

# *Program Transcripts*

For June 2020



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

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**June 2020**

*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **JUNE 7 – WHO IS YOUR LORD?**

Jesus once asked His disciples, “Who do *you* say I am?” Faith in Christ is an individual matter. Each must decide for himself whether he will follow the Lord and His teaching. Jesus is Lord, and we must set Him apart as Lord in our lives.

## **JUNE 14 – A SERVANT’S HEART**

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

## **JUNE 21 – BECAUSE OF JESUS**

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

## **JUNE 28 – IS GOD ACTIVE TODAY?**

Some think God is absent in our world today; others say God is dead. The Bible teaches God is indeed alive and active in the world today and is working for our good. We can be thankful to have a God who cares for us.

## Who Is Your Lord?

The most important question you'll ever answer is this, "Who is your Lord?" Today, we're going to explore what it means to call Jesus, "Lord." The New Testament is the true measure of Christianity. The true disciples of Jesus Christ abide in His Words. They seek to please the Lord, not the world. They take their faith seriously.

Matthew 16:13-17 says: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'"

What you decide about Jesus is crucial to your spiritual well-being. Ultimately, you have to decide for yourself what you believe. You cannot ignore the Lord Jesus because one day you will come face to face with Him. Each one will face judgment. Can you confess Jesus and say what Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"? To say Jesus is the Christ is to recognize Him as the promised Messiah, the One who fulfilled prophecy and set up His kingdom in the first century that would last forever. To say Jesus is the Son of God is to recognize His Divine nature. Do you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Are you willing to make Him Lord of your life?

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

The apostle Peter told the household of Cornelius, "*You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach the gospel to the people, and to solemnly testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 10:38-43).

God anointed Jesus as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He will judge us all on the last day. The Lord Jesus said, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). We will not be judged by what people think, by what councils vote, or by opinion polls. We will be judged by the Words Jesus spoke, Words that are found in the New Testament.

Since he is our King and our Judge, we must recognize our accountability before Him. The

apostle Paul told the Athenians in Acts 17 verses 30 to 31, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” You can be sure that one day you will stand before the Lord Jesus in judgment. God will hold you and me accountable for our lives.

We’re accountable for our attitude toward other people. The Lord Jesus said, “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you’ Jesus is talking’ ‘that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ [that is, Raca, “empty-headed”] shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ [that is, you moron] shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:21-22). God knows all that happens in our hearts.

We’re accountable even for our thoughts. The Lord Jesus said “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:27-29). When people think immoral thoughts, they sin against their spouses and they sin against God.

We’re also accountable for our words. The Lord Jesus said, “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:34-37).

We are accountable for our actions. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” God’s Word further says that “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality” (Romans 2:6-11).

More than that, we’re accountable to Jesus whether we know it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, or whether we agree with it or not. Jesus, our Creator, who died to save us from sin, is also our Lord. Not only do we confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, we also confess Him as our Lord. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit proclaimed through Peter and the apostles to all the Jews that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36). God has made Jesus to be your Lord and mine.

The word “Lord” indicates two crucial concepts. First, to call Jesus “Lord” means He is divine, that is, He is deity; He is God. The word “Lord” is often spelled with all capital letters in the Old Testament. “Lord” is the English word that is used to translate the Hebrew word “Yahweh.” This is the word the Lord God used to identify Himself to Moses at the burning bush.

In Exodus chapter three, God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and

into the Promised Land. Moses was reluctant and he offered several excuses to God as to why he shouldn't lead them. At one point Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13-14). The word in Hebrew "I am who I am" translates into Greek as "kurios" and into English as "LORD."

When the Holy Spirit, through Peter, proclaimed Jesus as Lord on Pentecost, he was speaking clearly of the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:6, which we read earlier, says Jesus also existed in the form of God. Let's hear Philippians 2:5-11 again. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus has always existed in the form of God, but He emptied himself and took the form of a servant, being fashioned as a man. In humility, He obeyed His father by dying on a cruel cross. Because Jesus suffered and died for us, God exalted Him, gave Him a name above all names, and demands that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord! This type of worship is not for men, but for deity, for God.

Second, to call Jesus "Lord" means you have decided that you will obey Him. He is your master, and you are his servant. The word "Lord" in the Bible often refers to the one who owns slaves. When we became Christians, we became the slaves of Jesus Christ. A master owns his slaves and has the right to make decisions governing the lives of his slaves, decisions the slaves cannot stop or change. You may not always understand His decisions, but you can always trust that He will act for your best interests.

We are all servants to someone or something. Romans 6:16 says, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, *that* you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" Some folks serve sin. They think sin will bring them happiness; and instead, it brings them a lot of misery; it fills their lives with all kinds of ruin and problems; and it makes them a slave. Sin fills them with guilt and it ruins their hearts and their lives. Hebrews 3:12-13 warns Christians, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

What we choose in this life will affect our eternal destiny. Romans 8:12-13 says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Following sin and the flesh will lead only to many problems in this life and separation from God in the life to come. 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."

That is why repentance is so vital, so important! If we put to death the deeds of the body, we can live spiritually with God; but if we continue in sin, we can lose our souls. Isn't it better to be the servant of One who loves and cares for us? Some enslave themselves to their lusts and pleasures, which only last for a time and later destroy them. Some become the servants of the devil, who uses them with cruel, false promises. The devil is never your friend; no matter what he may offer you. If you choose to follow him, he will lead you where you never want to go. When you take Jesus as Lord, you give yourself to the only One who will always love and take care of you. Jesus is the only one who can save you.

The question is not whether the Lord Jesus will be a good and kind master; oh, He will! The question is whether you will be a good and obedient servant. Obedience is not always natural to us; we have to learn it. The Bible says of Jesus, "Although He was a Son, 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). If we are to please our Lord, we must learn to be obedient to His will. Obedience is how we show Him our faith and our love. Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, but you must decide whether you will bow before Him now in this life or whether you will bow before Him when He comes again. But be sure of this, one day every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God our Father.

Someone has well said, "If Jesus isn't Lord in every aspect of our lives, He isn't our Lord at all. If Jesus isn't Lord every day, He isn't Lord any day." Jesus doesn't want half-hearted followers, fair-weather friends, or convenient Christians. He expects us to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses daily, and to follow Him. He wants us to present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. God wants us to live by faith in the One who loves us and gave Himself for us. God wants you to love Him with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.

Sadly, many have become Christians in name only. They say they believe but you couldn't tell it from the words they use or the lives they lead. 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." Are you walking like Christ or like someone who simply claims to know Him?

We must hear His Words, revealed in the New Testament. We must believe Jesus Christ is the Lord, the Son of the living God. We trust what the Lord says, because we trust Him. In trust and love, we turn from rebellion and sin and turn to the Lord. So, whatever he asks, we're ready to do because we love Him—that's repentance. Then upon the confession of our faith, we're baptized. That's when He will wash away every sin. That's when He'll add us to His family, the church. That's when He will save us and we'll become a child of God. Oh, won't you obey the Lord today?

## A Servant's Heart

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Paul said, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, you've become slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). Those folks left their old ways of sin and obeyed the Lord from the heart, and God set them free from sin. God can also set you free from sin, if you too will obey from the heart the standard of teaching.

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

## Because of Jesus

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

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

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

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Is God Active Today?

Some think God is absent in our world today; and others say that God is dead. Is God alive and active in the world today and working for our good? We want to know all we can about God, the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ; and the way to know God is through a study of His Word, the Bible. So we go again and again to the Scriptures.

How we view God matters greatly in how we view life and how we understand our purpose and role in this world. An atheist doesn't believe God exists at all. An agnostic says he doesn't know whether God exists, because he thinks God is unknowable. Some believe God got the world going and then just abandoned it. Others have the belief in God that He was relevant in ancient times, but now God is dead. They say we no longer need God.

Several years ago in graduate school, I spent a couple of semesters studying skeptics and atheists. One thing I found was that skepticism and atheism grew more out of an attitude than it did out of the evidence. Atheists and skeptics tended to focus on the disorder and the ugly in life. They seemed to ignore the intelligent order, the beauty, the grandeur, and the wisdom that's so evident in our universe. They were intelligent, but they missed the intelligent design. I'm amazed at how easily people can slip into a very narrow view of life and of God. Some folks choose to close their eyes and their minds to the beauty of God and see only the evil. God is good and actively blesses us every day. Thankfully, we can know Him and what He has done for us to bless us and to give us eternal life.

Our scripture reading today comes from the book of Proverbs 3:5-8. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones." That's a great encouragement to trust in the Lord. Let's pray together. O, Father, may we always trust in You and not lean on our own understanding. May we always acknowledge Your existence and Your presence in our lives. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Paul said in Ephesians 1:18-19, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." God wants our hearts to be open to His power. God's power towards us who believe is greater than we think!

Have you ever had an "aha!" experience—awakening to some great truth that had eluded you up until that time? That's what Paul wanted for the Ephesians. He wanted them to understand what God causes to happen—God is at work! God has great power—and His power works in the lives of His people.

You might ask how God is at work. He is working in a variety of ways. First, God works in the universe. As a prophet of God, King David said, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). One can hardly look at the beauty, the order, and the wisdom of our universe and not see how wise and powerful God is. The God who makes the sun shine and flowers bloom, the God who regulates times and seasons has such great power and wisdom that it is truly beyond our understanding. Paul proclaimed: "And in the generations gone by He permitted all the

nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:16-17). All that we have, all of our blessings come from God!

Jesus is not only our Creator, He is also the one who keeps this world together. The Bible says, "And He (speaking about Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17). God's power and wisdom cause our seasons, cause the earth to rotate every 24 hours making night and day, cause the moon to revolve around the earth every 28 days and controlling the tides of the ocean, and cause the earth to go around the sun every 365 and one fourth days determining our year and our seasons. This couldn't just happen on its own; God has been in control.

The Lord Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). We're blessed to have food to eat each day, food that God provides. Have you ever thought about the power of one seed planted in the ground? One kernel of corn planted in the ground, watered, and fertilized can produce an ear of corn with sixteen rows and 800 kernels. Many cornstalks will have more than one ear! God created that kernel of corn with the information and the ability to reproduce itself in that marvelous way.

God is indeed powerful and wise! The Lord Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he doesn't know how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:27-29). God has been taking care of us in marvelous ways for a very long time.

Second, God is at work in our salvation. God sent His only Son to die on the cross; God through the Holy Spirit inspired men to write the Bible including the gospel, which has the power to save; and Christ built His church, who are the saved. From the beginning, God has been working toward our salvation. The apostle Paul by inspiration said, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:4-9).

The salvation that we enjoy through Christ was expensive. It's the gift of God, and for that we are thankful. Great gifts are never cheap, and our redemption came at a price greater than silver or gold. God sacrificed his Son Jesus, and Jesus sacrificed His body on the cross. We must not take our salvation for granted or treat it lightly as if it were trivial. People who mock the Lord, ignore the cross, and criticize the church are usually people who are unthankful for what God has done to save them. They don't realize what He sacrificed to give them eternal life. The Bible is the message of that life. Without the message of the Bible, we would all be in great peril—without hope and without God in this present world.



The Bible teaches us how to come to Christ, and how the blood of Christ cleanses us, and how we can have new life with Christ. The Bible says, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" (Colossians 2:12-13). It is God who is "at work" in baptism.

In baptism, God unites us with Christ, and washes away our sins, takes away that old man of sin, buries us with Christ, and raises us up from spiritual death to life. In baptism, God adds us to the church and makes us His children. God is very busy working on us in baptism. For this reason, I cannot quite understand why anyone would say baptism is unnecessary for our salvation. Read what the scripture says. Baptism is when God works on us.

God doesn't forget us once we are saved as Christians, once we've been baptized. Every Christian still has weaknesses and still sins. Christians wish they could keep from sinning; they hate it when they sin and they want to stop it afterward. God knows that we're weak but He has provided for our weaknesses. The Bible says, "Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). That's what Jesus is doing right now for us. He is interceding with the Father on our behalf, asking the Father to forgive us and to continue blessing us, even when we have sinned. I am so thankful for the Lord who loves me enough to pray for me.

Third, God is at work answering prayer. The Bible says, "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). God wants to hear your prayers. He invites you to pray to Him. The Bible says, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow" (James 1:17). God loves us enough to hear our prayers and to help us when we need Him. The apostle Paul reminds us, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Fourth, God is busy shaping our lives. He works in us. The Bible says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). God prepares His people to do His work, so we may live for an eternity in heaven with Him. What God is doing in us now prepares us for the life to come. The Bible says, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). God is shaping our hearts, our attitudes, our will, and our lives to conform to His will, so that we might live with Him always.

God also saved us so that we might be His servants, doing good works and impacting the world for love and righteousness. The Bible says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). So much good is being done in the world; because of the love of God and the teaching of the Bible, Christians feed the hungry, take care of widows and orphans, help unwed mothers, provide help to the lonely and homeless, and point sinners to righteousness. Oh, yes! God is at work through the church.

I saw a book the other day written by a skeptic, called, The God Problem. His subtitle suggested that God never addresses the problem of evil in the Bible. I wondered which Bible he was reading, because it's not the Bible that I've spent my life studying. God knows about our suffering, and the cross of Christ demonstrates God's willingness to suffer for us. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." God doesn't stop every event of suffering, but He uses even suffering to work for our good. We don't always understand what God is doing or why; but we know that God loves us and will use every circumstance in our lives, good or bad, pleasing or painful, to work for good in some way. We can trust God!

David, who was inspired of God, said, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities; Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit; Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle" (Psalm 103:1-5).

God has been working in our lives a very long time. He isn't hidden or dead; and the Bible reminds us of all the good that God is doing for us and in us. The apostle Paul said, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). God's Word is far from being harmful. It is the source of love and life and good and righteousness. We need the Bible every single day to help us grow spiritually and in character, and to live like God intended. Pray with me. O, Father, we're thankful that You have been so active in our lives through the world You created, through Your answer to prayer, through the things written in Your Word, and through the providence we enjoy. Father, bless us and help us to love You more each day, to be good servant, and to do Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I join Paul in His prayer: "and I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-19). God can work in your life, IF you let Him. He won't twist your arm; He won't force you to do anything. But if you out of love and obedience, put your life into His hands, God can do amazing things. It's not the power of God that's lacking. It's not the willingness of God to work in our lives that's lacking. What is lacking is our willingness to let God into our lives and into our hearts.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." You must trust Him and let Him work in you. God desires that we believe in Jesus Christ enough to obey Him and trust His promises. Do you?

That starts by trusting Him enough to repent of your sins and confess the name of Christ before others. Christ doesn't want a secret disciple. He wants you to confess with your mouth that He is your Lord and that you believe He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. After you've repented and made that confession, God wants you to be baptized into Christ where God cleanses you with the blood of Jesus and makes you into one of His own children. Won't you do that today? Won't you obey the gospel and put the Lord Jesus Christ first? Will you let God work in your life?