



YOUR
SOUL

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SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

MARCH 6 – YOUR SOUL

The word “soul” is one we do not speak much about these days. But each of us has a God-given soul that God will one day require of us. How we live in this life will affect our souls in the life to come.

MARCH 13 – YOUR SIN

One in eight Americans does not believe in the concept of sin, and nearly four in ten believe sin is an outdated word. What is sin, is it really a serious matter, and how does my sin affect me?

MARCH 20 – YOUR SALVATION

For someone to be saved means that they were at one time lost. Many folks today do not know they are lost and in need of saving. Our salvation came at a great cost, and we are so blessed to have a Savior.

MARCH 27 – YOUR DESTINY

One day each of us will face our destiny in the afterlife. The decisions of what we believe and how we live today will affect where our souls spend eternity. We need to choose the narrow road that leads to life!

Your Soul

One day, you'll separate yourself from everything you possess except one thing. Today we're going to consider something that many people ignore. What is it? We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We search because our eternal destiny depends on what the Scripture says. If we're wise, we'll listen with love to God's Word and obey it. Every blessing that we enjoy comes from the hand and the heart of God. We give God our hearts and our minds as we listen to Him speak in His Word, the Bible.

Life is swift and filled with many joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, hopes and heartaches. Some things we can control, and other things we cannot. When life comes to a close, there are many earthly things that we must leave behind. We'll leave our possessions, our treasures, and our families. Paul said, "For we brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either" (1 Timothy 6:7). You will only take one thing out of this life. And, you're making a decision from day to day where you will go when this life is over. What will you take with you? Your soul!

"Soul?" That's a word you don't hear much these days. You have a soul. You've always had a soul. Your soul is you. God gave you your soul, and you're deciding each day by how you think and how you live what you're going to do with your soul. You're deciding each day what will happen to your soul by how you think about God and how you respond to Him. God is taking notice of your life. He knows everything about your heart and your life. You can't fool him. He knows what's going on in your soul. What is God seeing inside of you?

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus in the Gospel According to Luke 12:16-21. "And He told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and I'll build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'" Those are the Words of Jesus and need to be taken seriously.

What is the soul? The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, and it originally meant "to breathe." God gave us life and breath and we became a living soul. Genesis 2:7 says in the King James Version, "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." To have a soul means that I have a personal existence. Sometimes the word soul is translated "life," or "being," or "self." While animals also have a life force, only man is spoken of as having as a part of that life, a spirit. According to Stephen Renn in his Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, the underlying essence of the word *nephesh* or soul "may be described as that quality which lends to human beings their distinctive individuality as creatures made in the image of God." Your soul is what makes you what you are as a person.

The Bible translates the word "soul" in a variety of ways and with different meanings. I want to explore some of those meanings. First, the word "soul" can sometimes refer to that inner person. Here it's the equivalent to the word "heart." The Lord God asks us to love Him

with all our heart and soul. There really is no difference between those two words. Both refer to that inner person, the seat of our emotions, our intellect, and our will.

The word "soul" is found 143 times in the book of Psalms and the psalmists are usually speaking of their passionate inner being. David worshiped God saying, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:12). In Psalm 139:14, David said to God, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; and my soul knows it very well." Isaiah expressed the feelings of his soul, "At night my soul longs for You, Indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently; For when the earth experiences Your judgments, The inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9).

When Mary found out that God had chosen her to bear a holy child, the Son of God, she said, "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46). When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He told His disciples, "Oh, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Mark 14:34). So the soul can refer to our innermost thoughts and emotions.

But, the reason the soul is able to feel and to reason is because it's spiritual in nature. The Lord Jesus warned, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). That spiritual part of us, our souls, is not a material thing, but it will last beyond this life. The Hebrew writer tells us, "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12:9). You have a spirit, a soul, that's given to you by God. That's what makes you a creature made in the image of God. That spiritual part of you is what you will take into heaven or into hell. That's why your soul is so important!

Jesus is a comfort to our souls. Not only does He offer us forgiveness of sins, He also provides a way that our souls can endure. Christianity is livable! It's not impossible to live the Christian life. It's not so difficult that we can't go to heaven. The Lord Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus loves your soul and He wants to give you an abundant life, and that means giving you peace and comfort.

Second, sometimes the word "soul" refers not to some part of us but to the whole person. For instance, Acts 2:41 says, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Peter spoke of Noah and his family being saved on the ark. First Peter 3:20 speaks of "the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls (or eight persons), were saved through water."

Third, sometimes the word "soul" refers to the life force in a person, that which gives him life. While soul and spirit are sometimes speaking of the same thing, there are times when they emphasize different aspects of the spiritual nature of man. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The idea here is not so much that these terms are opposed to one another, as it is that they overlap and emphasize different aspects of the inner man. The word "soul" emphasizes more the life force within a person, while the word "spirit" emphasizes the understanding and emotions of a person.

First Thessalonians 5:23 also seems to distinguish the soul and the spirit. This verse says, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." God wants to save us completely: body, soul, and spirit. God is saving us as whole people. This phrase is like the great commandment of Jesus in Mark 12:30 that you "shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." That's all of you, every aspect of you. Just as we give our all to God, so God saves us completely: body, soul, and spirit.

Fourth, there are times that God distinguishes the body from the soul or spirit. One can lose his life physically, when his body dies, yet not lose his soul. The Lord Jesus warned in Matthew 10:28, as we've mentioned, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Death is a separation of the body from the spirit or soul. James 2:26 says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." While the body dies, the spirit remains alive. Ecclesiastes 12:7 describes what happens at death, "then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit (that is, our soul) will return to God who gave it." Your body will decay here on earth, but your spirit, or soul will return to God.

This is why Paul could say in Philippians 1:21-23, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I'm to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I don't know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart (that is to die) and to be with Christ, for that is very much better." When you're a faithful Christian like Paul, you have the promise of being with Christ when this life is over. This is one of the many reasons to become a Christian. The way to become a Christian is to believe and obey the Lord. We must never think that Christianity is somehow a trivial matter that has no personal connection. Your faith and your soul are unchangeably united. What you believe will affect your soul for eternity. So, I hope you believe in the Lord Jesus and in His gospel, and you are living for the Lord Jesus, the way you ought to.

James 1:21 says, "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." When people believe in Jesus, when they repent of their sins, and when they receive or accept the word of the gospel into their lives by their obedience, the word saves their souls. My friend, have you accepted the gospel message? Have you obeyed it?

Accepting it means believing that it's true, and not only believing but committing yourself to it, in word and in deed. You not only want to get right with God, you must stay with the Lord. Many these days are leaving the Lord and leaving His church, wandering off into false religion and no religion. When Christians stray from the truth of the Word of God, they put their souls in peril. 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."

When people give up on their faith or they start believing something that is false, or they begin to practice sin because of these things, they could lose their souls. This is why we need to study God's Word, and to hold fast to it. Your home in heaven with the Lord Jesus is dependent on you knowing the Word of God and following it. You can know all kinds of technology, history, science, and literature, but if you wish to live forever, to live with the

Lord for all time, you must also know the Scriptures and believe them and follow them.

Your soul is accountable to God. God said through the prophet, "Behold, all souls are Mine (they don't belong to you; they belong to Him); the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Your soul belongs to God, and if you sin against Him, you will die. I'll speak more about sin next week. This death is not simply a physical death, as some wrongly suppose, but a spiritual one. If you sin, you'll separate your soul from the grace of God. Death is a separation, and the one thing you should never want is to be separated from the God who created you.

God's Word clearly says that God in the Judgment, "will render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, He'll give them eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, He'll give them wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:6-11).

When this life is over, I hope you can say "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain." If your soul is right with the living God, heaven will be great gain. Friends, you only have one life and you only have one soul. Make your time on this earth count. Seek for glory, seek for honor and immortality in Christ. Do what is good and right; be obedient. Don't let sin overcome you. Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding." Oh, my friend, follow the Lord. If the God of heaven was willing to sacrifice His Son Jesus on a cross in order to save you from sin, that shows not only how much He loves you but also how much your soul is worth to Him. How much is your soul worth to you? The Lord Jesus asked, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Your soul is worth more than the whole world. You only have one soul. Get it right with God. On the Day of Judgment, nothing else will matter but whether your soul is right with the living God.

In Luke 12:16-21, Jesus told the parable: "The land of a rich man was very productive. 'And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops? And then he said, 'This is what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns, I'll build larger ones, and there I'll store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

One day, the Lord will require your soul of you. Are you right with God? To get right with God, you must believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; you must repent of your sins and turn your heart toward the Lord; you must confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God; and you must be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. This baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is when we call upon God for a good conscience, when God washes away our sins and gives us newness of life. Oh, we urge you to get right with God today!

Your Sin

Some people are saying, “Sin is an outdated word” and should be dropped from our vocabulary. Today we’re going to talk about sin, something that affects all of us.

The Bible is the most important book that you’ll ever read. It’s the only book that tells you where you came from, why you’re here, and what will happen after death. Scripture reveals God’s love for mankind and how He’s dealt with our problem of sin. God’s desire for all men is that they be saved from sin and live with Him eternally. Sin, however, keeps us from eternal life. The Bible reveals the answer to sin and how we can live eternally with God.

Some people believe using the word “sinner” is offensive and a hindrance to Christianity. Some claim that Jesus never called anyone a sinner. Several years ago, Dr. Karl Menninger saw this change in attitude in American people and he wrote the book, *Whatever Became of Sin?* More recently John MacArthur wrote the book, *The Vanishing Conscience*. Both of these men realized that many had grown callous about their sin and had decided to ignore the concept of sin altogether.

Does sin really exist? What does the Bible say about sin? What does it mean to be a sinner? What’s the big deal about sin anyway? Is sin really so offensive that a person will spend an eternity lost without God? Should we ever call anyone a sinner? In a politically correct world, some have banned the word “sin” as being offensive. But, is the word “sin” really so bad that we should never mention it? I realize some folks don’t want to hear about it, but sin is a real problem! Ignoring sin won’t make it go away and it won’t turn something that is evil into something that’s good.

Our reading today comes from the letter of James 1:13-16. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he’s carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.” Those are words from James, in the Word of God, and we should take them seriously. Let’s pray together. Father, we’re grateful that You love us and never tempt us. O Father, help us to keep in check and in control of our own desires. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The word “sin” is certainly a Biblical term. It’s used 221 times in the New Testament alone; and the word “sinner” is used an additional 46 times. The Bible also uses other terms when speaking of sin. Sin is sometimes described as an “error,” “iniquity,” “unrighteousness,” an “evil,” a “trespass,” or a “transgression.” Sin is not some small thing that one can ignore or dismiss. You’ll never find sin taken lightly in Scripture. You’ll never find Jesus saying that sin is an outdated word. In fact, every time Jesus thought about sin, he called for repentance. He recognized that sin was real.

You can hardly understand the purpose of Jesus without talking about sin. When Mary was with child, the angel told Joseph, “she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). When John the Baptist introduced Jesus, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” (John 1:29). More than seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah who was to come. He spoke about Jesus and how Jesus would bear our transgressions.

Isaiah 53:5-6 says, “But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are

healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we've turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Jesus died a cruel, ugly death upon a cross so that we might be freed from sin. His suffering brought us forgiveness, grace, and peace. To suggest that sin is an unimportant word makes a mockery of what Jesus did on the cross for you and for me. It suggests that we don't need His blood.

Sadly, some people don't realize just how tragic sin truly is. Sin has caused much of our greatest pain and has wasted countless lives. Sin, of some sort or another, is at the root of every crime and every violent act; it's brought so much guilt and shame, and so much pain. Calling sin "outdated" doesn't make it outdated. Relabeling sin only shows the attitude of the one who makes this claim. God takes note of sin whether we do or not. When men sin, they sin against God—they offend God. Sin is not merely a transgression against the law; it's a transgression against God's law and God Himself, and it breaks his heart! There is no "victimless" sin for God is always the victim.

Some people think of sin as something somebody else does. Nearly everyone can point to someone they think is a worse sinner than themselves. But everyone sins. Paul said, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Every person who reaches the age where he knows about God, and he knows about right and wrong, comes to that point where he acts in defiance of God's law and so sins. We all stand guilty before God.

Some people have categories of sin. They think "big" sins are really bad, but "little" sins are no big deal. Or they figure others commit the big sins, while they themselves only commit little ones. But all sins are bad. All sins transgress God's law and break God's heart. All sins go against His will for our lives. Paul said, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and that hasn't changed. When he talks about death, he's talking about spiritual death, that is separation from God and from His grace.

Isaiah 59:1-2 explains, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear." When people persist in sin they build this barrier between themselves and God. This barrier means that God no longer approves, that one doesn't stand in His grace and receive His blessing.

Some people still don't think they've sinned. However, John said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, then he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, why we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10). People tend to lie to themselves about many things. Some ignore warnings about the weather; others ignore warnings about their souls.

When your sins aren't forgiven, they will cost you your soul. Sin is no joke. Jesus said, "For what will a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:26-27). Some people laugh about sin, but no one will be laughing when Jesus comes again. Then they will weep with regret that they didn't change their lives and come to the Lord.

Sin not only has eternal consequences, it also creates sorrow in this life. Sin deceives and hardens people's hearts. Hebrews 3:12-13 says, "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's *still* called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the

deceitfulness of sin.” Most people sin because they think it feels good, or because it’s pleasurable; but in the end sin will harden your heart and hurt you. It’s deceptive and it’s cruel. Sin will make a person desert every member of his family just to feed a habit.

We generally think of taking drugs or getting drunk as addictive and destructive behaviors, but actually all sins become addictive and destructive. A person can become addicted to lying, to gossip, to stealing, to anger, to sexual sins, and even to violence. These behaviors not only hurt the person who does them, they also hurt other people. How many families have been destroyed or impoverished because somebody thought they could sin and get away with it. The prisons are full of people who thought they could get away with their sins, or people who knew they’d someday get caught but wouldn’t give up their sins.

There is an unalterable law in Scripture about the life we choose to live, and you can’t cheat this law or change it. You can’t wish it away or ignore it. Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” When a writer says, “Do not be deceived,” it’s usually because people fool themselves and lie to themselves about the lives that they’re living.

Oh, I hope you’re not kidding yourself, thinking that you can live an immoral lifestyle and avoid any consequences. You simply can’t. Sometimes those consequences are physical diseases if you abuse your body. Sometimes they are shortened life if you commit crimes. Sometimes sin breaks up families and destroys friendships. Sometimes sin enslaves us financially with heavy debts like gambling does. The choices that you make today may cost you far more than you ever dreamed in your health; or the spiritual drain in guilt, in money and friendships. My friend, if you continue in sin, you won’t be the exception. You will someday reap what you sow.

The prodigal son wanted his inheritance, and he wanted it so that he could waste it on his pleasures. That’s what a prodigal is, one who wastes his resources with reckless living. You remember the story. “And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into the fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one was giving him anything” (Luke 15:14-16). I tell you, when you live a selfish, sinful lifestyle, the time comes when you run out of friends. Selfish people are friends only when they see some benefit. As long as the prodigal son paid the bill, he had friends.

It was only when the prodigal son was desperate and alone that he began to see clearly about sin. Verses 17 to 19 continue: “But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!’ He said, ‘I’ll get up and I’ll go to my father, and I’ll say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; and I’m no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’” Sin dulls the senses, but reality wakes us up. Sin makes a person feel small in his own eyes. He no longer felt worthy to be called a son of his father.

While sin leads only to shame and guilt, the wonderful thing is how much God loves us even in our sin and guilt. Verses 20 to 24 reveal, “So he got up and he came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and he ran to him and he embraced him and he 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; for this my son was dead and

has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.” God rejoices when his prodigal children come home. He ran to meet his ragged, dirty, but penitent son. He embraced and kissed him. It was a time of celebration, for his son was now alive and found! God wants to find you, too. Sin will hurt you and embarrass you; but God still waits for you because He loves you. No matter what your past has been, God wants to forgive you as you turn away from the old evil life and come home to Him. God’s love is greater than our sin.

Paul said, “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’s a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. And 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). My friend, there is hope for you. If you’ll believe in the Lord, if you’ll repent of your sins, if you’ll confess His name, if you’ll be baptized (that is immersed in water) for the forgiveness of your sins, you too will become a child of God and a member of the Lord’s church. The prodigal son came home; Saul of Tarsus came home. They found forgiveness, and so can you. Let’s pray together. Father, we’re so grateful that Your love and grace is more than abundant and greater than our sin. Father, help us to come to You, to be obedient to Your Word, and to love You with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Father, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

We’ve seen that sin matters; it’s not trivial. Scripture tells us that unresolved sin costs people their souls. You remember Paul said, “The wages of sin is death.” That hasn’t changed in all the centuries. Now “death” here is a reference to separation from God which lasts for eternity. Don’t let Satan or the world fool you into believing that sin is no big deal. It’s the critical threat to your soul and will cost you everything when Jesus comes again if it’s left unforgiven. If sin weren’t such a big deal, Jesus would never have gone to such great lengths to atone for your sins by his cruel death on the cross. Sin is not trivial when you consider the cross of Christ. Jesus didn’t die for a petty, unimportant problem. He died for you because your sins are the greatest problem that you face.

When you consider the Lord’s suffering, you can readily see His love. There’s no greater love that a man can have than to lay down his life for his friends. That’s what Jesus did for you. He wanted you to be free from sin and to live with Him eternally in heaven. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Forgiveness is a gift from God; and I would hate for you never to know how much God loves you and wants to forgive you. If God takes sin and your soul that seriously, shouldn’t you take it seriously? Don’t let anything keep you from having all the blessings of the Lord? Love Him, serve Him, and obey Him.

To become a Christian, believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, repent of sin that separates you from God, confess Jesus before others, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. You’ll never regret obeying the Lord. So, do it today!

Your Salvation

Most people think that everybody is going to heaven, but the Scripture distinguishes the saved from the lost. Does it matter whether we're saved? The New Testament devotes more than a dozen chapters to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus died upon the cross so that we might be saved. We study the Scriptures because we know they tell about Jesus, and we want a relationship with the Lord Jesus and to be saved by His blood. For us, the gospel is not merely words on paper; they give us life. The apostle Paul said, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). We want everyone to be saved; we don't want anyone to believe in vain.

Jesus came to earth "to save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). "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" (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus is in the saving business, the forgiving business. He takes people where He finds them and He makes them into the kind of people that He wants them to be. He's the friend of sinners! He's like the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in the open pasture and searches for the lost sheep until he finds it! He brings it home on his shoulders rejoicing! Oh, I tell you, God rejoices over every sinner that repents (Luke 15:7). The Lord is searching for you if you're a sinner, my friend. He wants to find you. He doesn't want you to be lost!

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Romans 5:6-10. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man, someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." God's Word tells us about the great demonstration of the love of Jesus.

What does it mean to be lost spiritually? We know what it means to lose our keys or our wallet. We know what it means to lose our health, our savings, or our house. We have amber alerts for a lost child and silver alerts for a lost senior citizen. When a child is missing or a senior is missing, we'll turn over every rock to find them. All these things are tragic, but they're trivial compared to the loss of our soul. Being lost spiritually means that we're without God and without hope in this world. Being lost spiritually means that we can't enjoy the blessings or the promises of God in this life or in the one to come. God doesn't want anyone to be lost. First Timothy 2:3-4 says, "This is good, and it's pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The fact is that many are lost and don't know it. Our nation has become so morally and religiously confused that many have come to believe that everyone is okay with the Lord. The Lord Jesus, however, clearly taught that not everyone is saved. He 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). Wouldn't it be sad not to be among that few who

find life? Scripture reminds us that there is salvation in no one else, "for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Even many religious people think that they are right with God, but not everyone who is religious is saved. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." When people fail to follow the will of the Lord, even if they're religious, the Lord will not allow them into heaven. But when people do love the Lord, when they are willing to listen to His Words and obey Him, God opens His heart and opens the way for them to enter into Heaven. When you get away from the Words of Jesus, you get away from Jesus.

The prodigal son had lived wickedly until he ran out of money. When he became destitute, he took a long look at his choices and life. The Scriptures say, "he came to his senses." He realized that he needed saving. What about you? Do you need saving? Are you in sin and in need of forgiveness. The prodigal son decided to go home to his father and confess that he had sinned against heaven and in his father's sight. In his mind, he was no longer worthy to be his father's son. Sin makes us small in our own eyes. Sin ruins our lives. Our sins must be atoned for. Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins. We must be willing to come to Him for forgiveness.

The prodigal son was afraid of what might happen, and many today have a fear that the Lord or the church won't accept them. But, when people come home humbly and penitently, willing to do the will of the Father, God will accept them. When David came to God for forgiveness, he said, "For You (speaking of God) do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17). Just as the prodigal son's father, God will open His arms to us, run to meet us, embrace us, and kiss us. The Father knew his son had been wicked, but the father still loved him. God still loves us!

"But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate" (Luke 15:22-24). God celebrates when people recognize their sins and come home in repentance. Do you need to come back to God?

God wants to forgive you, to save you from sin because He loves you. Your salvation is so very important. Preaching the gospel means talking about sin and salvation. That is what gospel preaching is all about. What happens when you're saved? Let's see:

First, your salvation means that God has washed you clean from sin. Sin leaves a stain and it causes us to feel the sting of our guilt. When we become Christians, the stain and the guilt are gone. First Corinthians 6:9-11 says, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed (God cleaned you up), you were sanctified (God made you holy), but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (God made you innocent)." When we're washed clean, we're also made holy and righteous. God no longer sees what we were but sees what we have become, and what He caused us to become. We're new creatures.

When we're baptized, we're calling out to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21). Ananias told 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). That’s how we call upon God for salvation. First Peter 3:21 explains, “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” In baptism, we’re asking God to cleanse our souls and our consciences so that we can be right with Him and right with ourselves.

Second, your salvation means you are forgiven and reconciled to God. Reconciliation means I’m in a right relationship with God; God and I are friends again. To be guilty of sin and know you’re not forgiven is scary. To think I will face eternity without God’s favor, without His friendship, and having no hope; my friend, that is frightening. Hebrews 10:31 reminds us, “It’s a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” I wouldn’t want to face God outside of Christ, lost in sin, never having believed or never having obeyed the gospel. I wouldn’t want to face God having forsaken the church. I wouldn’t want to face God living in sin and being unwilling to repent.

I’m thankful for the words of 2 Peter 3:9, “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 doesn’t want to condemn anybody. He wants people to believe, to love Him, and to change their ways. He wants us to leave our sins and to become obedient. I’m thankful God is patient with us. I don’t want to presume on the grace or the patience of God. I know I must change my ways if I want to see the grace of God work in my life.

My favorite saying is this: “I’m not all I ought to be; I’m not all I want to be; I’m not all I’m going to be; but thank God by His mercy and grace, I’m not what I used to be.” God’s grace and forgiveness transforms us. When we’re obedient to the gospel, we become a child of God. We become new people, transformed into a child of God. Second Corinthians 5:17-19 says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us (made friends with us) to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” Being forgiven means that God no longer holds my sins against me, and that allows me to become friends with God once again.

Third, your salvation means that you are sanctified. What does that mean? It means God makes you holy and regards you as holy. Peter describes obedient Christians, “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’re the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

If God has forgiven you, and cleansed you by the blood of Jesus, and He’s made you holy, then you should live that way. God’s Word says, “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.’ Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he’ll be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:19-22).

Fourth, when the Lord saves you at the time that you're baptized, He adds you to His kingdom, His family, the church! When you're baptized into Christ, you're also baptized into His church. You'll remember Peter said, "'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (that is, so you'll receive forgiveness); and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.'" And with many other words he solemnly testified and he kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!' So then, those who had received that word (His Word) were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:38-41).

These penitent believers were happy to do what God says. They didn't argue with God. They committed themselves, and God recognized that. So, He added them to the other believers, to the church. Acts 2:47 says, "And the Lord was adding to their number (that is, the church) day by day those who were being saved." My friend, to be saved means to be added to their number, and to be a part of the church, the family of God.

Why does this matter? It matters because we're talking about your soul and your future. To be saved means every blessing in Christ is yours. To be lost means you have no relationship with God and no hope. Don't gamble with your soul. Buy the truth and do not sell it. Get right with God and don't let anything, anything come between you and God ever again. Don't argue with God. Life is too uncertain to put off putting your trust in the Lord and obeying the gospel in repentance and baptism. If the Lord Jesus came in the clouds this day, would you greet Him with love or would you be afraid? Why would you remain afraid? Get right with God!

How are we saved? God saves us by His grace; it's a gift. God has always wanted to save and redeem us from sin. Ezekiel 18:23 says the Lord takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" but He wants us to "turn from" our sinful ways and live! God is in the saving business. People lose their souls when they rebel against God, or refuse to believe in God, or will not obey God. God grieves when His people sin. He made and loves you and He doesn't want anybody to be lost.

Some people want the grace of God, but have little interest in what He teaches or commands. They want a Savior, but not a Lord. However, you can't separate Him from His teaching. Wanting Him means listening to what He has to say. First Corinthians 1:21 says, "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." God saves through a message. First Peter 1:22-23 says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." God saves us through the gospel (Romans 1:16).

If you believe and are willing to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God; if you're willing to repent of your sins; and if you're willing to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you too can be saved and the Lord will add you to His church. Peter told the people to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). Ananias told Saul of Tarsus to rise and be baptized and wash away your sins in Acts 22:16. That's how a person responds to the grace of God. Won't you repent and be baptized today?

Your Destiny

You have a soul that will last beyond this life. What is your destiny? The Bible says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). God doesn't answer every question that we can ask, but God does give us everything that we need to know, everything that pertains to life and godliness. If you wish to live with God eternally, you can do nothing more valuable than to study God's Word.

Hebrews 9:27 says, “it's appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment.” From our earliest days we've heard about the Day of Judgment. We've heard about heaven and hell. We know something exists beyond this life, but we don't know everything we'd like to know. Movies and television stimulate our imagination, but they only provide someone's guess about what lies beyond. We want to know what God says will happen when we die. That's why we go to God's inspired Word for answers.

Today, we're going to talk about a very sensitive subject, so I want to speak to you personally. I hope that this time will be like two friends having a heart-to-heart conversation. Life is short, and death is certain. Even if you're young and healthy, you can't escape reality. Your death will either open the door to the most wonderful experience that you've ever enjoyed or the worst experience that anyone could have. God wants to bless you, and the Bible gives us the information we need to find that blessing. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You have given us our life, and we know that there is a life to come. Father, help us to do the right thing. And may Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Our reading today comes from the letter of James, chapter 4, verses 13 to 17. “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You're *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” That's the Word of God speaking to us, letting us know that we never need to be presumptuous.

The word “death” occurs 150 times in the Old Testament and 120 times in the New Testament. Death signifies separation. Physical death separates the body from the spirit. Spiritual death separates people from God and His blessing. The good news is that while death is a separation, it is not the end of our existence.

The Bible describes death in James 2:26, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” Notice that it says the body is dead without the spirit. But, we're more than a fleshly body. As we've talked about, we are body and spirit. The body dies but the spirit still exists. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” When we die, our spirits return to God who made us. God is the Father of spirits according to Hebrews 12:9. Your spirit is not physical or material, and it's not destroyed by a physical death.

On the cross, Jesus told the thief, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The Lord clearly says that we'll survive and be conscious beyond this life. The Lord expected to see the thief in Paradise. There's an inner spirit that survives death and is conscious. Life here and now is not all there is; there's more.

Yes, it's appointed for men to die once, and then comes judgment. Death holds a lot of mysteries for us. The unknown, especially judgment, is frightening. We worry whether our after life will be one of peace or not. The Lord Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14). This surprises many who think nearly everyone will be saved and only a few of the worst will be lost, but that's not what Jesus says.

We must consider the afterlife. How we live will determine where we will spend eternity. What are we saved by? The shed blood of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. What are we saved from? The penalty of sin. Jesus warned, "If your right eye causes you to sin, why tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30).

The Lord Jesus gives us a glimpse of what happens after death in Luke 16:19-31. Let's listen to what He says. "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

"And he cried out and he said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

"But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.'

"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Many think this story is a parable or some kind of fanciful story and for that reason shouldn't be taken seriously. But Jesus never speaks about trivial matters. When Jesus uses a figure of speech like a parable, He does so to emphasize a point not to trivialize it.

However, one takes this story, people will face two very different destinies after they die. One destiny is filled with comfort and the other with agony. Lazarus and the rich man both knew where they were. Both could reason and have intelligent conversations. Both could remember the lives that they lived back on earth.

Sometimes the Bible speaks of death as "sleep." This is likely because the physical body after death appears to be sleeping. This, however, doesn't mean that our spirits are unconscious or in a stupor. You'll remember Moses and Elijah, though they had been dead for many

centuries, had a conversation with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as Matthew records it in chapter 17:1-5. Death happens to the body, but death doesn't make our spirits unconscious.

The lives that we live now, whether we're right with the Lord will determine our future destiny. The story of Lazarus and the rich man opens our eyes to what happens when our spirits leave this world. After we die, the angels will come for us to take us to the place God has assigned for us. After death comes judgment. This may be a place of comfort or a place of torment.

Scripture uses the word "Hades" to describe the unseen. "Hades" literally means "unseen." Hades shouldn't be confused with Hell. Hades is a temporary place where the spirits reside until the Judgment Day; but hell is eternal. No one will enter the promised heaven or the eternal hell until after the resurrection. Hades is the place where only spirits of dead people reside. At the resurrection, our spirits will return to earth and will be joined to new, imperishable bodies. Death is the separation of the body and spirit. Resurrection takes place when our spirits are reunited with a changed, imperishable body.

While Hades usually refers to that place of torment, the word can also be applied the entire realm, which is divided into both a place of torment and a place of comfort. In Acts 2:27 the apostle Peter quotes David's prophecy in Psalm 16:10 about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He noted that Jesus' soul was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh suffer decay. When Jesus died, his soul went to Paradise according to His statement to the thief on the cross. He said "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

The word Paradise is used three times in Scripture and each time refers to that heavenly realm where the righteous go after death. Second Corinthians 12:2-4 says Paradise is equated to the third heaven, that is the place where God dwells. Jesus went to that unseen place of righteous spirits where God dwells. And so, the Paradise of God is where the tree of life is (Revelation 2:7). If Jesus' soul was not abandoned to Hades but He went to Paradise, then Hades must contain a place where righteous souls are comforted.

The apostle Paul also helps us to understand that we will have an existence in spirit form after we die and until the resurrection. He said: "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body that we're 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. Therefore we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:6-9). When the righteous die, they go to be with the Lord.

Again, Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I don't know which to choose. But I'm hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart (that is, to die) and to be with Christ, for that is very much better" (Philippians 1:21-23). Paul said he would go and be "with Christ" when he died. This is the Christian hope, to live with our Lord Jesus forever and ever.

Through the years at funerals, I loved the reassurance of Romans 14:7-9. The Bible says, "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." We may die physically, but not even death can separate us from the love of our Lord

Jesus. When Christians die, they go to be with Him that very day. But when evil people die, the angels take them to a place of torment.

This is why we must be prepared spiritually. No one else can do that for you. The Bible says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10). The saved in Christ go to judgment washed clean by the blood of Jesus; and their names are recorded in the book of life. They can face the afterlife with confidence that they have an eternal home with the Lord. The unbeliever and the impenitent person have no such hope. They must face God on their own without their sins being washed away. They will be lost eternally.

God doesn't want anyone to be lost—He wants everyone to be saved. He wouldn't have sent Jesus to die painfully on a cross if He were looking to condemn everybody. But God won't make people repent and He won't turn their lives around, and He won't make people believe in Him or love Him. That is your decision. You are a free moral agent, and you are deciding whether you will serve Him or you won't serve Him.

God has prepared the way for your salvation in the gift of His beloved Son, Jesus. By His grace you are saved. But grace as a gift must be received by faith and obedience. We don't earn our salvation, but God has determined that those who receive His gracious salvation are people who meet his conditions.

The Bible says, "Although He (that is, Jesus) was a Son (that is, a son of God), He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (Hebrews 5:8-9). Your gift of salvation is ready for you if you believe, repent, and are baptized. My friend, have you prepared? Death is something that all of us will face one day, and it may come sooner than we think. Are you prepared?

I bought life insurance to protect my wife and to provide for my family after I'm gone. I've known people to buy a plot, choose the casket, and arrange the funeral service long before the time. How foolish I think it is to be so well prepared for the dying and the death here, but fail to prepare oneself spiritually for the hereafter. I don't want to be like the five foolish virgins, who failed to buy the oil needed for their lamps. They ran to the dealers to buy oil; and while they were gone, the bridegroom came; and the door was shut and they were not allowed in (Matthew 25:1-14). We must prepare now before the time is up.

Don't waste your opportunity to get right with God; once life is over, there isn't any second chance. Why not start in a new and different direction for your soul's sake and for those you love? Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Friend, you can lose your car, your house, your health, or your life and still go to heaven. But if you lose your soul, you've lost everything. Make the most important commitment that you'll ever make, that of giving yourself to the Lord by obeying the gospel. Believe in the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Repent of every sin. Confess the name of Jesus, and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized, the Bible says in Acts 22:16 that God will wash your sins away. The Lord will add you to His church, and you'll be a child of God with the promise of eternal life. Would you do that?