after His resurrection, but this doesn't explain why there were linen wrappings in the empty tomb, or how the stone was moved before the women arrived, or how the guards were frightened. Nor does it explain how they were able to touch Jesus.

Though we have barely discussed the evidence surrounding the resurrection, we've seen enough to say confidently that Peter and the apostles showed how God had raised Him from the dead whenever they spoke about Him and that He is the Son of God and the Lord of all. According to John 12:48 and Acts 17:31, He will one day judge you and me according to His Word. To become a Christian, believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, turn from your sins in repentance, confess Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins as the Bible teaches in Acts 2:38.

The New Testament is Reliable

Why should we believe the Bible? Are the events and messages described in the New Testament reliable? Yes, we can believe! We want to build your faith, give you hope, and deepen your love for God and for others. Throughout the centuries, the Bible has had its critics and skeptics, yet the Bible remains the best-selling book of all time. It contains within its pages God's message to all people for all time. Scripture has given hope, comfort, and encouragement to millions who've read its pages and believed them. We hope you haven't set your Bible aside and forgotten it.

Some think the Bible is just an ancient book written by humans and filled with myths and contradictions. Others think the Bible is just one sacred book among many. Is the Bible really true? Can you trust it to give you accurate information? The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and what will judge us in the last day. If this is true, we need to listen to everything the Lord has to say!

Jesus Christ said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). Many people say they love the Lord and follow Christ but have never taken the time to read the New Testament. A person who doesn't read the New Testament is no better off than the person who doesn't own a New Testament. I hope you're paying close attention to the teaching found here and examining your life by its teaching. Let the written Word of God work in your heart and soul; let it shape your life. If you love and serve God in this life, you'll be able to serve Him in the ages to come.

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According to John chapter 20:30-31. Here Jesus is being talked about and why He came and why the book was written.

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

What a wonderful blessing that is, to know about Jesus and to have life in His name.

The Bible is a unique book, unlike any other book in all of history. It's the best-selling book of all time. It's made more impact on American culture and society across the world than any other book. Can we believe the Bible's claims about Jesus the Savior? Is He Lord and will He judge us at the end of time? If we believe this book, the answer is yes, so this question is most serious.

Occasionally, someone says that we don't know whether Jesus Christ ever really lived or not. When I hear someone say that I wonder if they are merely repeating what they've heard or if they've examined the evidence for themselves.

If Jesus were not historical, the New Testament is certainly an untrustworthy book; but since other sources corroborate the facts we know about Jesus, the Bible has credibility. Gary Habermas, a recognized university professor and historian, in his book *The Historical Jesus*, recorded and examined 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus outside the New Testament. Some were Christian but many were non-Christian, and some were archaeological. He found 129 reported facts revealing the life, person, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dr. Habermas concluded, "While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this is plainly not the case. Not only are there many such sources, ... Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times." Yes, Jesus really lived, and when you add the books of the New Testament, we see how Jesus has changed the world!

The New Testament clearly tells about Jesus, His teaching, His kind acts, His miracles, His death, and His resurrection. You may ask, "Did that really happen? We weren't there and we didn't see

those things; we can only rely on the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses. Did Jesus really rise from the dead?" What we're asking now is whether the New Testament documents written by eyewitnesses and people who investigated, told the truth about Jesus.

Dr. Harvey W. Everest, in his classic book, *The Divine Demonstration*, lists seven criteria used to test historical evidence. He notes that we can judge testimony to be the truth when it meets these criteria.

First, the evidence is credible when the witnesses are honest, competent and have opportunity to know. The accounts written shortly after an event are usually more reliable than accounts written hundreds of years later. We want to know the truth from those who were present and heard it firsthand. We can't trust guesses or opinions. Someone has said opinions are merely guesses in the absence of evidence.

The apostle Peter, who was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ from his baptism to His resurrection said, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well- pleased'— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:16-18). The Father wanted Peter to listen to Jesus, and He wants the same from us. We must hear the messages Jesus brings.

Though Luke came on the scene later, he revealed the sources that he used to write his account of the gospel. Luke wrote, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

If Peter or Luke or any other writer of the New Testament had written something untrue there would be hundreds of brothers and sisters who would have challenged their writings. Instead, the early church from the earliest times regarded the four gospel accounts, Acts, and the epistles as trustworthy records of what really happened in their day.

Second, evidence is credible when the witnesses agree in the general statement, although they may differ on minor points. What some say are contradictions in Scripture are not really contradictions but different perspectives of the same event. Investigators of crime scenes will frequently find witnesses who appear to disagree with each other but are actually speaking the truth. In fact, though they may emphasize and focus on different points, they actually add important facts in their reports of the events. Facts do not really contradict one another but rather provide their perspective.

In some cases, similar passages are actually talking about different events. Matthew 5 provides a list of beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount that differ from Luke's version. In Matthew 5, Jesus was sitting on a mountain; but Luke 6:17 says that Jesus stood on a level place. These were different occasions, even though the material sounds similar.

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 the apostles stood together in proclaiming the facts as eyewitnesses of the Lord's death and resurrection. When Paul defended himself to Agrippa, he noted in Acts 26:26 that the things that Jesus did were well known and "not done in a corner."

Third, evidence is credible when there is no known motive for imposture or faking. The apostles and preachers of the first century didn't become rich or honored by men because of their testimony.

Peter told the man that he healed at the gate of the temple, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” (Acts 3:6). When they healed this lame man, they certainly didn’t do it for money.

Fourth, the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are strongly against the well-being or interest of the narrator. The book of Acts records the persecution of the church and those who suffered for their faith. It records the opposition from the leading Jews. The apostles and early Christians were beaten, imprisoned, and some killed; but they never denied their Lord. They lived difficult lives in order to preach Jesus as the Christ and risen Lord. History records numerous persecutions by the Romans for centuries, but Christianity survived and grew. In the second century, it was commonly said that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the kingdom.” One may question many things, but there can be no doubt the apostles and early Christians were true believers!

Fifth, the testimony is reliable when such witnesses are numerous. Jesus made several appearances in the forty days after his resurrection and He demonstrated himself to be the Son of God by many convincing proofs (Acts 1:1-3). The New Testament records at least fifteen appearances of Jesus to various people. Paul said that Jesus appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). He knew what he wrote could be tested by others to be true.

Sixth, the testimony is reliable when the recorded facts and the existing facts are related as cause and effect. The places, people, culture and circumstances recorded by the authors of the New Testament accurately represented the way things really were. The New Testament is not filled with nameless, mythical people, who could never have lived. Rather, archaeology and secular historical records support the facts found in the New Testament. The dates of the New Testament match historical and geographical realities in the world of that era.

Seventh, the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are sustained by existing monuments, coins, games or other public institutions. The fact that the church itself exists is a marvelous testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to the truth of the apostles' teaching.

There would never have been a church had the apostles not believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that churches, after twenty centuries, still meet on the first day of the week to have the Lord’s supper is a testimony to the fact that the events of the New Testament are real.

People have criticized the Bible through the years, but the enduring nature and the power of the Bible itself is a major evidence. Though men have done everything in their power to destroy the Scriptures, they survive stronger than ever! You can find copies of the whole Bible translated into 670 languages, the New Testament alone into 1,521 languages, and portions in another 1,000, other languages. The United Bible Society estimates that more than 5 billion copies of Scripture are currently in print. However, if you add the audio and digital copies found on computers, phones, and tablets, nobody knows how many copies exist throughout the world.

Wherever the influence of the Bible is strong, morality flourishes; wherever it’s weak, selfishness and evil flourish. In any and every age, Scripture has made an impact on the morals and the happiness of the people. According to John Richard Green in *A Short History of the English People*, “No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the Long Parliament. England became a people of the book, and that book was the Bible. It was read at church and read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened, kindled a startling enthusiasm.”

He continued, “As a mere literary monument, the English version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue. But far greater was the effect of the Bible on the character of the people. Elizabeth might silence or tune the pulpits, but it was impossible for her to silence or tune the

great preachers of justice and mercy and truth who spoke from the Book. The whole temper of the nation felt the change. A new moral religious impulse spread through every class."

How can Scripture have such a great impact? It's powerful because Scripture is from God Himself. The Bible is sacred; it's more than a human product. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Wherever Scripture goes, people learn the teaching that leads to life eternal. They learn what is good and right. They learn how to love, how to treat other people, and how to serve. Scripture teaches the most important lessons of life.

The Scriptures also reprove us; they tell us what sin is and how sin will destroy us. They warn and admonish us to keep us from hurting ourselves and hurting those we love. You might think reproof is a negative thing, but Jesus told the lukewarm church in Laodicea, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:19). Parents who love their children lovingly reprove them to keep them safe.

The Scriptures correct us in order to bring us spiritual healing and make us whole. It's only when a person has been taught and he makes changes to correct his life that he is ready to be trained in righteousness. God will use him to do good to all people. Have you let the Word of God be a mirror to your soul, so that you can become what God created you to be?

There are other reasons to trust your Bible that we'll explore another day. For me, the Lord Jesus settled the question of the reliability of the Bible. He considered events of the Old Testament to be real history. Jesus understood Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish as historical. Jesus used the punishment of Lot's wife as a means to warn his disciples not to turn back (Luke 17:32). There is no evidence that He ever regarded the creation, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, or any other story of the Bible as a myth or fable. As the Word who lived from the beginning, Jesus is an eyewitness in the position to know. We can trust Him to tell us the truth!

The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17). If we'll listen to God, hear His Word, and obey it, our lives will change! We'll know God speaks the truth. We need to believe, to repent of our sins, and to come to the Lord for answers. Perhaps we have great problems because we've tuned out the Bible and listened to our lusts and desires. We got what we wanted but not what we needed. Read the Bible, meditate on it, memorize it, love it, obey it, and share it! It can change your life.

And if you are not a committed Christian, become one. Believe with your heart, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in the name of the Lord. God will forgive your sins, He'll give you a new life, and make you His child.

Love One Another

Tremendous division seems to face our country, and anger over differences troubles our unity and ability to communicate. How can we love one another? Looking to the cross and the love of God can transform our lives. What we know about God's love comes from a thoughtful study of the Scriptures. With the love of God comes peace and forgiveness, things necessary for people to live in harmony. Without a knowledge of that love shown on the cross, people continue to fight and hate. This book gives us reason to love, and we must love one another and even our enemies.

What is the greatest priority in your life? Many say family, job, or achieving some goal. A religious lawyer once asked Jesus, "'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophet'" (Matthew 22:36-40). Our first priority is to love God fully in every way. Another priority like it is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Some think they can love God but not love their brother or neighbor, but they may not be thinking clearly. First John 4:20-21 says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." We all need reminding to love even those who are hard to love.

Our reading today comes from 1 John 3:16-18. John talks about what it means to love.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

That's how God wishes us to love. In deed and in truth. Let's pray together. O, Father, help us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Help us to love You with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And to do Your will and to treat others as we wish to be treated. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Love is at the core of all Christianity. We're called to love God and to love others. If we fail to love, we have failed at the most important task of life. First Corinthians 13:1-3 says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." A loveless Christianity is no Christianity at all.

God distinguishes those who love others from those who don't. First John 3:10 says, "By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." When people fail to love others, they will also fail to keep the Lord's commandments. Being a child of God means loving others the way that God has loved you.

Love is the motivator for all that we do as Christians. Second Corinthians 5:14-15 says, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all

have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” The cross of Christ moves us not only to love Jesus but also to commit our hearts and our lives totally to Him. That means we must die to ourselves and live for Him.

Jesus wants us to love others the way that He loved us. The Lord Jesus said, “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” (John 13:34-35). We’re to love as Jesus loved. If we define love the way some people do, we’d hardly love anyone at all. We must outgrow our self-centered ways and put others first, just as Jesus did. Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

You might ask, “How did Jesus love people?” First, Jesus cared for those who are in need physically. First John 3:16-18 says, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” Jesus led the way! He healed the sick, He fed the poor, He showed compassion to all who were in need. The Lord Jesus speaks honestly to us about feeding and clothing the poor and visiting the sick and those in prison. “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). When we give to help others today, we’re giving love to them and to the Lord Jesus.

Second, Jesus cared for their souls as well as their bodies. Luke 5:31-32 says, “And Jesus answered them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’” Jesus, by leading a perfectly sinless life, leads us to live more righteously. He forgives our past, which allows us to change and become people who have a good conscience. Jesus helped people change by the life that he lived and by His preaching and teaching. In Mark 1:38 Jesus said to His disciples, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” He wanted everyone to be spiritually healthy.

Third, He sacrificed his body and his life for them. First Peter 2:24 says, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” Jesus sacrificed Himself so that we could live with Him forever. He died so that we might live; He suffered so that we could be forgiven and enjoy everlasting life. He bore whips and nails, and beatings and spit, and mockery and humiliation. He didn’t fight back, but He bore it for your sake and for mine. He loved us.

Fourth, Jesus suffered for their sins to bring us to God. First Peter 3:18 says, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.” He was not content to leave us where He found us. He wanted something grander for us. He wanted to give us an opportunity to know our Creator, the One who made and sustains us and the One to whom we pray. To Jesus, God was not merely “my Father”; He’s “our Father.” Because of Jesus we can be His children. He wanted to be in our lives now and forever. There’s no greater blessing in life than to have God as our Father.

Fifth, Jesus forgives and wants us to forgive. First Peter 4:8 says, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.” Jesus loves us and is willing to

cover a multitude of our sins. He taught us how to forgive. We forgive because of what God has done for us and because we are God's children. The Lord Jesus said, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15).

People will always offend us. If we don't learn how to react to offenses, we'll spend our lives in misery. Revenge doesn't end the heartaches; it keeps anger alive. Anger will not achieve the righteousness of God but spreads to violence! Anger breeds anger, and hatred breeds more hatred. If we let anger grow in our hearts it will destroy our soul and it will ruin our life. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." We live in a cruel and violent world because people have never learned to forgive as Jesus did.

Ephesians 4:31-32 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, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Recently I've seen where members of the church have forgiven others even when someone has killed a family member. This is how Christ lived and how He wants His people to live.

The Lord Jesus taught, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).

Jesus practiced what He preached. The Lord Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:33-34). Jesus was willing to forgive those who were hurting and killing Him, nailing Him to a cross. Stephen also showed the same love. When they were stoning him to death, Stephen cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60).

Sixth, Jesus confronted those who were thinking wrongly and those who sinned. Matthew 16:21-24 says, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'"

You might wonder how a rebuke like this is loving. We're so easily offended these days, and we've decided that anyone who criticizes another is somehow hateful, or mean-spirited or judgmental. Unwarranted criticism, slander, and judging is certainly wrong; but rebukes that lead to righteousness can be the most loving things that one can do. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." Agreeing with and approving sin doesn't help anybody to repent. The Lord Jesus said, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:19). Leaving a soul in sin is the most cruel thing that one can do.

Love is a verb; it reveals itself by what it does. We all want to hear those precious words, “I love you.” However, we want love to be shown, not just be told. Love is not only an emotion; it’s a way of life; it is evident by what it does. God demonstrated His love in giving Jesus to us, and God wants us to demonstrate our love by loving Him and loving others.

Paul described love this way, “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). When a person acts like this you don’t have to wonder if they love you, you see it in their lives and know it’s in their hearts.

First Corinthians 13:8 simply says, “Love never fails.” Jesus never stopped loving us! John 13:1 says, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” Jesus washed the disciples feet, knowing they’d scatter. He washed Peter’s feet, knowing that he would deny Him three times. Jesus even washed Judas Iscariot’s feet. Jesus endured the trials, the beatings, and the cross; and through it all He never stopped sacrificing Himself or loving us! He was not a fickle, fair-weather friend. When we love God, we should love Him to the end. When we love the church, we should love it to the end.

Let’s pray together. O, Father help us to be people who know how to love and who practice our love for You at all times. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

First John 2:3-6 says, “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” Loving God means keeping His commandments, and loving others the way that He loved us is a big part of that!

Do you love the Lord? Of course you do. Can people see that by the way that you keep His commandments? Can they see you walking like Jesus walked and living like Jesus lived? Do you love others? If you miss doing this; you miss what it takes to be a Christian. When God’s love is in your heart, you’ll find life beautiful and glorious. When God’s love is in your heart, you’ll choose to do what’s right and you’ll treat others the way that you want to be treated. When God’s love is in your heart, you act kindly to those in need. When God’s love is in your heart, you’ll stop fighting with God. You’ll simply trust and obey His commandments.

Love moves us to place our trust in the Lord Jesus, to give up our sins and live in righteousness, to confess Jesus Christ as God’s Son, and to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Whatever God in Scripture asks of us, we’ll do. We’ll listen to Him rather than human sources that may lead us astray. Love means focusing our close attention on Jesus Christ and being like Him.

Prepared by Jerry Campbell

Out of Darkness

It is better to light just one little candle than to stumble in the dark. Light is so precious! Today, we're going to explore the blessing God's light. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." God's glorious Word is such a blessing to our lives. It opens up the way for us to see the things that God wants us to know, things that will guide us safely and bless us. God wants us to be saved and to know the truth, so He sheds light on the things that matter most. He opens the way for us to live with Him eternally in heaven. God is light, and we can be thankful for all that He has done for us.

Have you ever gone down into a cave on a tour when the guide turns out all the lights? I've had that experience a few times and total darkness is frightening. I'm always grateful when the lights come back on. When you can't see anything you feel lost and vulnerable. You don't know what dangers lurk around you. The Lord struck Egypt with a plague of darkness that could be felt. According to Exodus 10:22-23, the Egyptians could not see one another and did not rise from their places for three days. This darkness plagued and punished them, and it separated them from one another. It must have been a frightening, long, and lonely three days.

Spiritual darkness has some of these same frightening features. The Lord speaks of hell—in part—as being cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8-12). Spiritual blindness is a form of darkness and leads to certain judgment. But the Lord shows us the way out of darkness into His marvelous light. I think, what a blessing!

Our reading today comes from 1 Peter 2:9-10. This is one of the most beautiful descriptions of the people of God.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for god's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of god; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We sometimes speak of being "in the dark" to mean someone simply doesn't know what's going on. We lose much when we don't know Christ or the truth that can set us free. Knowledge is not some small gift. God's teaching prepares us to walk worthy of our calling in this life and prepares us for eternity. When people don't know the Lord they fall into many harmful ways. What we know and how well we follow the Lord's teaching measures our character. The Lord wants to shape us in righteousness so we can live with Him forever. When people don't know the Lord or take Him seriously they end up in a spiritual and moral darkness that harms everybody.

God left evidence of His infinite power and wisdom in the universe. Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Some men, even when the evidence is before them, do not want to acknowledge God or learn from Him.

Romans 1:21-23 says, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling

creatures.” The ancient, pagan cultures didn’t know God and were filled with cruelty, lust, and greed. Their foolish hearts were darkened morally and spiritually. Spiritual darkness ruins lives and ruins societies. Ignorance of God threatens the peace and welfare of any nation. Psalm 33:12 says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” The more any nation pushes God out of its thinking and its morals, the more it destroys itself. The more families forget God and live for themselves, the more bitter their lives become. The Lord’s way is not simply one choice among many; it’s the only way to true and lasting joy and peace. Every other choice will ultimately lead to darkness.

The Bible describes the hopelessness of life without God. God’s Word says, “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4:17-19). Knowing God matters morally, spiritually, and practically.

Spiritual darkness comes from attitudes and choices, whether we serve God or we serve material and fleshly things. The Lord Jesus said, “The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays” (Luke 11:34-36).

The Lord Jesus understood that people often turn to sin and aren’t willing to do what is right. He said, “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

When we focus on God and following His way we stand in the good light of life; but when we focus on selfish desires, we remain in evil darkness. We hide our actions from others. We can even get to the point that we despise what is good and right and we love what is evil and wrong. In darkness, people would rather believe a lie than love the truth. Evil people despise those who want to do what is right because they don’t want their evil ways to be revealed. A godly person who seeks to do right is never afraid of being exposed. He wants his deeds to glorify God.

The apostle Paul contrasts light with darkness. He clearly shows how immorality, impurity, and greed will keep people out of heaven. The Bible says, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret” (Ephesians 5:6 -12). God has called us to live holy lives in all goodness and righteousness and truth!

How do we move out of the darkness and get into the light? We must be rescued; and we need God's help. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "He (that is, God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." I'm thankful that we have a Savior who was willing to sacrifice Himself to rescue us from sin. Christ rescues us by redeeming us with His innocent blood and grants to us the forgiveness of sins. The Lord Jesus "gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4).

The grace of Christ is not designed merely to forgive sin. The Lord wants new people who change their ways. Titus 2:11-14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." This is the light of life!

When the Lord called Paul to be an apostle, He revealed to Paul why He had chosen him to preach to the Gentiles. The Bible says that Christ sent Paul, "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18). Faith in Christ makes a difference. That faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). The power of God to save still works through the gospel (Romans 1:16). The power to change comes from hearing the gospel. God sent Paul to preach. His message about Christ can open their eyes to what's right and good. It can tell them the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. It can break Satan's power over their lives so that they can live for God. It's no wonder that Paul said, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). There's power in God's Word to touch our hearts, to free us from the hold of sin, and to motivate us to serve God and love others. God's transforming power will not leave you where it found you.

When you come to the Light you come to a marvelous light. Peter describes it in 1 Peter 2:9-10, and it tells there what it means to be a Christian. He said, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his (that is, God's) 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."

People who were formerly lost and godless become very different once they become Christians. Before they were not a people and didn't have the mercy of God; but in Christ they become God's people with God's mercy. God's people are a chosen race. They are people for God's own possession. God's people make up a royal priesthood. They are kingly priests offering up spiritual sacrifices to God. They are a holy nation, and their purpose is to proclaim the excellencies of God! God has led them out of darkness into the light, and it is a marvelous light!

The Lord Jesus said, "I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. 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 12:46-48). The Lord doesn’t want His people to remain in spiritual darkness. He gave them His Word to open their eyes to an abundant life filled with goodness and blessing.

The same Word that is a blessing will also be the standard of our judgment. God gives light in the Word to bless us. If we ignore that light we put our souls in danger. The Lord Jesus pictured the Pharisees who were blinded by their commitment to human traditions. The Lord said, “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14). People blinded by human ideas frequently fail to see the glory and the beauty of the gospel. They reject the very thing they most need.

God’s light is not weak or dim; it’s a marvelous light. First John 1:5 reminds us that “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” The Lord Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12). The marvelous light is life itself. This life is abundant, and it is eternal. The Lord said to the Father, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). Our eternal life begins with knowing the only true God and His Son Jesus Christ.

First John 2:3-6 says, “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” The marvelous light shines on those who know Him, love Him, and obey Him. Do you?

First John 1:6-7 says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” There are only two paths, one leads to life and the other leads to destruction.

Because people choose their path, they choose their destination. God, however, graciously gives us the opportunity to change our path and to change our relationship with Him. We can always leave the dark path and come to the light. There’s no greater blessing than to have fellowship with God and to be cleansed from all sin by the blood of His Son.

First Timothy 2:3-4 says, “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.” God gives us the light of the gospel to lead us to heaven and avoid the dark destruction that evil and ignorance brings. God opens the door to knowledge through the Word. When we obey the Word, God grants us life.

To respond to the gospel, believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Repent by changing your heart and your life; leave the old way of sin and follow the teaching of the Lord. Confess Jesus as the Christ before others, and be baptized into Jesus and His death. When you’re baptized, the Lord applies that cleansing blood to your soul (Romans 6:3) and He washes away your sins (Acts 22:16). Why not come to God’s light today and make a difference in your eternal destiny? You won’t regret doing what’s right.