

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Turn to Psalm 8. Our theme is the greatness of God. Our series, “Who God Is,” to me is so crucial. I do not know how many times I say it, but I know it is often. The root of our problem is a misunderstanding or a misapplication of who God is and what He can do. The focus for a long time has been on man. It is everywhere. What we are going to say in this series is in direct conflict with what our society believes. Our society believes the most important question to answer is: Who are we? Who is man? They are dedicated to it. There are seminars and books on it everywhere. Not just a few hundred, but thousands upon thousands of titles in our bookstores are dedicated to one thing—helping man find out who he is. God tells us we will never find out. God tells us we are going to get confused and messed up the more we search into the depths of who we are.

Why do we keep doing it? Why is it our obsession? Why is it our priority to find out something God says we cannot discover? The need in our generation is not to find out who we are. The question is not: Who am I? The question is: Who is God? Once we find out who God is, then we can understand who we are. And there is a sense in which all of us are going to pale in significance in some way. Initially that might seem hurtful because today people want to know who they are, and find self-esteem and worth. And that is important only from God’s point of view.

What we are going to teach in this series is that when you focus on God and who He is, all of a sudden self-esteem has a new foundation, a new root system. It is entirely different. It changes your life, your perspective.

I do not know what your relationship with God is like. But no matter how long you have been a Christian, you and I both know that the most fundamental thing to Christianity is a living and vital relationship with the God we say we believe. It is a personal relationship. It is not a group of facts and dogmas that we preach from the pulpit. Even though we must teach truth, we also need to apply that truth. We need to have a living, vital, personal relationship with the God who made us. There is nothing as important as that.

Psalm 8. Much of our focus throughout this series will be on the Psalms. Let us begin with Psalm 8:1.

O LORD, our Lord, How excellent [majestic, awesome] is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! [Talk about greatness!] When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? O LORD, our Lord, How excellent [or great or majestic or awesome] is Your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:3, 4, 9 NKJV)

Turn to Psalm 83:18 please. The Bible is replete with statements about God’s greatness.

That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth. (Psalm 83:18 NKJV)

There is no one higher than God. You talk about the greatness of God. He is described as the Most High over all the earth.

Look at Psalm 96 please. The opening verses exhort us to praise Him in our worship and proclamation.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.

Why?

For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. (Psalm 96:1-6 NKJV)

Psalm 145, the opening three verses. You could almost make this the key text of the day. They are good verses to memorize.

I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day [no exceptions] I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:1-3 NKJV)

The New International Version says, “His greatness no one can fathom.”

One last verse. Psalm 150:2. In the last culminating psalm of this beautiful worship and praise book of the nation of Israel and of all of God’s people, there is a symphony of praise to the Lord.

Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! [or the expanse of His heavens!] Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! (Psalm 150:1-2 NKJV)

Great is the Lord! Let us pray.

Father, I pray in these few moments together You will help all of us to focus on the greatness of our God in a fresh and wonderful way that will cause us to stop doubting, to stop being confused about what the answer is to our problems. It is so frequent in all of our lives that we seek every possible solution except You. May You become a living, personal, vital friend and relationship to every single believer here. May those who are not believers long to know a God who is great like the Bible expresses. May we see that we need to trust Him, to worship Him, to honor Him, to consider Him in all of our ways. Thank You, Lord, for all You are going to do. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

There are three things, basically, that comprise the greatness of God. One, which is rather surprising in that our whole series is dedicated to knowing about God, is the fact that He is incomprehensible. I want to focus on that a little bit. God is incomprehensible. That is, it is impossible to know Him. And yet we are going to try. All we have at our disposal is the written revelation of God, facts that God has chosen, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to allow us to see about Himself and His greatness. But within those facts, God reveals that we will never discover all that He is. He is the incomprehensible God. He is beyond knowing.

Please turn to the book of Judges 13. After the opening five books of the Law, you have Joshua, Judges and Ruth. The book of Judges is a terrible period in Israel's history. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, but there were some notable exceptions of people who really called on the Lord and saw great and mighty things. No matter how rotten society can become, there is always that power of the living God, the greatness of God that can change any person's life, any person's situation. The parents of Samson, the judge, who was mightily used of God, were such people. What a wonderful story it is: Samson's parents, a man named Manoah and his wife, lived through many childless years. They had no child so they prayed and asked God to give them a child. And the angel of the Lord paid Manoah a visit. It was not just an ordinary angel, but a particular messenger of the Lord, with a title that usually refers to the Messiah. It is my belief that our own Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is appearing to Manoah and his wife.

It is interesting in verse 17,

Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?"
And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" (Judges 13:17-18 NKJV)

What? What does it say? "Wonderful!"

In English the word *wonderful*, means *fantastic, terrific, and really great*. That is not the meaning of the Hebrew word. The best English word I know for the meaning of the Hebrew word is *incomprehensible*. It is too difficult to understand. When Manoah wanted to know what the name of the Angel of the Lord was, he said, "It is too wonderful for you." The greatness of our God is seen in that one word *wonderful*, incomprehensible.

You remember the verses that we often see at Christmastime on plaques and posters. We use the verses a lot at that particular time.

Isaiah 9:6 says,

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called wonderful.

What? *Wonderful!*

We read in Psalm 145:3 that His greatness is unsearchable, that no one can fathom it. We are talking of the greatness of God. And what do we mean? He is incomprehensible. It refers to three things: what He knows, what He does, and who He is.

Let us start with what He knows. Why is God so great that it is impossible to know what He knows? And the answer is that not one single person who has been created by God has ever been given the capacity of God Himself. We are all limited in our knowledge, but He is not. He knows all things. From beginning to end, anything that has ever happened in your life or in mine, the Bible says that God knows it all. He knows our weaknesses better than we do. He knows what sins have been in our lives or will be. He knows what tragedies will come. He knows what sorrows we bear and what pains and hurts are ours. And because we do not understand that doctrine, we quickly move to the belief that somehow God does not care. And yet over and over again He says He cares. He knows and He cares. He will not do it like you think, but He will do what is right. And He will do it for His glory and His honor. And He asks us to trust Him, but we want to be in charge. We want to be the captain of our own fate, the master of our own destiny. We want to grab hold of it and make the decision. And God says, “You will never know what I know—ever.”

Let me give you an example. Turn to Psalm 139, a wonderful, beautiful psalm, whose opening six verses deal with the omniscience of God, that He knows everything and the fact that we cannot know it. So He is indeed incomprehensible to the human mind. He knows what no one else knows.

You know after this Job tried to find out why he was suffering so much. Have you ever tried to find that out? I think if we had a testimony time right now and asked people to share what they are going through, we could spend hours here just hearing incredible stories. It would almost be like one-upmanship. It is like the guy who said, “I complained that I had no shoes until I saw a man who had no feet.” Each one of us could go on and on, telling how tragedy struck. And it would get worse and worse and worse. Every one of us has an incredible set of problems in our lives, from past, present, and I am sure in the future. And we could continue to pour out those problems and those difficulties and those hurts.

Job went through a lot. Everyone who reads the Job passage while going through suffering, gets a measure of comfort. Because they can see in their life the same things that Job went through. Job tried to understand, *Why, Lord, is all this happening to me?* God never gave him any answers. God made him suffer through the wisdom of friends who really tried to give him correct Bible doctrine. They pointed out that maybe one of the reasons was his sin. They pointed out that maybe God was just showing him how fragile human nature is. Well, actually it was the worm syndrome they gave him.

God gave Job a lot of friends who did not give him correct information. And you might ask, “Since God knows all things, why did He do that?” Why does God let us be exposed to a hassle of things that never bring us the truth? Why does God even allow that? The whole book of Job has that message, in addition to the message of encouragement in suffering. Perhaps it is the fundamental message. Job finally, after hearing all of his friends, said, “Miserable comforters are you all.” He was getting no peace for his torn apart heart. He was not getting any satisfaction as to why he was suffering. He lost his family, his possessions and his personal health deteriorated. He was in sackcloth and ashes and nobody was helping him. But when he finally ran out of conversation, God talked to Job. I do not know how God said it, but He sure got his attention. And He brought two gigantic animals, which I believe were dinosaurs, to his attention. He said, “Nobody can conquer these Job, I made those.” Job saw this whole vivid illustration in front of his eyes and said, “Now I know You can do anything.” And listen to these words: “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know.”

The meaning of *wonderful*, is incomprehensible. God, I do not know what You are doing. I have been a motor-mouth on this. I have uttered things constantly that I did not understand. I tried to act like I could possibly understand. Lord, I am now going to rest in the fact that I do not know why You have done this. But I know that You have a purpose in it. So I am going to be quiet. God says, “Good, now I can bless you.”

Boy, is that ever something for us to take home today and put in our hearts. May God teach us all to rest in Him when we do not understand. The greatness of our Lord, it is incomprehensible. It refers to what He knows.

And listen to these words in Psalm 139.

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139:1-6 NKJV)

The last phrase explains the meaning of *wonderful*. It is so high! Your knowledge is so vast, so great, above all things that I can never hope to understand it. I cannot attain it. Lord, You know everything. And I do not know what You know. And I do not know why You are doing what You are doing. You are incomprehensible. It refers to what He knows.

Isaiah 28:29 says, “He is wonderful in counsel and knowledge.” It means it is incomprehensible to us. We have to trust Him that His advice, His counsel, is what we all need.

Not only what He knows, but what He does is wonderful. Turn to Isaiah 25:1. I love this verse.

O LORD, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things. (NKJV)

Incomprehensible things He has done. You see, the fact that God is great and incomprehensible in that greatness not only refers to what He knows but what He actually does.

Let me ask you if you understand why God does what He does? Listen, the only time we ever understand it is when it turns out that it is good in our category. Amen? Do you follow me? If what God does is in our list of really super special good things this week, then we say, “Oh what a wonderful God He is. Let me tell you what He did.” But nobody goes on to describe it like this: “You know, I had a bum week. I am telling you, I mean, I do not even know why it happened.” Those are not the testimonies we thrill in. But do you know that God delights in that human frustration? God delights to hear people say, “You know, I do not know what God is doing. Let me tell you what happened to me. I do not know why it happened.” But from God’s perspective praise, glory and honor have just reached heaven’s throne, because now man is in the place where he can enjoy and understand the eternal God and what He wants to do in his life.

It is when we think we have a hold on everything and we understand what He is doing, that we are far from the truth. We just do not know it.

You know, I am in the business of explaining things in the Bible to people. And it is amazing how many people come up and they think that I have the answer. Now I try to take them to the Word as fast as I can. But even when I quote some of the passages to people, they get irritated when I say, “Well, there are three or four good views by different people. And here is the correct one.” They get irritated. But I think we need a little intellectual honesty along the way. Even these wonderful things that seem so simple that a child can see them and understand them, we know that there is a depth to the riches and knowledge of God that sometimes embarrasses us later.

Do you know how God normally embarrasses speakers like me? It is often through a tape ministry. People come up all the time and show me a tape I did ten years ago. They say, “You now disagree with what you said on that tape. What are you going to do about it?” The only thing I can say is, “I am growing, okay.” I think the most important thing you can do in life to demonstrate that you really understand what I am saying is to disagree with yourself at some point. At some point to argue against yourself and admit that you, in fact, were totally dead wrong and now, your mind has been changed. Some of us are bound and determined never to change. “Listen, I still believe what I always believed.” Well then, you are not growing.

There are certain facts that we must always believe, even though we do not understand them. It is what faith is all about. But to try to let folks believe that we know everything is the height of human arrogance and conceit.

God’s knowledge is important and God’s actions are important. And they are both incomprehensible. Think about what Paul said in Romans 11:33. It says, “His ways are past finding out.” But a lot of us think we know. In Isaiah it says, “His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts.” Then why in the world are we trying to act like we know and we understand what God knows and does?

Turn back to Psalm 145. It is not just what He knows or what He does, it is who He is that is incomprehensible. And that is what we read a moment ago in Psalm 145. Look again at these three verses. It says,

I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name
forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise
Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD.

Here, it is not the knowledge of the Lord. It is not the works of the Lord. It is the Lord Himself.

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; And His
greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:1-3 NKJV)

His greatness is past finding out. There is no limitation. It is impossible to understand. When you ask me, “What is the meaning of the greatness of our God?” I say, “Incomprehensible.”

Number two, when you ask me about the greatness of God, I immediately contrast it with man. So I give you a second word, He is *incorruptible*. That is why He is great. Everything else in life is corruptible. It is falling apart—including all of us. Amen? Now that can be depressing unless you have the joy of the Lord. Every last one of us, given enough time, will prove that we are falling apart. Amen? Now you can think about that and really be blessed by it. Amen? It happens to us emotionally and it happens to us physically. All of life demonstrates one thing—we do not last.

Everything they sell us does not last either. Have you noticed that? And I have been thinking about this for many years. I think they are making stuff to look better and to last a shorter period of time than ever before. I believe that is because they want you to experience that thing breaking, in order to get you to buy the latest one that they have coming out. Nobody is selling stuff anymore and saying, “Well, it is crummy, but you will never see that break down. It does not look good, but I will tell you that is solid.” All of us are finding that it is the glitter and glamour of everything that they sell to us. But the truth of the matter is down in our hearts, we know that nothing lasts. The world is passing away and all that it contains.

God is so different. When you talk of God’s greatness, He is incorruptible. And there are two things that are behind that. One, is because He is holy and the other is because He is eternal. Because He is holy, He is not like that which corrupts. Everything that corrupts is unholy.

Special attention will be given to the theme of the holiness of God before we are done in our series. But at this point, let me tell you that there are two ways to describe the holiness of God. The word *holy*, used all the way through the Bible, means *to be separate, to set apart, separation*. There are two ways in which God is holy. One, He is separate from sin. That is what a lot of us understand as the fundamental idea of holiness, separate from sin. Are you glad He is not separate from sinners? Our Lord Jesus was a friend of sinners, but He was totally without sin. Now that is a major idea of holiness.

But the fundamental idea of holiness, that is, the root behind that one, is that God is separate from everything that He Himself made. He is separate from the material and physical universe and all of its creation, including angels and man. What that means is we are not pantheists. God is not in this table. He is not in this microphone. He is not in the trees. He is not Mother Nature. God is totally separate.

New Age thinking is permeating our schools, our educational systems. It is permeating our business community with all kinds of seminars and learning tools. There are books everywhere. Their number one thinking purports that God is all and all is God. It is pantheistic through and through. It is discovering the god that you are. It is seeing God in everything, the trees, the plants and the animals; therefore, save the whales. Everything goes on like that. “Kill the babies; save the whales” is of course, philosophical nonsense. But this generation is not thinking clearly.

God is not to be identified with that which He Himself created. He is not trees and He is not mountains; that is the result of His creative power. God exists behind that, outside of that, and totally separate from it, although He invades it all with His omnipresence because He is everywhere at once.

Turn to Psalm 30:4 and let us just look at this for a moment concerning the greatness of God. Because His name is holy, therefore He is great. He is not like man.

Sing praise to the LORD, You saints of His, and give thanks at
the remembrance of His holy name.

His name is holy.

Turn to Psalm 97:12.

Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, and give thanks at the
remembrance of His holy name.

He is holy.

Turn to Psalm 99, which is really a psalm about holiness.

The LORD reigns; Let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved! The LORD is great in Zion, And He is high above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name—He is holy. Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool—He is holy. Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the LORD our God is holy. (Psalm 99:1-3, 5, 9 NKJV)

Turn to Psalm 111:9.

He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome *is* His name.

Greatness and holiness are put together. Why is God so great? It is because He is incorruptible. He is holy. He is separate from what was made that will not last. He Himself will last. He never is corrupted in any way, shape or form. Neither sin, nor circumstances, nor any physical factors, that affect all of us like weather and health and bugs and viruses, can affect God at all. He is the incorruptible God, as well as being incomprehensible.

Turn please to Psalm 72. He is not only holy, He is eternal. Everything else does not last, and everything has a beginning. God had no beginning. He has always existed, and that is how great He is. I can still remember my theology class on the doctrine of God. I spent one solid semester going every single day with hours of reading all kinds of books on it, and I was just learning about who God is. And I can remember the discussion about the eternal character of God. I can remember my head hurting. I mean, it bothered me so much. I was bound and determined to understand how God could be eternal, have no beginning and no end. I tried to think of illustrations. I did a study project. I wrote a paper, which the teacher said was nonsense. I did everything I possibly could to discover what the eternal character of God was all about. You know something? I still do not know. Everything that I am used to, had a beginning. God never started. Every time I think about anything, I think there is a beginning and end, a cause and effect. I am sorry, I cannot help it. It is what I am all about and what you are all about. Somehow we have been programmed that way. And yet, God had no beginning and will have no end. He is the incorruptible God.

In Psalm 72:17, it says, His name, His character, what He is all about, shall endure forever. His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him. All nations shall call Him blessed.

Talk about a contrast. In Psalm 102:11-12, God takes man and contrasts him with Himself. The psalmist says,

My days are like a shadow that lengthens, and I wither away like grass.

That is man. We are just a shadow. Whatever time of life we have it is just a lengthening of that, but we will wither away like grass. That is all we are.

But You, O LORD, shall endure forever, and the remembrance
of Your name to all generations.

In the little community where we live there are trees, like in most communities, but they have been planted with special design. There are lovely trees there, but some of the trees have something wrong with them and the leaves are dying and withering. I was sitting out by the pool and I was talking to a gentleman who has lived there longer than we have. And he was discussing with me the tragedy of the trees and how we can solve this. “Because,” he said, “you know the trees last forever.” If he just had not said that I could have done like my wife and kept quiet. But when you hear wrong doctrine it is hard to be quiet. I know we are supposed to slip it in on them, and build bridges of friendship. But I cannot stand it! I said, “That is an example to me of all of life. Nothing lasts.” He looked at me and said, “What are you so down about?”

My dear friends, God is eternal! He lasts! He has no beginning. He has no end. He has always been there. He is what it is all about. In Psalm 102:11 we learn about man’s fragile nature and that we will not last. But look at the conclusion in verse 12.

But You, O LORD, shall endure forever, and the remembrance
of Your name to all generations.

Look at Psalm 135:13.

Your name, O LORD, endures forever, Your fame, O LORD,
throughout all generations.

Why is God incorruptible? It is because His name is holy and because His name is eternal.

We have given you two things. When we talk about the greatness of God, He is incomprehensible and incorruptible. But I love the third and final point. He is incomparable. You want to know how great He is—He cannot be compared to anything. He is incomparable. Where are you going to start?

And I want to give you just two things that demonstrate the incomparable nature of God. First is His position, and second is His power. He is incomparable in terms of His position, as well as His power.

In focusing on His position, would you turn to Ephesians 1. Remember that our God, who made everything, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God manifesting Himself as three persons. The eternal Son of God is under discussion and the greatness of our God applies to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 1:19-23 it says,

And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us
who believe, according to the working of His mighty power
which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead
and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,—[Now
watch this]—far above all principality and power and might and
dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but
also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His
feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
(NKJV)

It is as though we are not getting the point. What he is saying is, in so many phrases, point after point after point, no one is higher than God. How is God great in the sense of being incomparable, affecting His position over all? No one is greater. He is far above all principalities and powers. Name some great leader, some mighty force. God is above it all. The Lord Jesus Christ is above it all.

Look at Philippians 2 please. In speaking again of the Blessed Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, it says in verse 9,

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:9-11 NKJV)

Turn to Hebrews 1. He is incomparable because of His position. Nobody should be mentioned in the same breath. They do not deserve it. Hebrews 1:1-4.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

He is above all names that are named. Not only His position, but also His power, demonstrates that He is incomparable.

Turn back to Psalm 66:1-4. The power of our God demonstrates that He is incomparable. A description of His greatness must include that. No one is to be like Him.

Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, "How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name."

Why? It is because of the greatness of His power.

Look at chapter 68:32 please.

Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; Oh, sing praises to the Lord, To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old! Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice. Ascribe strength to God; his excellence is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God! (Psalm 68:32-35 NKJV)

What is at the root of our problems? It is a misunderstanding or a misapplication of who God is and what God can do.

Let me give you two illustrations of the incomparability of God, in terms of power. Just two things: first prayer, God is able to answer prayer. Amen? Turn to John 14. God can answer prayer. Now, either you understand what I am saying about the greatness of God and who He is, or you don't fathom all of its implications. But the major point is that one of the first applications in the heart of the believer is that praying to Him is not a waste of time. Praying to Him is not meaningless. Praying to Him may be the most important thing I can do in life. God really does have power and greatness, as opposed to anything I might try; therefore, praying to Him is what I need to do more than anything else.

All of a sudden, when you understand who God is, guess what? Prayer moves up the list and becomes a priority in the believer's life. Prayer is always down on the list when the preaching, teaching ministry of the church is focusing on the needs of people—believe it or not. Often that is where prayer requests come from, the needs of people. But what in fact happens is that because of the concentration on man and not God, the motivation to prayer becomes a weak matter. It is a difficult thing. Repetition becomes a problem of just going through the motions and saying the same kinds of words you have always said. We even teach children how to pray and new converts how to pray, and so there is a routine. Christians get used to it. We offer quickies when we have food, before we go to bed at night or when we get up. It becomes a routine or a pattern, and in some terrible sense it becomes empty because we forget who God is. It is the greatness of God and His power that says to me that prayer is most important.

I read in John 14:13-14 that Jesus said,

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

And we can find an incredible list of reasons why that does not happen and it reveals our arrogance, conceit, doubt, and discouragement. And it reveals that we do not believe in who God is. That is what He said. Look in John 15:16. Jesus said,

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

And in verses 23–27 He says,

And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and

you will receive, that your joy may be full. These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. (NKJV)

What He is telling us is, “Ask. I can do it. I can answer prayer.” Talk about the power of God! He is incomparable. Who else can do this for you?

How about saving people as a second illustration and final word? Who is like God? Who has the power to save the human heart from sin, death, and hell? Read in John 1:12.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

You talk about incomparable. Peter said in Acts 4:12,

Neither is there salvation in any other name, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

It says in 1 Peter 1:5 that we are kept by the power of God. Is there anyone who can save us and keep us and bring us finally to our heavenly home but God Almighty? The Bible says, “No! He is incomparable.” Nothing else will do. No other message will work. It is only Him. And He asks us to bend the knee and confess with the mouth, believe in our hearts that He indeed is who He claimed to be. God wants you to trust His greatness. God wants you to believe in Him, not in your ability to believe it. “Though we believe not,” Paul says, “yet He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

Jesus honored the great faith of the centurion. Yet it is recorded that he said, “Lord, I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24). The key issue is not my faith. The key issue is who God is. God is asking us to trust what He tells us in His Word about who He is. And He has the power to save you right on the spot, right where you sit now. No matter what your agnostic attitudes have been or your hesitancy has been, God Almighty has the power to save you right now. Call upon His mighty and powerful name. Ask and you will receive. God can do it because of who He is.

I love to talk about the greatness of God. Let us pray.

Father, You know that there is a hesitancy in our hearts because we focus on our circumstances, our problems, whatever the reason on our human abilities. But there is hesitancy in our heart to trust You. God, I pray that You would set us free. That can be an agonizing and painful way to live. God, You are great. There is nothing too hard for You. Each of us has to walk out of here and run smack into life again. And it can be so routine, dull, overbearing, hard, and difficult. You will test us again to see whether we believe in the God described in the Bible who is great and awesome. When we do not know what is happening,

God, help us to remember that You do, so teach us to rest in You. When we find ourselves weakening and see everything around collapsing and perishing, help us to remember that You are eternal. When we see everybody trying to exalt their own importance, God, help us to remember that You are incomparable. There is nobody like You. There is nobody that is more important for us to know than You, and that You can answer prayer, and that You can save us. God we thank You. Work in our hearts as only You can do. By Your Holy Spirit, draw us to the Lord Jesus. We pray that we might bow the knee and acknowledge that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Will you take your Bibles please and turn to Romans 9. This is the second in our *Attributes of God* series—our first subject was “The Greatness of God.” Our second subject on who God is—“The Sovereignty of God.” It seems almost frustrating, as we study the great doctrine of God in the Bible, to know how in the world we can possibly communicate all this wonderful truth in an organized and effective way that we can understand from week to week. It seems to me that it has to be a daily pursuit. To know God is the highest pursuit of life. To understand Him is to understand ourselves. To understand Him is to know what is happening. Not to understand Him is to remain in confusion and doubt.

The sovereignty of God is a wonderful theme. In Romans chapter 9 it is described in a most powerful way. It is a chapter that causes people a lot of trouble. And I guess if you are looking from man’s point of view, who is arguing for his rights and his ability to do as he pleases, then you will have trouble with this passage. Center your focus on God and the fact that He is not sitting as a passive observer to the events of human history, but rather He is involved, bringing it all to a wonderful and grand climax. From beginning to end, He is God in control. Then you will read it with joy. Then you will read it with understanding. But it is not easy.

We will begin our reading in Romans 9:6.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac; (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that

My name may be declared in all the earth.” Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Rom 9:6-24 NKJV)

Now turn to chapter 11. He concludes the argument in verse 11:33 with these words—
And you can really identify with them having just read what you did.

Rom 11:33-36.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.

And all God’s people said—Amen! Let’s pray.

Father, we pray in these few moments, as we approach the critical subject of Your own sovereignty, God, I pray that You would help us to see things from Your point of view. As difficult as they may be to accept or understand, God help us to see them from what You say. There is so much that we don’t understand. You have asked us to walk by faith and not by sight. God, I pray that as we go over the Scripture and examine who You are and what You do, may there be a desire in our hearts to know You. We thank You, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

When I sit at my office to study here at church, there is a cup where I like to have some tea, and I had some this morning. I am holding my cup with the tea in it, looking at it and it is one that I got down at the Laguna Arts Festival. Anyway, Carol and I were down there one day and a guy had hand designed the little cup. And on there were the words, engraved in the cup: I am the potter; you are the clay.

Hey, that is my message! The light comes on. I am the potter; you are the clay. What right—really folks—what right does clay have to say to the potter, “Wait, I don’t like this!”? “Hey buddy, you are clay. Don’t talk. You are not supposed to talk. Clay does not talk.” And you know that goes across the grain of every last one of us here. Talk about a passage that completely attacks and confronts a narcissistic culture where everybody wants to do his own thing—be in charge. Talk about your rights. And you do not want anybody pushing you around.

And God says, “You know what you are? You are just clay. I just mess around with my fingers a little bit and make you into what I want. And I will do what I want to do. And by the way, keep quiet.” And men, we are motor-mouths asking questions. “I don’t like that. What do you mean, God is in charge?” God: “Oh you are acting like it doesn’t matter whatever I do. I don’t like that. Keep quiet.” “What do you mean? I got a right to speak out just like anybody else. We got freedom of speech.” God: “Would you shut your mouth.”

And not a one of us in this audience wants to hear that message from God. When we talk about the sovereignty of God, friends, it is not an easy subject to talk about. And I would like you to see in our message today—which maybe will get you started thinking on this massive subject in the Bible—that involves at least four things.

First of all, it does involve His powerful control of all things. Now all things seem sometimes out of control to me. It looks like things are not being handled well. Yet the Bible teaches His powerful control of all things. And that is based on three things. First: His position. God will tell us over and over again (we will look at it in a moment) that His position is King of the Universe, Sovereign God, throne established in the heavens, He does whatever He wants. His position results in His powerful control of everything. There is no one in a more exalted position. There is no one with a greater perspective to understand what is happening, and to see it, and to know how it is going to take place. So His position alone is a factor as it relates to His control of everything.

Secondly, we will look at His power. The fact is that God’s power is not limited in any way, shape or form. And the Bible teaches that His power is actually working in all the things that are occurring in life.

A third thing that is very much involved in His control over everything is His own pleasure—that God is doing it because He wants to do it. And you do not have any right to question Him in it because you were not around when He started it. God is doing whatever He wants to do and He is doing all of it for His own pleasure. And these things are not what this generation wants to hear. But that is what the Bible teaches—His powerful control of everything.

Turn to Psalm 97, please. Let’s just hustle through a few little Scriptures in the Psalms to see the position of God and what it means in relation to His control of everything. And I really believe that the root of every problem in our life is a misunderstanding or a

misapplication of who God is and what He can do. I think we can prove that. No matter what problem you discuss—marriage, family, personal, job, career, you name it—no matter what problem we would be discussing, the root behind our failure to apply it properly and to take it from the hand of the Lord is our misunderstanding of who God is and what He can do in our lives—and what He, in fact, is doing.

Now in Psalm 97:1, you have an example of the position of God affecting the sovereignty of God. The Lord reigns. Is there any more simple statement than that? Not the Lord did reign and not the Lord is going to reign. “The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad!”

Why?—because somebody (thank God) is in charge. Gorbachev, Bush, Thatcher, are insignificant names to God. They are not reigning. Is everybody understanding me? Now we do our best to appreciate their power and authority, their control to make decisions, move governments, and nations, et cetera. They are not significant to the discussion today at all. God’s position is—the Lord is presently reigning.

Flip to Psalm 99:1-3 please, where it says it again,

The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells
between the cherubim; let the earth be moved! The LORD
is great in Zion, and He is high [there is His position] above
all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome
name—He is holy.

The Lord is reigning and He is high above everyone. The position of God is not affected.

Turn to Psalm 103:19, please. The Bible says, “The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.” Some translations say, “His sovereignty.” His kingdom is ruling over everything. Where is He ruling from? His throne is established in heaven. His perspective sees it all, everything. From past history into future history, all time He sees at any one moment of time. He is in absolute, sovereign control of everything.

Turn to Psalm 113:1-6, please. Look at the opening verses of this chapter, on the sovereignty of God from the standpoint of His position, controlling all things. It says:

Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise
the name of the LORD! Blessed be the name of the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of
the sun to its going down the LORD'S name is to be
praised. The LORD is high above all nations, [His position
again] His glory above the heavens. Who is like the LORD
our God, who dwells on high, Who humbles Himself to
behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

I love this statement. This is the sovereign position of God, seeing everything—high above it all. No one is like Him, but He humbles Himself, “to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?”

What a colossal understanding of the greatness of God and where we fit in. God literally humbles Himself to observe and behold what is done in the heavens, as well as on earth, because He designed it all. He made it all. He has to humble Himself to even care about it. Is that not a phenomenal concept? Again, the root of our problems is a misunderstanding of who God is, or a misapplication of it in our own lives, regarding the position of God.

Turn to the Book of Daniel chapter 4, please. Let me show you some other interesting things as it related to Daniel, who in fact, is in captivity in Babylon. Daniel is a prophet of the Lord, to whom God gave a wonderful message. It deals with future things from our day even. But Daniel got some sovereignty lessons from God concerning the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, which he was interpreting in Daniel 4:17. It says,

This decision is by the decree of the watchers [which is one of the names for angels in Daniel], and the sentence by the word of the holy ones [another one of their names], in order that the living may know [angels communicated the message to him, and he said, in order that the living may know] that the Most High [No one is higher than He—position again] rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.

Have you ever, when you voted for somebody that got into power, wondered about them? Amen? Let’s put it another way. The guy you voted for did not get in and the guy that got in proved to be a real stinker or failure or something else. And it caused you to say, “Well, if they would have put my man in there we wouldn’t have this problem.” I just thought it was interesting to read that God sets over it the lowest of men. We want the best person on the job. And when we get the best person we have, God says, “Oh, by the way, you just put in the lowest you got.” “No, no, no. You didn’t hear about his credentials and his past experience, his ability to understand foreign policy and to handle domestic problems.” “No, you just put in a real bummer.”

The sovereignty of God (thank the Lord) does not leave us to ourselves, even though it looks like that from our point of view. God is literally causing it for His purpose. He is even setting people up according to whomever He wills.

The lesson goes on in Daniel 4. Look at verse 25. He is telling what is going to happen to Nebuchadnezzar. He is going to really go bonkers. It says,

They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field [He literally went insane.], and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till

you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,
and gives it to whomever He chooses.

Nebuchadnezzar did what many of the Roman emperors did and that is to proclaim himself as god and “nobody is higher than I am.” And Daniel says, “Well God is going to show you brother. You are going to be crawling. You are going to be eating grass like animals.” And that is exactly what happened to Nebuchadnezzar and God humbles him. And apparently, even Nebuchadnezzar responded at the end of his life to that sovereignty of God. But Daniel says, “You know why God is going to do that? So you will know. God is going to break you. You won’t bring your heart to understand the ways of the Lord, God has His ways. And you will know that the Most High is ruling in the kingdom of men.”

Verse 34 is interesting.

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: [You could avoid a lot of trouble in your life if you just start this way, honoring the Lord.] for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.

It is interesting that the most powerful man on the face of the globe, at his generation and time, would make these remarks.

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Daniel 4:35)

And that is all I hear from people—questioning what God has done. In their hearts they really do not even believe that God did it. But it is like, “Oh, is that what you Christians believe, that God did it? Well, what did He do it for? And why would a god do that? If He is such a good God, why would He let that earthquake happen? Or how about Hurricane Hugo? Why would He leave things in such a mess on planet earth? Why doesn’t He get rid of the wicked people and put the righteous in power? Why does God do it? Why does He let little children suffer? Why do we have a Mongoloid child? Why does God allow deformity? What’s going on here?”

This king, who was humbled by the sovereign God said, “Hey, wait a minute. He does whatever He wants to. Blessed be His name. Just because I don’t understand it, doesn’t make it so.”

Well, I guess you could become fatalistic hearing this. You could say, Well, whatever will be, will be. You know, I love to have people say that to me. And I say, “Finally you said something right.” It is like we are all of a sudden supposed to jump on that and explain it. I just want you to know that whatever has happened so far this morning, has happened. Now am I not a brilliant theologian? I mean, I do not know what has happened to you so far this morning, but whatever has happened has happened. Wow! Is that heavy truth? Hey, wait a minute—come on—the sovereign God is ruling everything!

Now turn to Isaiah 43 please, and let me show you that it is not only His position that is affecting His control of everything, but it is His power. Isaiah 43 is a rather strong statement but I am afraid a lot of us do not read these verses, or at least when we do we skip over it. Isaiah 43:13 says,

Indeed before the day was, I am He [Don't you love that?];
and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand [I love
this statement]; I work, and who will reverse it?

Did you think you could change what God is doing? You cannot change it. You say, “But look what happened.” “Well, whatever happened, happened.” “Well, you are saying that God caused that?” “Well, He does cause all things. The Bible says, He is working and ruling.” “Well, why would He do that to me?” “Oh, the implication is that you deserve better?” “Well, hey, I didn't do anything to deserve what happened to me. I got fired. What are you talking about?” “Well, on a human perspective I guess there must have been something you did.” “Hey, I was the best employee they had.” “Really? Well, I guess God chose the best one to get rid of.” “Well, why would He do that to me after I worked so hard for Him?” “I don't know. But I want you to know that if it happened, it happened.”

Have you ever noticed how, when friends tell you that, it is not really the most thrilling thing you wanted to hear? You know, your heart is longing for some explanation about how wonderful you are. And isn't it terrible what has happened? But you know, you would be at peace and sleep better if you just said, “Well, it happened, brother. That's what happened.”

You know there are a lot of things that happened in my past I do not understand. I want you to know what my friend, John MacArthur, said that delights my heart and makes me laugh every time I hear him say it. He said, “I know I'm right, otherwise I'd change my view.” Now there is something about that I really like. You know, it sounds arrogant, but there is something I really like about that. It is like an honest admission of what we really want to believe, see?

Listen friends, whatever happened, happened. And our problem is in understanding it. And God says, “Well, I know. I also know that you do not know. And I have reasons as to why I haven't let you in on it.” And man, that is frustrating. You know what you have to do? You have to relax and it is so hard when you do not know. You have to just relax and say, “I don't know what happened.”

One of the most refreshing things to hear about somebody is that during a terrible tragedy you say, “Why do you think that all happened to you?” “Hey, I haven’t got the foggiest idea.” You know, that is not immaturity. That is often the fullest expression of maturity that ever could come to a believer, to say I have no idea why it is happening. I just know it did. And I am going to praise the name of the Lord, that He’s got a reason. He’s got a purpose to everything and I am going to praise Him. I know He will work it out for His glory.

Colossians 1:17 says, “In Him all things consist, or hold together.” Talk about control! In Hebrews 1:3 it says, “upholding all things”—not just a few—“upholding all things by the word of His power.” It is God’s power that is behind His control of everything, including the laws of gravity.

Turn to Psalm 115. This is the doctrine that God is controlling everything. The sovereignty of God is based on His position, His power, but also His pleasure. He is doing what He wants to do. “But our God is in heaven; he does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3).

Look at Psalm 135. I have you turning fast today. Psalm 135:5-6 says, “For I know that the LORD is great, and our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.” Whatever the Lord is doing He does so because it pleases Him.

In Proverbs 16:4 it says, “The Lord has made all things for Himself, [Listen to this] yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.” Whoa! Talk about the sovereignty of God! The Bible says in Proverbs 16:4, “He has made everything for Himself, including the wicked for the day of doom.” You say, “Oh, God delights then in the punishment of the wicked.” No, according to Ezekiel 18: 23 and 32, God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. But it is a part of His pleasure to say that all people, whether they are wicked or righteous, will in fact experience the consequences of everything the plan of God has outlined—and that is what God wants done. Wow!

Let’s move to a second one quickly. This is a message where your head hurts if you think too much. The sovereignty of God is not only talking about His powerful control of all things, but folks, it is talking about His providential care of all things. Providence means there is a purpose. Providence means somebody is taking care of us even though we do not understand. So we call this the providential care of all things. It involves several things. Turn to Isaiah 55 please. When you say God is caring for everything, He is not just controlling it with a lack of compassion and interest. He has a real care for it and it involves several things. It involves His ways because they are not the way we do things. And Isaiah 55:8-9 makes that very clear. God says,

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways
My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher
than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and
My thoughts than your thoughts.

It is interesting that the verse preceding this was about pardoning. Look at the end of verse 7. “He will have mercy on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” The point is that God pardons people that you do not think deserve it. God forgives people who deserve hell. And He all of a sudden cleans up their act, saves them. It is a wonderful thing. God saves them. You say, “That is great, but why did He save him?” “My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts.” You say, “He does not deserve to be forgiven. Do you know how awful he is?” My ways are not your ways and My thoughts are not your thoughts. Romans 11:3 says, “His ways are past finding out.”

Turn back to Genesis 50:19-21. From the series we did in Genesis, we saw a classic statement of the sovereignty of God about His care of all things. It is found in the words of Joseph, who said to his brothers,

Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Do you know that even in times of disaster God can have a caring purpose that no one sees at the time. He could cause a generation to suffer some pain because of their failure to prepare adequately for a disaster that He knows is coming in the future. But all of those are human explanations. Here is an example where somebody could see easily why God did that. “Hey, you know, I was really treated bad,” Joseph could have said. But instead he said, “You meant it for evil. That is clear. You guys wanted to wipe me off the face of the planet but let me tell you something, God meant all this for good in order to, obviously, preserve many people alive in a serious crisis. A famine has covered our land and covered the land of Canaan. God obviously was fulfilling a purpose here and you guys did not even know. When you decided to throw me into that pit, you did not even know that that is what God was going to do.”

Sometimes we really do see the end of what is “category bad.” We see the end of some tragedy and how God brings good out of it. And that sort of helps our struggling hearts to understand that all things are being worked for His glory. But half the time we do not know. We do not understand. We have not yet heard. And it may even come after our death. I have seen that a lot, by the way. I have seen people not know why something happened in their life. They die and those who lived past them, who were friends of theirs then see after their death, the reason behind God’s plan which they previously did not understand. That is very true also. Not counting the fact that God’s purpose might relate to something entirely different than what we ever thought.

I think of this often as I think of a missionary named Chauncy Sheldon. He has been dead for many years. He worked for forty-one years in an area where he had very little fruit. He was really not an effective speaker—a very average person, to say the least. And he worked with a given man just going over the Bible with him constantly. He was a man who was illiterate and came right out of the jungles of the poorest country on the face of

the planet. And he worked with him and worked with him and worked with him. And people used to question him when he came home about what he was doing. You know, forty-one years and no real fruit. He could not come up with numbers or anything else. And yet that one man that he dealt with, I had the joy of meeting with and ministering with in Africa. That man was turning Africa (at least in the central part) upside down for God. That man became dynamite for God. And it says he owes it all to that one man that came by his village every day and talked to him about the Bible. You see, you do not know but God does. He has providential care in terms of His ways. His ways are not your ways. His thoughts are not your thoughts.

It also affects His wisdom. Turn to Daniel 2:20. So many times in discussions about what God is doing, we act like we know. We do not know. Even some things that are obvious, you may miss the biggies that God has hidden in His own counsel. God has great wisdom as to why He allows the things to happen that do happen in our lives. Daniel 2:20-23,

Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and raises up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; he knows what is in the darkness, [when you think no one does] and light dwells with Him. I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to us the king's demand.

God's sovereignty changes times and seasons, removing things and putting them down. Empires once existed and He said, “Get rid of that one. That is long enough for them. Put this one up. Send that guy over there. Put that one in power.” And God is exercising His sovereign control of everything, whether we know it or not. And what is behind it? This is the wonderful wisdom of God. God knows exactly what He is doing. But it also involves His actual work.

Turn please to the New Testament for some examples that may warm our hearts in Philippians 1. When you talk about the providential care of God, it involves His ways that seemingly are often different from how we would have thought they should be done. His wisdom is behind His ways. So we cannot figure it out but He knows why He is doing it and why it has to be done that way. And His work is actually involved because He does not stay outside of it and leave it up to us to figure it out. God literally works in the affairs of men. I read in Philippians 1:6, this wonderful word of encouragement to a believer. It says,

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Did God just save you and then leave you alone to work it out? That is not the teaching of the Bible. God not only began a work in us, but He is going to continue to work it out. And I'd kind of like to know that. Isn't that encouraging to know that God is working in your life right now? You say, "Well, all I'm doing is sitting and listening to you. God is working in every life here. No matter what floods your brain. I am not that stupid to know that at times your mind wanders. *What was the score of that game? I didn't put that thing in for lunch. Oh my goodness, I did not get that done. Maybe I should make a note. Things to do list.* One guy said, "You know, I love church. I can get everything down that I need to do this week." I just want you to know something. That God is working in all of us. There is not anything happening in your life that He does not know about. And the wonderful thing to my heart is that He actually cares. He cares about me.

In Philippians 2—just flip over to that. Look what it says in verse 13. You talk about God working in you! Philippians 2:13 says, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." Wow! God is not a passive observer. And I thank God for that. He is working in my life.

Acts 15:18 says, "Known to God from eternity are all His works." He is working. It is not only involving His care of all things, it includes His ways, His wisdom, His actual work. It involves His will, whether we like it or not. Some people have God doing something and hopefully it is not His will to do it. "Well, He did it." "I know, but He probably didn't want to do it."

Folks, let me clear this doctrine up that is troubling a lot of Christians around America. Whatever God does, He wants to do. Did everybody follow that? Theology by David can be both simple and complicated. You can read something—and I just want people to understand it. Whatever God has done He wants to do. And by the way, whatever God wants to do, He does. I cannot believe how many Christians believe that God wants to do something, but will not do it because of reasons He sees in us. I cannot believe that but we believe it. There are a lot of Christians who believe God really wants to do something nice, but cannot. What? Is that your God? Whatever God wants to do He will do. He does not leave anything undone.

You say, "Well, He did not do it for me." "Well, what He wanted to do is not do it for you, at least up to this point." I told you your head would hurt before you go home. I love to think on these things. I tell you, it helps me to walk through this and find out who God is because I am messed up down here, I am trying to struggle with it all, like you are. And I read about God and I say, "What am I so worried about? Enter Jesus. "Don't worry at all." "A little bit?" "Don't take one thought in your little brain about anything that is in the future, for sure. Don't even worry about what you are going to put on, what you are going to eat, what you are going to drink." Don't worry—why? Because your heavenly Father knows all about it and He loves you. He will take care of you. Amen? God will take care of you. He will lead you all the way. Praise the Lord! So just trust Him.

Well, can I be a little concerned? I got it. Hey, I have come up with it, folks. How about prayerful concern? Did you notice that? If I could just spiritualize this a little bit. You

know we are so concerned and God has touched our hearts to pray about this. And in our prayers the anxiety comes out. The prayers are not to worship the living God. The prayers are to express how we are all worried. Wait a minute!

Look at Ephesians 1:11. You talk about the will of God. Is He, in fact, performing His will in the affairs of men in all things? Here is what it says,

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being
predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all
things according to the counsel of His [What? His?] will.

So if you asked me about the sovereignty of God, I speak of His powerful control of everything, based on His position, His power, His pleasure. I look at His providential care of everything and I see His ways, His wisdom, His work, His actual work and the fact that it is His will that is being done.

Number three in the sovereignty of God. Watch it, this is the tough one! Turn back to Romans 9 in your Bible. The sovereignty of God involves His personal choice of the destiny of all peoples. “What? Did I hear what the pastor just said?” You heard right. The sovereignty of God involves the personal choice of God in the destiny of all people—nobody is excluded. There are two issues involved in this, folks: one is God’s right to do it, and the other is God’s reason.

Now in Romans 9, as you know, just glancing through the text, it says in verse 14, “Is there any unrighteousness with God?” Well, of course we do not want to say that. And Moses heard this message from God about God’s own name. God said, “You want to know what I am all about? Well, I have mercy on whomever I want to have mercy and I harden whom I want to. Any other questions?” Wow! Verse 16 concludes: “It is not of him who wills it.” Suppose you say to me, “Well listen, boy, you will it and it will happen.” No it won’t. Whatever happened, you may have gotten in on it by willing it, but that is only because God, in fact, allowed that to occur. Because whatever He was going to do, He was going to do anyway. Did everybody follow that?

You go to a seminar that is success oriented. Amen? Boy, you actually can make it happen! I put my money on the line. I go out of there, “Hey, we’re going to turn the world upside down.” Amen? Maybe there are twenty people in the seminar. Eighteen failed, two guys succeed, and guess what? They are used as testimonies. Is everybody following me? Nobody stops to think, whatever happened, happened. “If I would...” “No, if God would.” Do you understand that the right of God and the reason of God are not looked at much by our generation? We are into our own personal rights, our own personal reasons and we do not want to hear this.

What we have established in Romans 9:20–21 is the right of God. It says, “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” [He certainly does.] “Does not the potter have power over the clay, [to do whatever He wants to]?”

How fascinating that he used the word “clay” because as you know, man’s body came from the dust of the ground and to dust we shall return when we die. So He took it and said, “Look, can’t He make, can’t He do whatever He wants to do in anybody’s life?” And if you answer, “I don’t like that, you better be careful. The sovereign God has a right to do whatever He wants to do.

And when you ask me about God’s personal choice, “why this?”—Jonah said in 2:9, “Salvation is of the Lord.” It is the Lord doing this. He saves whom He wants to and knows whom is going to hell. Whether we want to identify with it, He not only knows but it is a part of His plan and His sovereignty.

Proverbs 16:4 says that He does know that the wicked are facing a day of doom and He has a reason in that. Otherwise, why not have everybody be saved? Or to put it another way—why aren’t we all robots? Evidently, God wanted all this to happen for a reason that sometimes is not found in my finite human brain, but it is clearly taught to me in the Bible. I may not agree with what the Bible says and perhaps you think that is your right. I would say that is a dangerous position but it does not make you right. Man questions what is in the Bible. Hey, I understand that, folks. I can understand why a man, who has been given the choices that he has, who has the mind to think that he has, and has the emotions— I can really understand why he might reject what is in the Bible. But hey, do not fool around with my brain or yours, acting like there is something that we are saying this morning that is not in the Bible. Why, we are only scratching the surface. The question is whether we believe it or not because it is definitely in the Bible and a lot of people know it and it frightens them when they read it. You see, when you ask about the personal choice of God and the destiny of all people, you must speak of His right.

Arthur Pink, in his fine volume called *The Sovereignty of God*, says on page 52, “God claims the end [based on Romans 9]. God claims the indisputable right to do what He wills with His own.” Wow!

It is not only His right or His reason. You say to me, “Wait a minute. What’s His reason behind the destiny?” I read in the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:48 that they had some results. And you know what the verse says? “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” That is what it says. Let me repeat it again. “As *many* as [that tells me something right there] had been *appointed* [I learn something there] to eternal life, believed.” Wow. What is the reason of God? As I analyze that, do you know what that verse says? I mean, regardless of whether I agree with it or not, the verse says that believing is the consequence, not the cause, of God’s decision. “As many as were appointed to eternal life, they believed.” So believing in the message which Paul was experiencing as he and Barnabas were preaching, believing is the *consequence* not the *cause* of God’s decision to save them.

And yet there are thousands—especially in America—there are thousands of us who claim to be Christians, who believe exactly the opposite. They believe that the reason is our faith, but that is not what the Bible says.

I learn also that not all people are destined for salvation, obviously, because it says “as many as.” I learn that all who are ordained or appointed by God will, in fact, believe. That no one can resist His will, which is what it says in Romans 9:19, “For who has resisted His will?” No one has.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the last century, called the prince of preachers, was one of the greatest orators. The volumes that man wrote alone in his life are incredible to believe. He preached in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. The man used to preach in open fields of 25,000 people on Sundays. I mean, folks, we were talking a man who had a tremendous ministry. He sent over 500 preachers out into the world—missionaries from his own college. The guy had a fabulous ministry. Spurgeon wrote regarding Romans 9, these words:

Is it not God who gives the disposition to believe? If men are disposed to have eternal life, does not He in every case, dispose them? Is it wrong for God to give grace? We would answer, of course not. If it be right for Him to give it, is it wrong for Him to purpose to give it? Would you have Him give it by accident? If it is right for God to purpose to give grace today, it was right for Him to purpose it before today. And since He changes not from eternity, before any one of us ever came into existence. (C.H. Spurgeon)

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul said, “Because God from the beginning chose you for salvation.” My friends, God destined and designed and decided the means to accomplish the result that fulfills His original purpose and choice, whether we like it or not.

1 Peter 1:2 says we are elect. We are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

Ephesians 1:4 says we are chosen before the foundation of the world and the purpose is found there. What is the reason of God? Okay, I see His right to do it. What is the reason? The reason is that we will praise the glory of His grace.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 1:26. You talk about the sovereignty of God. It involves His personal choice in the destiny of all people. And my friend, if you are listening to me now and you say in your heart, “Well, we don’t have anything to do with this,” then you did not listen. God designed the means as well as the result to fulfill His original purpose. And the fact is that if God begins to work in your heart, one of the ways He does that according to the gospel is by the preaching of the Word of God. So your arguments are going to pale into insignificance because you made a mistake this morning if you are not a Christian—you showed up to hear me preach. Does everybody follow me? You say, “Well, I was pushed into it. I mean, they’ve been after me a long time.” But you came and whatever happened, happened. I love this.

Whatever happens will happen. Do you understand that you can fight this all day long, but God at least in His infinite wisdom, had somebody hound you to death to get you here to hear this guy scream and yelling at you about how God has a right to do what He wants to do. Are you following me? God ordains the means as well as the end. Whether I preach it or whether a friend or maybe a family member has been praying for you and asking God to save your soul, God knows how to work it, my friends. And that is what makes it all so glorious to those of us who are Christians—how God uses all kinds of things to touch our hearts.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26 it says,

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Why? What is Your reason? Here it is. 1 Corinthians 1:29—“that no flesh should glory in His presence.” That is the answer of God. “That, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 1:31).

One last point—just quickly, turn to Revelation 19. When you talk about the sovereignty of God, you are talking about His powerful control of all things. You are talking about His providential care of all things. You are talking about His personal choice in the destiny of all people. But you are also talking about His predicted climax of all history. The fascinating thing about the sovereignty of God, when you think about prophecy—it is already laid out. Everything is going to occur according to the prophetic Word. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth may pass away, but My word will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35). Whatever God has decreed and revealed in His Word is actually going to happen. That is why studying the Book of Revelation is so important to believers and why there is a blessing in there. “Blessed is he who reads it and hears it and heeds it.” That is why that’s said because it is revealing the sovereignty of God even the predicted climax of all history. It causes Christians to rest in the Lord and rejoice in the Lord, because we know how it is coming out. Amen? We know, we are not in doubt. We know what is happening and the world looks like it is in a mess. No sweat, it is going to be settled by God. God is going to straighten it all out. When? We do not know. He told us to wait, but it is going to happen.

And in one bright climactic statement of praise to God, you learn about the sovereignty of God in the predicted climax of all history. In Revelation 19:1-6 as you learn about the collapse of this world’s system, it says,

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.” Again they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” Then a voice came from the throne, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, [And here is the sovereignty of God in great, climactic fashion] “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent [what?] reigns!”

We started out in Psalms, the Lord reigns. He is reigning. And all heaven breaks out as God brings it to a great climax. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Why? Because it is true, the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! And one day we will know that like we do not know it now.

Let's close with prayer.

Father, I want to thank You that from beginning to end, You have led us all the way. Lord, You know why You brought people into this meeting right now. You know the reason why some of us got burdened for somebody and talked to them about Jesus. Some of us have been praying for friends and relatives for a long time. You know why people are here, even when we don't, or even when we don't want to be. You are the God who does all things well. Everything has a purpose to it, as You said. And Father, I thank You that You can bring people to Yourself even when we have written them off, even when we said there is no hope and even when we said they are too bad or sinful. You have written no one off. You have the power to do it. And Lord, I know that some are going to spend an eternity in hell. And You have also made it clear to us that men reject You and men refuse and You know why. You hold us accountable for the choices we make, for the decisions we make, and for the means that You have used to communicate Your love to us. And a lot of us are not listening and are not looking and not understanding. We are going about it in our own selfish way. God, we cannot help but believe that You have brought us in this meeting, at this

time, to this message, for a reason that is known in Your counsel and Your will. A reason that maybe would comfort the heart of a Christian who is discouraged and defeated over what life has brought. But it is a message that would also confront those who have filled their lives with so much worry and concern and tension and problems. God, help us to rest in You and Your message that would bring conviction and salvation to those who have been ignoring the God of the universe. Father, I pray that You would bring us to acknowledge Him. You said every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that He is Lord. You have taken care of us. You have guided us. You have led us. And God, I pray that those outside of Your wonderful family would, right now by faith in Jesus Christ, receive Your love message of even Your truth sent to them in this service today. Thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 111. This is the third in our series of who God is. We started with the greatness of God and moved to the sovereignty of God. Today we will look at the power of God in Psalm 111. This is a psalm of praise. “Praise the Lord” is *hallelujah* in any language.

Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant. He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: holy and awesome is His name. The fear of the LORD [which by the way is our next subject in this series] is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.
(Psalm 111:1-6)

Verse 6 is the key. He has declared to His people the power of His works, the power of God.

Let's look to the Lord in a moment of prayer.

Father, we thank You so much for the Bible and that we can study it and learn about You. And as we focus on the power of God, God I pray that You would help us to understand that our God can do miracles. So many of us have questioned and doubted what You can do, maybe because we have not seen what we wanted to see in our lives. But God, I pray that You would open up our hearts and expand our perspective of what You are doing. And give us a heart to believe You and trust You and to know that Your power is great. We thank You in Jesus' name, Amen.

There are really two concepts that I want you to understand about the power of God. One is that His power is unique. Now there are a lot of ways in which God does things that are, frankly, similar to what man does. But when we speak of the uniqueness of the power of God, what we mean is that God can do what no one else can do.

The second principle that we want you to leave with today is not only that His power is unique, but that His power is unlimited—that there is nothing too hard for Him to do. I do not know what you think about this, but I think a lot of us have reasons why we are doubting what God can do. Maybe you have wanted God to do something in your life. You prayed about it and it did not happen. People often focus on the power of God in a way that man, in technologically advanced areas, can do the same thing. So we begin to question the power of God. We want to look at the uniqueness of God's power and the fact that it is unlimited. There is not anything that He cannot do.

Let's start by going to Psalm 71, as we look at the uniqueness of the power of God. His power is unique. The simple statement: no one can do what God can do. And we want to give you three examples of that. In Psalm 71:19 it says, "Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?"

Obviously, no one is like God. No one can do what He does.

Look at Psalm 77:13-14,

Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; who is so great a God as our God? [Obviously, no one.] You are the God who does wonders; you have declared Your strength among the peoples.

And yet there is also a corollary truth there that we need to understand. God has declared or shown His power among the people. But is it not also true that among the people of God, we also see evidence as to why we do not believe the power of God? We need to remember that. Sometimes, all of life appears to be contradictory to what we say we believe. We believe that God can do anything; that He is unique and no one can do what He can do. And yet the fact is that a lot of Christians live their lives without ever seeing any demonstration of the power of God—at least if it is operating, they do not understand it. They do not perceive it to be the power of God and so they wonder sometimes. It is like they go to church and they hear these things and know they should believe them, but they have not seen it in their own lives. So, do they really believe it that God's power is unique?

And I want to give you just three cases. First of all, let's take creation. Go to Isaiah 44, please. Let's take a look at creation to see that God is unique. No one can do what God can do. When was the last time you made a mountain? Or how about a galaxy? When was the last time you put together an ocean?

Hey, we were just on a Caribbean cruise. I did not know those Virgin Islands were a thousand miles from Miami, Florida. I did not know the boat trip would take two days. I woke up the first day (after a rough night) because we had some big, heavy swells and all that. And I woke up the first morning, pulled back the curtains and looked out my window. And what was there? Water, nothing else. Water. Next morning, same thing. Opened up the windows, water. Hey, you know, there is a lot of water in the world! Amen? But you know that vast amount of water is a testimony to the remarkable power of God!

On a clear night, (I usually tell folks from other states, that we in Southern California do not trust air that we cannot see) you know when the air is clear, on a beautiful clear day and especially a clear night, isn't it fabulous what we see? We look at the stars that just fill the heavens. Hey, our God is unique. There is no one who can do what He can do. The creation sometimes seems so far removed from us. God exhorts us to look at it all the time, so you will not forget what He can do.

What do you do when you are in a traffic jam in the morning going to work? I mean, I always think that what God is teaching me is patience. I do not really often think about the beauty of the creation. I have a real problem with traffic. I am not sure it is a part of the plan of God. You understand? I sometimes think of all the things that I should be doing right then. Well listen, just look out the window and look at what is around—smell the roses. Look at the mountains and look at the stars. Realize that God can do what no one else can do.

In Isaiah 44:24, the case is presented to us.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, [No one else helped Him.] Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself."

The uniqueness of God. No one can do what He can do and no one helped Him do it.

Isaiah 45:5–7, 18 says,

"I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me. That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things." For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other."

On and on it goes and God says, “There isn’t anybody like Me. Who did you think would be compared with Me? Look at creation.” And you should understand that the power of God is unique. No one can do what He can do.

Let me give you a second line of thought. Turn back to Isaiah 44 which not only speaks of His creation, but of His control of time, events, and circumstances. In our previous message on the sovereignty of God, we mentioned this point and I want you to see it now in the light of His power. In Isaiah 44: 6, God speaks about His power in controlling time, events, and circumstances in our lives.

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the First and I am the last; besides Me there is no God. [His uniqueness again] And who can proclaim as I do? [Can you do that? Can you say something is going to happen and it happens?] Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, [You think you can do it? Go ahead and do it.] since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? [Haven’t I mapped it all out?] You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.” (Isaiah 44:6–8)

Folks, you know one of the greatest proofs or evidences of the Bible being the unique and supernatural book that it is, is the fact that we see fulfilled prophecy in its pages. Not just unfulfilled things that are yet to come; but we have prophecies that we can prove historically, when they were written. And there are prophecies that predict nations, their rise and their fall, and it has already happened in history. And we know the Bible was written before the things that were prophesied happened. Fulfilled prophecy is an enormous testimony to the inerrancy and inspiration of this Book.

But God is saying, “Listen, it takes My power to do that. You think you can do it, then go ahead and do it. Map out the next one hundred years. Let’s see if everything comes to pass just like you predicted.” God controls it all. His power is being demonstrated.

Look at Isaiah 46:5.

To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike? [Obviously you can’t do it with anyone.] Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’ Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My

counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.
(Isaiah 46:5, 9–11)

Hey, that sounds to me like He is in charge. Amen? You want to know about the power of God? Then see it in creation and see it in His control of all time, events, and circumstances throughout history.

But let me give you another idea to bring it closer to home. You can see the uniqueness of the power of God in the care of His people. Look at Isaiah 43, in particular the people of Israel. They have gone through a lot and God has taken care of them and fulfilled many promises to them and He will fulfill a lot more. In Isaiah 43 I read these wonderful words in the opening thirteen verses about the care of God for His people, and that no one could have done it like He did. It says,

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ And to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth—Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.”
Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, And let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, And show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear and say, “It is truth. You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, And there was no foreign god among you; Therefore you are My

witnesses,” says the LORD, “that I am God. Indeed before the day was, I am He; And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?” (Isaiah 43:1–13)

Now that is “a statement” from God. What He is saying to His people is, “Look, I’ve done this all for you. And I am predicting many wonderful things in the future. And though you go into captivity, I’ll bring you back from every part of the globe. I am going to do it all. I love you. I’ll take care of you. No matter what trouble you’re in. No matter how the rivers may overflow you or the fire may scorch you, I’ll be there and I’ll take care of you. Why? Because there is no God like Me.”

The uniqueness of our God, His power is unique.

But the second principle I want you to see and one we want to spend some time with, is that His power is unlimited. There is nothing too hard for God to do. Turn to Psalm 145 please. Not only is His power so unique that no one can do what God can do, but His power is unlimited. There is nothing too hard for Him to do. In Psalm 145, look at the opening verses.

I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. [Now look down at verse 10.] All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. (Psalm 145:1–13)

They shall talk of what?—Your powerful acts. They shall talk of Your power. God’s power is unlimited. There is nothing too hard for Him to do. And let me give you just four ways in which you can see the unlimited power of God.

1) In the very first book of the Bible, after the story of creation, it is emphasized in the miraculous birth of a boy named Isaac. Turn to Genesis 18 again. God brings His enormous power of creation down to the human level and shows us what He can do in our lives and our experiences. The power of God is unlimited. It was emphasized in the miraculous birth of Isaac, a boy born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. They were

told they were going to have a child when Sarah was eighty-nine and Abraham was ninety-nine. “Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing” (Genesis 18:11).

You know, every time I read this story—as many of you know it is one of my favorite stories—I get a lot of humor rolling. I will try to be cool on it, but understand that it is funny to me in a lot of areas. One of the funniest things I thought about is the first time I ever got a hold of this story, I know God said they were old, well advanced in age. And when I first started a church there was a couple in the church who was, in my opinion, very old. You know what scares me? I am now older than they were at the time. So when you say old person, you have got to kind of evaluate it. But I guess when you get to be 90 and 100 we can say old, okay?

Now it says,

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” [I mean, take a look at him, he’s no spring chicken.] And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’” [Would God not say to you, “Why did you think that I could not undo what is troubling you?” The Lord said] “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:12–14)

You know, sometimes I think when we read the Bible we do not read it carefully. It is almost like we think Abraham said, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” It was the Lord who said that. I wonder how you would respond if the Lord came right up to you and looked you straight in the eyes and said, “Is there anything too hard for Me to do?” You see, we can talk about the unlimited power of God, that there is nothing too hard for Him to do; but the fact is that a lot of us question His power—especially in a crisis or a difficult time. When we need help and it does not seem to be forthcoming, and we have prayed and there has been no answer. Where is the power of God? And God would look you straight in the eye and say, “Is there anything too hard for Me to do? Is that what you think?”

We see the unlimited power of God early in the history of the Bible. In the history of the world, for that matter, it was emphasized in the miraculous birth of that child named, Isaac. *Isaac* in Hebrew means “laughter”. This was God’s little joke on them for laughing at His power. You can imagine what the kid had to say when he went to school. I like to think they asked him, “How old are your parents?” “Well, dad is about 110.” Can you imagine the embarrassment when everybody cracked-up laughing every time they looked at the kid. That is what his name means. “Why did they call you laughter?” “Well, you should see my dad...”

2) We are talking about the unlimited power of God, so turn to the Book of Job. It not only was emphasized in the miraculous birth of the boy Isaac, it was also explained by

God in His answer to Job. Now folks, the book of Job is an interesting book. It is the kind of book you have to read at one sitting. You do not just take it piecemeal because you will get confused. As a matter of fact, I have observed that Christians who are down or discouraged or defeated will often read Job. First of all Job lost everything; then he had sores all over his body and his wife told him to curse God and die. I mean, why do you keep on with this “faith business” when look at what is happening to you? And a lot of people read Job and they try to identify with him. Then they take some verses out, like the advice of his friends and they think that is what God is saying to him. And so you miss the whole message of Job. You know what the message of Job is? When we ask, “Why, Lord, am I suffering? Why, Lord, am I going through all this trouble?” The message of Job is that we do not know why.

“But I want to know why.”
“I am not going to tell you.”
“But I cannot go on unless I know why.”
“Well, then fold up. I’m not telling.”

There is not an answer in Job except that God knows what He’s doing. He can do anything. There is nothing too hard for Him to do, so keep quiet.

Have you ever as a parent tried to teach your kids the Bible and had them ask you questions? I remember when my kids were really small, (in fact, our oldest one was the only one that could really talk at that point, and boy did he talk) I would say something and he would raise his hand. He would say, “Well, why?” I would explain it. He would say, “Well why?” I would explain it again. “Why?” You know, and the ultimate answer hit me one day when he said, “Why, God? Why, God?” Why do kids ask questions like that? I did not know what to do. I turned to him and I said, “Why you?” I was so frustrated. Why, why, why, why, why? Everybody wants to know why. You know what the message of Job is? We are not going to find out a lot of this stuff. And God likes it that way.

In Job 40:1 here is what God did when He answered Job, as he kept wondering why this was happening to him. His friends are trying to tell him and he is not getting an answer. So in verse 1, God answers Job:

Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said:
“Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.”
Then Job answered the LORD and said:
“Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You?” (Job 40:1-4)

No sweat. Carry on. In verse 6, the Lord starts to answer him and then look at verse 15, “Look now at Behemoth”—as those of you who were in our series in Genesis know that I believe it is a dinosaur. God said, “I made him along with you.” Verse 19 says, “He is the first of the ways of God; only He who made him can bring near His sword.” What God is

saying is: “I made that big beast so that you would know that, not only did I make him and obviously I have power, but I am the only one that can get rid of him.”

Job 41:1 says, “Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook?” I believe this was another big dinosaur. Some say that these two animals are probably a brontosaurus and a plesiosaurus. I do not know. But God says, “Can you do that? You obviously aren’t handling that one very well either.” I just love this story.

Job 41:10 says, “No one is so fierce that he would dare stir him up. Who then is able to stand against Me?” God’s power is unlimited.

Now let’s get to the punch line in Job 42:1. This is after Job heard about these two big animals which God had made and that nobody can handle.

Then Job answered the Lord and said: “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’” (Job 41:1–3)

Hey folks, why is God holding back from us the information that we all want to know? “Why is this happening to me?” Job says, “Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand” (Job 42:3). I like that. You know, most human communication is uttering things that we do not understand. Have you noticed that?

A lady last week told me that she learns best by talking. She said that *after* I said “When you are talking, you are not learning anything.” She said, “That’s not true. I learn best when I talk.” She said, “Many, many times when somebody asks me something, I do not really know what I’m going to say, but once I get into it, it all comes out right.” Now folks, that is a little dangerous in my opinion, but it is kind of true.

You know, when people ask you something and you want to make sure they think that you have the answer, you might say, “Well, there are several views on that.” And what that basically means is that you do not have any idea what you are going to say. But you kind of make it up as you go along and as you are talking they might say, “Wow, that’s heavy. That’s really good.” You think, *Hey, not bad. I think that is right. Yeah!* So all of a sudden you have talked yourself into some sort of understanding. Well, I’ve got a theological word for all of that, okay? *Baloney!*

You know, we do not understand like we think we do. You know what Job learned through all of this? Hey, life is difficult to understand. And Job says,

These things are too wonderful for me. I did not know them. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, “I will question you, and you shall answer Me.” [Okay. I am going to answer You. I got the message.] I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. [All he

had to do was look at those two big animals and what is his conclusion?] Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:3–6)

That is the exact opposite of what our New Age thinking of the day says. Job's view after hearing that: God can do anything and you don't need to know why. What He will do, He will do. And leave it to Him and He will take care of it, because He is a God who can do anything. So keep quiet. And Job says, "You know, You are right. I abhor myself. I repent in dust and ashes." And then God just pours out blessings on him because that is the answer he is looking for.

Didn't you know that? We do not want to repent and change our mind. We want to think that we can do something. "I need to understand, and if I know why then I will..." No, you will not. Hey, come on. Whatever God is going to do, He is going to do. Why don't you trust Him? Is it because down deep inside you are afraid that He will blow it? Are you afraid that He cannot handle it because your deal is too big? Listen, the Bible says that creation is the finger play of God. "When I consider the heavens, the work of Your fingers" (Psalm 8:3). What do you think your problem is? He could probably sneeze and solve it. You know, He can just blow—and so much for David's problem!

Did you think there was something too hard for God to do in your life? And I hear it over and over and over again from believers. We better go back and read the message of Job! When God talked about the unlimited nature of His power and that there is nothing too hard for Him to do, He emphasized it in a very practical story—in the miraculous birth of Isaac. He then explained it in His answer to Job. Even though you do not understand the circumstances, understand this: God can do anything He wants to do, any time He wants to do it. And Job needed to trust Him.

3) Let me give you a third example. Turn to Ephesians 1. The unlimited power of God, and the fact that there is nothing too hard for Him to do, was also exercised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You want to see God's mighty power? Then look at what He did.

In Ephesians 1:19–21, Paul said that he wanted us to know and understand "what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe." You want to know what it is? Here it is:

According to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.

If you want to see the power of God, then look at the body, in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Do you believe He rose from the dead in a physical body?

The Bible says if you do not believe that, you are not a Christian. “I don’t care what you say.” Well, that is only recorded in the Bible.

A man told me recently, he said, “How do you even know Jesus lived?” “Well, it talks about Him in the Bible. He is mentioned in other literature, but especially in the Bible.” He answered, “Oh, that’s just the Bible.” I said, “Well, how do you know George Washington lived?” “Well, everybody knows that.” I said, “Well it is only recorded in a history book. How do you know he lived? Did you ever meet the guy?” He answered, “Well, of course not. He’s dead.” I asked, “You actually believe that somebody existed just because you read it in a book?” He said, “Well sure. How else do we believe anything?” “I said, “Notice please, the Bible is a Book.”

Why is it that people are so hostile? Why do they have so much animosity? It is because we are talking about that which is the truth, the living God. His power in Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. God says, “You want to know what I can do? I can do anything. Bang! I’ll raise My Son Jesus from the dead. And I’ll prove to everybody that I can do anything.” Because He lives, we shall live. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet he shall live” (John 11:25). You want to know about the power of God? Look back 1900 years ago at the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

By the way, the most, well-attested fact of history before the printing press was invented, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is something that an unbelieving world does not want to hear and does not want to listen to. If Jesus did come back from the dead, then He is who He claimed to be. And you are in serious jeopardy if you have never put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Is He Lord? Is He a liar? Is He a lunatic? Who is He? The Bible says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). You want to know the greatness of the power of God? Look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

4) Let me give you one more example. When we talk about the power of God being unlimited and that there is nothing too hard for Him to do, we also see it as it is experienced in the life of the believer. And here it gets a little fuzzy for some of us—experienced in the life of the believer—you can see the unlimited power of God and that He does what no one else can do. Let me give you some reasons why this is true.

Turn to Matthew 19 and let’s take a look at salvation for an example. It takes the power of God to save somebody. You say, “Well, I asked the Lord to come into my heart.” I explain, “Well that’s nice, but God’s power is necessary to bring you back from the dead, spiritually. In order for you to be a Christian, you need a spiritual awakening. You need to be born again and that is caused by God.” A lot of people who say they are Christians really are not, because they have never had a spiritual awakening in their heart. They have not been born by the power of God.

A lot of people say they are Christians by the performance of man, rather than the power of God. A rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, “What good thing should I do to inherit eternal life?” The man was rich. Jesus put His finger on the sore spot in his life and told him to dump his riches and then they would talk about it. “Then you can follow Me” (Mark 10:21, paraphrased). He went away sorrowful. He had many possessions. He could not make the decision.

In Matthew 19:23–26, Jesus turned to the disciples and said:

Assuredly, I say to you, that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible. But with God, [what?] all things are possible.

You see folks, it takes the power of God to bring somebody salvation. So in our very salvation that we experience as believers, we see a demonstration of the power of God. On the other side, I see a lot of frustrated people who have tried to save themselves and it does not work—but they try.

There is a story that I really enjoy from the life of D. L. Moody, who was one of America’s greatest evangelists at the turn of the last century. After a meeting, D. L. Moody was walking with his song leader down the streets of Chicago. They were just going shopping for something. They had a meeting the night before and they were walking down the street and a guy was literally coming down the gutter of the street. He was really stoned. He was just drunk as all get-out. He was wobbling from the curb to the gutter. And so the song leader was kind of ribbing Dr. Moody a lot and he said, “Say, isn’t that one of your converts from last night?” D. L. Moody, who was so humorous, hardly batted an eye at any kind of confrontation like that. He said, “Well you know he must be, because he is certainly not the Lord’s.” You have to think about that.

There are a lot of people who talk themselves into becoming Christians. They say all the right words, sign on the dotted line, and pick up the vocabulary—you’re in! Let me tell you something, it takes the supernatural power of God to save somebody. And that is why a lot of folks are not saved because they have never known the power of God.

Let me give you a second thing in the life of a believer. Not only in the salvation that we receive, but how about sufferings that we encounter? Look at 2 Corinthians 12. You want to know about the power of God? I will tell you about the power of God. It is not simply found in the fact that somebody is healed of an illness, it is also found in the midst of their suffering. In 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, we read that Paul had a thorn in the flesh, some sort of physical problem. He begged God to take it away from him. God did not do so. In verse 9, he got this message from the Lord:

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Folks, I have never seen a more thrilling or powerful testimony to the power of God in the midst of suffering than what we saw on our Caribbean cruise. We had a couple who wanted to renew their marriage vows. This was a couple who had come to know Christ and they listened to our broadcast. And the man had contracted Lou Gehrig's disease and he was dying. Already he had lost the ability to use his hands and he fell over a couple of times on the trip. People were alarmed by it because he was losing all ability to control himself. His wife and he, after I talked to them personally, they granted me permission to have them literally go in front of everybody and tell the story of what was happening to them. He had a little over a year to live and he was dying. Our hearts were broken and people were crying all over the place listening to this man. And in private what he told me and he also expressed it publicly, he said, “David, I finally learned what the power of God is.” He said, “the power of God is inside when you know you are dying.” He said, “I thought I knew what it was. I didn't know it at all.”

You talk about God's power. God can do what no one else can do. I have found that to be true myself—not in such a powerful way as that man had, but I have found it in the midst of emotional turmoil and defeat—that God could put peace right in my heart. It is an unexplainable peace. I have found when circumstances were so discouraging that the average person would be bummed out, but God could put joy in my heart and make me happy in the midst of it. Yes, I know something about the power of God. And although every single friend, circumstance, and event around you is trying to help, I have found that only God can do for you inside what needs to be done. Do you know the power of God in the midst of suffering?

Let me bring you a third case. Turn to Philippians 4, where we see the power of God experienced in the life of the believer also in the supply of his needs. In Philippians 4:11–13, 19 it says,

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

I was thinking a lot about this message throughout the week. And there were so many other messages I had to give last week and prepare for people. And my mind was kind of going crazy for a while, trying to adjust all of this. One day we were on the island of St. Thomas and we went over across the hill (mountain) over to Megan's Bay, a nice little beach area. Some of you may have been there. And we went over with some friends from the church.

We were walking down the beach, looking for a place—you know, a little quiet place to be on the beach for a couple hours—and we were wondering where to stop to put our things. As we were walking along the beach, my message had been going through my mind all week and I had been trying to think of things (in the midst of everything else that needed to be done), and how God supplies our needs. And it just caught me funny. I have been thinking about it ever since it happened. We were looking for a place on the beach and all of a sudden, I walked by and there was a five dollar bill lying in the sand, right in the sand. And I said, "Right over here, this is the place! Four cokes please." But do you understand? It is a simple, little, dinky thing like that, which is a wonderful reminder that God will supply all of our needs. Sometimes it is the smallest thing that you are never expecting that God uses to say, "Hey, I'm going to take care of you. Don't you worry about it."

Let me give you one final thing. Turn to Ephesians 3. You talk about experiencing the power of God not only in the salvation we received, and even in the sufferings we encounter, and in the supply of the needs that we face; but I see also the power of God in the strength that we need in the inner man. In Ephesians 3:14–21 it says,

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might [power] through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [that He would really be at home in your life] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

He is not done with the book, but it is time to say, Amen. Folks listen, the power of God is often seen in the inner man, not the outer man. We always want the outward, visible demonstration to know that God can do it. Well, once in a while God does that. But let me tell you, one of the wonderful demonstrations of God's power is inside the believer in the area that is not seen but we experience in our relationship to God. I do not think there

is a greater need in any believer than to know the power of God in the inner man. To know God's power when everything is out of whack and it looks like nothing is in control and we cannot go on another day and to know the power of God within us!

I can still see the eyes of the gentleman I referred to, with tears down his face and his hands totally immobilized, barely able to stand up. I can still see his eyes as he said, "David, when you can't use your body any more then you begin to know the power of God."

The world is into everything that demonstrates the outward: fitness, aerobics, nutrition, you name it—everything. It is like the Greek–Roman age is back again with all of its New Age thinking, which is not new. It is old, with all of its emphasis on the body and the external and all of it. And we have lost sight of something, friends—the power of God can be seen inside when the outside does not work anymore.

Let's close with prayer.

Lord, You know how many people here, listening to what we've just been talking about, have never experienced Your power in terms of becoming a Christian. You made it so simple. You told us to believe the message of the gospel about Jesus, that He died for our sins and that He arose again from the dead. Lord, it is not our faith that saves us, according to the Bible. It is Jesus Christ who saves us. It is not our performance that makes it happen, it's Your power. You say we are not only saved by the power of God, but we're kept by the power of God. Lord, I would pray for those here in our audience who are not sure if they died today whether they would be in heaven. I pray that You, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, would cause them, Lord, to put their faith in Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior. That they would confess with their mouth that He is Lord and believe in their hearts that He was raised from the dead. You said if that happens they'll be saved. Your power will bring them to Yourself. God, I pray for many Christians here in the audience who are going through tough times, difficult times. Perhaps they have some burden that is heavy on their heart. God may we once again know of Your power in the inner man. God, thank You for what You can do. There is no one like You. We praise You in Jesus' name. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

We are studying Proverbs 1, on the fear of God. We are going to deal with three questions today. 1) What is the fear of God? 2) Why should we, in fact, fear God? 3) How do you fear God—if you do fear Him—how do you do it?

There is a lot in the Psalms and Proverbs that speaks about the fear of God. In Proverbs 1, we read:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity;
To give prudence to the simple,
To the young man knowledge and discretion—
A wise man will hear and increase learning,
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,
To understand a proverb and an enigma,
The words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:1-7)

Prov 2:1-5

My son, if you receive my words,
And treasure my commands within you,
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding;
Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the LORD,
And find the knowledge of God.

Prov 3:1-8

My son, do not forget my law,
But let your heart keep my commands;
For length of days and long life
And peace they will add to you.

Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart,
And so find favor and high esteem

In the sight of God and man.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.
It will be health to your flesh,
And strength to your bones.

I read that Proverb in a Bible study several years ago and an elderly lady said to me, “That’s for me. My bones hurt.” Well, if your bones hurt today, we have got good news for you!

Let’s look to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank You so much for Your Word. And I pray that the understanding of the fear of the Lord may come into us with great force because of the Word of God’s teaching. Lord, there are a lot of us who really need to understand this, in a generation that has forsaken You and a culture that has decided to make decisions and live life without any regard for You and Your purposes and Your plans. God, I pray that it will be different for us and for those in our audience who have never yet made a commitment to You that is personal, life-changing, and spiritually awakening. God help us to see the need of that and may lives be changed today because of it. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

What is the fear of God? You know there are many ways to answer this question. I said after doing a long study on the word “fear”, and by the way, it appears so many times in the Bible that one wonders how much time you would need to have to finish it. But if you study every passage where it is used, you come to the conclusion that, fear, in terms of its in-depth Hebrew grammatical understanding, “fear” means fear. Amen? Now all the books I have that comment on fear, kind of go the other way. In fact, I just did a quick review of that in preparation for this message—although I remember well what they all say. But anyway, I just did a quick review and ran through them. And almost every last theology and commentary on this subject of the fear of God says, “Well, it is not exactly fear. It is reverential trust. It is awe. It is an understanding of how God is great.” Oh I know there are a lot of reasons behind that, as you will soon see. But the truth of the matter, without trying to run away from it, is that “fear” does mean fear. And yet, the Bible very clearly wants us to love God and tells us that if we have God’s kind of love, it will cast out fear.

So are those mutually exclusive? Well, it depends. First of all, it depends on whether you are talking about the human reaction of fear, or whether you are talking about the biblical understanding of fear. I believe the biblical understanding of fear is never to be absent from the believer’s heart—never.

Now part of my relationship to God involves my fear of God. In fact, there is a sense of which I can tell you that all believers fear God and all nonbelievers do not fear God. The very term “to

fear God” is a statement about who is a believer and who is not. But of course, we need a lot more than this.

What is the fear of God? I am going to use the Bible alone to tell you. Number one, I read in Proverbs 1:7 that it is the key to knowledge and wisdom. Turn to Proverbs 15:33 and you will also find the same thing in Psalm 111:10, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. If you want to be smart, really smart, really understand life and what it is all about—the meaning and purpose of it and how everything functions and works—if you want wisdom and knowledge, the Bible says, “you need the fear of the Lord.” You might ask me, “What is the fear of God?” It is the key to wisdom and knowledge. Whatever it is, we desperately need it.

In Proverbs 15:33 it says, “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility.” The last phrase is a parallel statement. The “honor” here would be, “being wise.” And before that honor is humility,” which is the fear of the Lord. It is a type of parallelism in Hebrew poetry that shifts subject and direct object in the two parallel statements. The fear of the Lord is the humility and the wisdom is the honor. So before you get wisdom, before you are honored that way, you need humility, which is what? It is the fear of the Lord. So there you are getting some insight into what it is. But the key thing to notice is that whoever has the fear of God in his life is being constantly instructed in wisdom. So those who fear God are going to be much smarter and wiser, especially in terms of the application of knowledge, than those who do not.

Number two, turn back to Proverbs 2:5. You say, what is the fear of God? Well, it is the key to knowledge and wisdom. But the Bible teaches that it is the knowledge of God Himself. When you say “fear of God,” we are not talking simply about being scared; but we are actually talking about knowing God, and fear is the consequence of that. In verse 4 it says, “If you seek for wisdom, like you search for hidden treasure (you are really after it), then you will understand the fear of the Lord (parallel statement again) and find the knowledge of God.” What is the fear of the Lord? It is the knowledge of God.

Now turn to Proverbs 9:10 to read even a more pointed statement. It says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” That is how we started the book in Proverbs 1:7. Now Solomon picks it up again and says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (here is a parallel statement) and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

So, what is the fear of the Lord? It is the knowledge of God Himself. When you fear God, you have decided that knowing who God is is more important than anything else in life. Are you following? And isn't it interesting that our culture is bonkers—I mean, I am going to find another word to just describe their obsession—but they are bonkers with regard to learning about man and self. And we wonder why we are not wise. We wonder why we do not have the wisdom and knowledge of God. What is wrong? Well, the pursuit is wrong. If you are pursuing knowledge of yourself to find out who you are to really get your act together, first of all, it is a dead end street going nowhere. You are wasting your time, really. But if you are doing that, it is leading to that which is not wise. You will learn fast and rapidly that you will never discover the real wisdom that God wants to give you. It comes through knowing God.

Turn back to Psalm 33 for a third thing when you ask me, “What is the fear of God?” It is the key to knowledge and wisdom; it is the knowledge of God Himself. And number three, it is respect for the power of God's Word. Why do some people not pay much attention to the Bible and the Word of God in their life? Well, according to the Bible there is a problem here about the fear of God.

In Psalm 33:8–9 we read,

Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast.

You know, just thinking about Creation and how it came into existence is awesome. By the way, if you do not believe that the world was created by the direct Word of God, (guess what?) I am sorry, but you are not smart. And I am not discussing all the scientific theories that our world has come up with. If you do not believe that the universe was the result of the direct Word of God, it is heading you down a course of intellectual and moral blindness, whether you know it or not. “For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:9).

Okay, we Christians might argue over how long the days were, what the processes were and all of that. But listen, you remove God—In the beginning God created—and you are now on a road of moral and intellectual darkness. And the Bible speaks about that frequently. You don’t acknowledge God, you set Him aside, it is going to lead to the foolishness of your own imaginations—that’s in Romans 1. And God says you are without excuse once you do that. You are in big trouble.

So it is respect for the power of God’s Word. Now God spoke and it was done. Remember folks, when God spoke and created the world, which is a result of the creative breath of God Almighty. Well, so is man the result of the creative breath of God. The Bible says that the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into His nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. So the material, physical universe is the product of the creative breath of God and so is man and woman. By the way, so is the written Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16 it says, “All Scripture (*graphe*, writing, that which is written), every Scripture is inspired by God, is God breathed.”

So in the Bible, we have learned three things that are the result of the simple word of God: the creative power of God by the simple spoken word; the physical, material universe (including people—man and woman); and third, the Word of God itself—the written Word of God. So you see the fear of God is a key even to your whole response to the Word of God.

You say, what is the fear of God? It is the key to knowledge and understanding and wisdom. It is also the knowledge of God Himself, and it is respect for the power of God’s Word. You stand in awe. You fear, why?—because He spoke and it was done.

Turn please to Proverbs 8:13 to see a fourth thing that the Bible says is the fear of God. It says,

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.

When you fear God, you hate what He hates. You hate sin. You say, “What is the fear of God?” It is the hatred of sin. And what do we see in our culture? We see a giant toleration of sin. We see also a redefinition of sin—things that God says are wrong, people are saying that it is okay. Listen, if you fear God, what that fear of God is, is a hatred of sin. Not sinners, sin. We love people but we hate what they do—hatred of sin. If you do not hate sin, you in fact are not described in the Bible as one who fears God. And you are living very dangerously as a believer if

that is what you claim to be. People who really love the Lord and are really committed to Him, hate evil and sin. They know what it does. They know the damage and destruction, and they hate it wherever it is. But they love people.

For point number five, turn to Proverbs 14. You say, “What is the fear of God?” It is the key to wisdom and knowledge, the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. It is the knowledge of God Himself. It is the respect for the power of God’s Word. It is the hatred of sin. Proverbs 14:27 adds another aspect. It says, “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life to avoid the snares of death.” You say, “What is the fear of God?” It is a fountain of life. Whatever this is, the fear of God, it is the root so to speak, or the fountain out of which gushes all that is what we call life—and especially as it relates to eternal life. Because obviously, the person is alive about whom he is saying it. So it is not simply the physical life problem. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life to avoid the traps of death. And what he is saying is referring to a believer. All of that life is being promised to the believer by our Lord. Everlasting, eternal, wonderful life and all of its blessings, is really rooted in the fear of the Lord. So, that is why the fear of the Lord is sometimes a statement just simply indicating a believer in contrast to a nonbeliever. All believers should fear God. All unbelievers do not fear God. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, out of which all life springs.

Turn to Proverb 23 and I will give you one more aspect of the fear of God. When you say, “What is the fear of God?” It is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. It is the knowledge of God Himself. It is a hatred of sin. It is a fountain of life. But according to Proverbs 23:17–18, it is also “hope in the Lord.” And here is where we begin to understand a little bit of what the fear of God means. It says,

Do not let your heart envy sinners,
But be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day;
For surely there is a hereafter,
And your hope will not be cut off.

When you have fear in the Lord, it is hope in the Lord. So you do not envy what the world is offering or what they say is cool or neat or sharp or wonderful or tremendous for you. You do not envy it. You do not want anything to do with it. The world is passing away. What the fear of God is, is hope in the Lord. You know that what He has promised will come true.

Hebrews 6 says that hope is a sure anchor of the soul. Our souls are in so much turmoil. Why? Because there is no anchor of the soul. We are bouncing on the water, so to speak. We are not anchored down. And the anchor is the hope and confidence that we have that God cannot lie; and He has promised to us wonderful things, so we trust Him.

Now I begin to learn a little bit more about what the fear of God is. It is the key to knowledge and wisdom. It does mean to hate sin and all of that, but it is hope and it is confidence in the Lord. It is not confidence in what life presents to me, but in the Lord Himself. And you can almost see when the fear of God is dribbling out of your life when you lose confidence in the Lord, and all of a sudden your circumstances and the events of your life and even people in your circle of ministry, become the key focus and you are getting your hope from them. Soon you will see that the fear of God is lacking. You are more worried about what people think about you. You are more worried about how the circumstances of your life are turning out. And if they are in your “category negative”—that is, you do not like what is happening—all of a sudden, you are getting bent out of shape. Yeah, things are getting worse. You are losing your confidence. You are losing

your trust. What is happening? Well, your problem is lacking the fear of the Lord. We need to fear God.

Now, let me give you some reasons to answer the second question: “Why should we fear God?” Why? Turn to Proverbs 10:27, please. Why should we fear God? And there are a lot of wonderful reasons why. One is that it prolongs days. You say, “Man, I can hardly get through a day now, you are telling me it is going to be longer?” It is amazing when you read a verse, what you think. That is why study is good. The Bible says, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who has no cause to be embarrassed or ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). At first glance sometimes you wonder.

Proverbs 10:27 says,

The fear of the LORD prolongs days,
But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

Now, right away comes forth a doctrine that I believe is incorrect, but is taught by many, many Christians. It teaches that if you fear God, you will live longer than the guys who do not fear God. That is what a lot of people believe that verse says. Looks like it, doesn't it, on the surface? Do you know any wicked people who have lived a long time? Do you know any people who have walked with the Lord who have, so to speak, had their lives cut short—did not live very long on the earth? No, Proverbs is not presenting the earthly life as the big deal. The hope of Proverbs, the wonderful joys and blessings of Proverbs, are not rooted in whatever this life has.

Remember the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians. “If only in this life we have hope, we are of all men most [what?] miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19, paraphrased). That does not sound like somebody who has the fear of the Lord in his life, who thinks prolonging days means just living longer. Hey, there are a lot of reasons why one does not want to live longer.

Let me give an example. I was thinking about this the other day. When a loved one has a heart attack and dies, sometimes it is a shock—especially if there is no warning and they just die. And you know we almost all, in hearing that go, “Gasp!” But you know, if they know the Lord, the response ought to be, “Wow, that's great!” Imagine that. I mean, it is like one day you are here and “bang,” the next moment you are in heaven. “Boy, that lucky guy! Man, wasn't that something? Praise the Lord that he died of a heart attack!” You know, if you say that, they will call for the guys in the white coats. They will ask, “Why aren't you more grieving?” But listen, if we are absent from the body and present with the Lord, though we sorrow over missing the loved one, isn't it true that that is a very sweet and gracious thing of God?

Now on the other hand, have you not also seen what I have seen and still live with every day, the suffering and agony of a loved one? They are not going to get better. The suffering gets worse. And you tell me to rejoice because the fear of the Lord prolongs days and all that means is that they may live to be ninety. Hey, they might have wanted to die when they were seventy, if they had only known what the next twenty years would have been.

No, God's Word here is not promising earthly extensions. God is talking about the hope that we have in the Lord. You talk about prolonged days! We are talking about living with the Lord forever! So why should we fear God? Because it prolongs days and that means we are going to be with the Lord forever. It is a statement again about those who have come to believe in Him. If you fear God, you put your hope in the Lord and your confidence is in Him. And what a wonderful promise we have of living forever with God. That is special.

Turn to Proverbs 14 again. A second reason *why* we should fear God is because it protects us from some very serious problems.

Proverbs 14:26 says,

In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence,
And His children will have a place of refuge.

We are leaning on God's everlasting arms. "Oh God, You are our shield and our fortress. You are the lifter up of our head" (Psalm 3:3, paraphrased). And there are so many wonderful declarations of God's protection. "The Lord is a sun and shield. He will give grace and glory. No good will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11, paraphrased). The Lord will deliver us.

The fear of the Lord protects us. In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence. If you understand that it is putting your confidence in God, in who He is and not who man is, then you realize how you can have strong confidence—no matter what happens. If you really fear the Lord, there is a refuge there. "He hideth my soul." There is a place of refuge.

Proverbs 14:27 says,

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
To turn one away from the snares of death.

Turn to Proverbs 19. God has promised protection to those who fear the Lord—confidence and a refuge. A place to go when it looks like all hell is breaking out around you. Hey, in the Lord there is strong confidence, no matter what happens.

And in Proverbs 19:23, it says,

The fear of the LORD leads to life,
And he who has it will abide in satisfaction;
He will not be visited with evil.

God is promising protection of the believer. Even Paul prayed, in 2 Thessalonians 3:1–3,

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

When Jesus, in John 17, was praying to his heavenly Father, he said, "Holy Father, keep those whom You have given to me." He said, "Keep them from the evil one." And I read throughout Scripture that those who put their confidence and trust in the Lord are protected in unique and special ways from evil and the evil one, more than perhaps any of us have ever really recognized. Thank God for it. God takes care of us.

This brings me to a third reason why I should fear God. Turn to Psalm 33. Not only because it prolongs days and involves living forever with the Lord; not only because it protects us from evil

and the evil one; but also, it provides for our needs. It provides for our needs. It is interesting that there are a lot of people who wonder if God will provide for their needs.

In Psalm 33:18–19 it says,

Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, [I like that]
On those who hope in His mercy,
To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine.

Look at Psalm 34:8–10 please,

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!
Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! ...
[Parallel statements here. Trust in the Lord. Fear the Lord.]
There is no want to those who fear Him.
The young lions lack and suffer hunger;
But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

They will not lack any good from the Lord. What a fascinating statement that is. God is going to provide for all of our needs. You say, “Man, I knew it! That new house, we got it.” Wait a minute. A lot of us struggle with how God provides for our needs. Isn’t it interesting that this passage in Psalm 34 is rooted in the goodness of God? Oh taste and see that the Lord is good. This is rooted in our trust in Him and that there is no lack. God will always give what is good.

Now isn’t it possible, my friends, to have something happen in our lives (or not happen that we expected) that we would regard as “bad” and He would regard as “good”? Oh yes. The thing that causes one to have the fear of God and trust in the Lord is that everything—no matter whether it is my perspective of how bad or good it is—everything God does, will be and is good. Do you believe it was good for you to lose that job? Do you believe it was good for you to face that trial and that circumstance and that pain and that sorrow and that fear? You know, sometimes God is gracious and in our lives He gives us understanding of those things. But I am to trust Him to the point that even though the understanding never comes, I will still put my confidence in the Lord that everything He has done is good.

You see, that is rooted also in my understanding of the sovereignty of God. All things are being worked together for good to those who love God. If I fear the Lord then I will recognize that. I know God provides all my needs, no matter what it is. Now, I may come up with my own list. I do not know if in marriage you have this problem, but I used to teach (until I realized what a problem it was) that you ought to make a list of things to do. You know, you call it a “honey do” list. You know, instead of worrying about communication and getting hurt, just make a list of things. The trouble is with preaching this, my wife took me seriously and started making a list of things I ought to do or not do. And so I have dropped that out of my teaching and preaching.

But anyway, it is interesting because in our list of things that we might make and then say, “This is really my need.” You know, we make a list and pray about those needs. And then we fail to recognize what God is in fact doing to answer the prayers requests on our little list—sometimes He is telling us “No.” And sometimes He is not even responding to us because He has something else He wants to do. But He doesn’t get glory. He doesn’t get trust. There is no fear of God because our list is the biggie. And we say, “God, as soon as You do something about my list, then

I'll know that You exist." Hey wait a minute. In the beginning God created. The Bible does not set out to prove to you the existence of God. It assumes it. It asks you to respond to it, to believe in Him and to trust Him no matter what. And if you never see anything in your life that is in your "category good," would you still trust Him? Job said, "Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him." If He takes everything away from me (it will look like He did), I am still going to trust the Lord because of who I know the Lord is, from the Bible. He always does good and He will take care of us. That is what He said.

Now turn to Psalm 147. Let me give you a fourth reason why you should fear God. Not only because it prolongs your days, which involves living forever with God, it protects us from evil and the evil one, it provides for all of our needs, and God does good constantly for us; but folks, it also pleases the Lord to fear God. It pleases the Lord. Psalm 147:10.

He does not delight in the strength of the horse;
He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.

Do we have any guys who are into being buff? Go down to the club, man, work out. Hey, get into the weights. I did that as a young man. In fact, for quite a long time I really went after it and I loved it. I became a life member of a gym and all that stuff. You know, I never told my kids to do that but they did it too. And I know the grandkids are going to do it too. I will never forget one day I was working out in the gym on the leg machine—pumping it up, you know. And we were kind of having a little contest, a few of us that were playing ball together. We were trying to see who could push the most with our legs, you know. I remember a little kind of a thin guy who was not into sports or anything, but he was in the gym and he was a Christian. He was always talking about the Word. He came up to me and he quoted this verse. "God takes no pleasure in the legs of a man" and he walked away. Man, what a bummer!

Psalm 147:11 says,

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him,
in those who hope in His mercy.

Isn't that neat? Hey you know folks, it pleases the Lord when you fear Him. And in this passage you've got even another definition of the fear of the Lord. It involves hoping in the mercy of God. Mercy is holding back from us what we really deserve and getting His loving kindness and tenderness. Hoping in that is the same thing as fearing the Lord. When you fear the Lord, you recognize that were it not for His mercy, you would be zapped right now. What a neat passage. It pleases God.

And we have all this busyness going on. We are into everything and trying to prove that we can handle everything. All of life is like that. The Bible says that God does not take pleasure in that. He takes pleasure in those who fear Him.

Let me give you another reason. Turn to Psalm 25. You say, "Why should I fear God?" Well, it prolongs days. Eternal life is an issue there. It protects us from evil and the evil one. It provides for our needs. God will always do good to you. It pleases the Lord. But number five, it provides special blessings from the Lord, to fear God. And these are some of the neat things that God does throughout our lives. And we look back sometimes over the years and we say, "God has been so good." Count your blessings. Name them, one by one.

In Psalm 25:12–14 we read,

Who is the man that fears the LORD?
 Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.
 He himself shall dwell in prosperity,
 And his descendants shall inherit the earth.
 [Look at this next statement.]
 The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him,
 And He will show them His covenant.

God promises in these verses that He is going to really show a man the way that the Lord chooses. He is going to show him also things that a lot of folks do not understand or see. God is going to bless him. God is going to show him the impact of all the promises He has made to him. God is going to reveal things to this man that he never would have seen, had he not first of all, feared the Lord with all his heart. How interesting!

Turn to Psalm 31:19.

Oh, how great is Your goodness,
 Which You have laid up for those who fear You,
 Which You have prepared for those who trust in You
 In the presence of the sons of men!

Again, God is promising wonderful, special blessings that He has laid up and that He has prepared for those who fear the Lord. Again, trust in Him.

Turn to Psalm 85:9. Talk about special blessings. The Bible says,

Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him,
 That glory may dwell in our land.

Salvation is near to those who fear Him.

Turn to Psalm 103, please. I love these verses.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
 So great is His mercy toward those who [what?] fear Him;
 As a father pities his children,
 So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
 [Special blessing from God.]
 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
 On those who fear Him,
 And His righteousness to children's children. (Psalm 103:11,13,15)

It is like a statement of belief in the Lord. It is referring to believers and the blessing that God will bring.

Turn to Psalm 115, please. Look at verses 13 to 15.

He will bless those who fear the LORD,
 Both small and great.
 May the LORD give you increase more and more,
 You and your children.

May you be blessed by the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.

Why? Because you fear the Lord. Wow!

Look at Psalm 128:1 which says,

Blessed is every one who fears the LORD,
Who walks in His ways.
Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
Who fears the LORD. (Psalm 128:1,4)

How will he be blessed? Verse 3 says, your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house. Your children, like olive plants, all around your table. Listen to me, people, the Bible promises a happy marriage and a happy family life to those who fear the Lord. And you want to know why there is so much trouble? It is because we do not fear the Lord. We do not trust the Lord. We do not depend on the Lord. We do not hope in the Lord. And we wonder why things are a mess. God promises special blessings from His gracious hand if we will fear the Lord.

Psalm 145:19 says,

He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him;
He also will hear their cry and save them.

You say, “I’ve got a lot of desire.” Psalm 37 says, “Delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4, paraphrased). Make Him the joy of your heart. You will find your desire system is radically changed by the Lord Himself. The Bible says that to all those who fear Him, He will fulfill the desire of their heart. Wow! Tremendous promises!

Let me give you one more. Turn to Malachi 3. You say, “Why should we fear God?” Well, it prolongs days—talking about living forever with God. It protects us from evil and the evil one. It provides for our needs. God is always doing good. It pleases the Lord Himself. It provides special blessings from the Lord, abundant blessings. And number six, it promises future salvation. It promises future salvation. That is why we should fear the Lord.

In Malachi 3:16 it says,

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another;
And the LORD listened and heard them;
So a book of remembrance was written before Him
For those who fear the LORD
And who meditate on His name.

Malachi 4:2 says,

But to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness [It’s a title of the Messiah] shall arise
With healing in His wings;
And you shall go out
And grow fat like stall-fed calves.

He is talking about the future blessings of the Lord when the Messiah comes again. For whom is all of this done? Whose names are written in the book of the remembrance of God? Who are those who will find total, complete, absolute, perfect healing from the Messiah Himself forever and ever? It is for those who fear God.

Now let's ask the last question—we have three questions: 1) What is the fear of God? 2) Why should we fear God? And now 3) How do we fear God?

Turn to Deuteronomy 6, the fifth book of the Old Testament. How do you fear God? I mean, what does it actually mean if we are applying this in our life lives? Number one, you fear God by keeping His commandments. Obedience. Don't tell me that you fear God if you do not keep His word. God says this over and over and over again. I will hit some highlights.

Deuteronomy 6:2 says,

That you may fear the Lord your God to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command you.

Deuteronomy 6:24 says,

And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8: 6 says,

Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

Deuteronomy 13:4 says,

You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

Deuteronomy 17:19 says,

It shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Deuteronomy 28:58 says,

If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, then God would bring judgment.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? In Deuteronomy 31:12–13 it says,

Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.

I hope all of this Scripture tells you one thing: we are not talking about learning to be afraid and scared of God. But we are learning to recognize God in such a dominate way in our lives that obedience flows out of it. I want to do what God tells me to do. Those who fear God are geared towards obedience always.

Number two, turn to Exodus 20. You say, “How do you fear God?” First, by keeping His commandments—obedience. The Second way is by staying away from sin. Staying away from sin.

In Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people,

And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.”

You know that is almost a paradox. He tells the people not to be afraid. And then tells them that they would fear God. So we learn that fearing God is not simply being scared. And they were scared at this point because they saw a visible demonstration of God—fire, all of this. They were scared, really scared, frightened by what God did. And He said, “Hey, don’t be scared. Don’t be scared at all. I have come to test you. I want My fear to be before you, so that you may not sin. He had just revealed the consequences that could happen to somebody who disobeyed the Ten Commandments, which are found in Exodus 20. You see, the fear of God is staying away from sin.

In Proverbs 3:7, we had read that verse earlier, but it says,

Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

In Proverbs 16, verse 6 it says,

In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity;
And by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil.

You may ask, “What does it mean to fear God?” We are to do it with all of our heart, mind, and soul. It means keeping His commandments. And it means staying away from sin.

Number three, it means to serve the Lord. Those who fear God are not trying to find a way out of service. They are committed to service because they fear God.

In Deuteronomy 6:13 it says,

You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him.

In Deuteronomy 10:12 it says,

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Joshua challenged the people of Israel in Joshua 24:15 with the same thing. If you fear God, you will serve Him. He said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve." Those who fear the Lord are going to serve the Lord. They are going to do whatever they can to be a blessing to others and to do what God wants them to do.

So you see, when you ask me: "How do you fear God?" Keep His commandments and be obedient. Stay away from sin. And serve the Lord with all your heart; that is fearing God.

Turn to Deuteronomy 14. This one is going to hurt a little bit, so you better turn to the Bible. You know how you fear God in your life? It is by giving to the Lord a portion of your income. You might say, "I knew he would talk about money." I always love to talk about the man who visited here at Calvary Church on three occasions. He has not been back in several years, but he visited here on three occasions. He said to me, "I've been here three times." And he named the occasions. He said, "All three times you spoke about money and giving. I checked my records. It was the only three times I had spoken on money. He said, "Well, the way I see it, you always speak on money. I said, "You know, since I checked the records and those are the only three times I spoke on money, obviously you have only been here three times. And by the way, isn't it interesting that in the sovereignty of God, He would bring you on the Sundays that I would be speaking on giving?"

You know, you talk about giving, people back up. Wait a minute. Deuteronomy 14:22 says, "You shall truly tithe." Yes, tithe was like a taxation. I understand all that. Israel was a theocracy.

You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

Did you know that giving a portion on a regular basis of your income to God, keeps God on the front burner of your focus and perspective? That is what it means to fear the Lord. You recognize His sovereignty over all that you have. That is why a portion of your income is given to Him, to honor the Lord with the first fruits of your substance, as Proverbs 3:9-10 says. It is a recognition that all I have comes from God. And it is a commitment to God to honor Him, to worship Him, to say, "Lord, I know where all this comes from."

Number five as to how you fear God is by keeping His commandments, staying away from sin, serving the Lord, giving to the Lord and also by praising the Lord, which we will talk about more in our next message.

Psalm 22:23 says,

You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!

Psalm 135:20 says,

Bless the LORD, O house of Levi!
You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!

If you fear the Lord, you praise Him, you bless Him, and you give glory to Him.

And there is one last thing. Turn to Psalm 115:11. How do we fear God? It is by keeping His commandments, by staying away from sin, by serving the Lord, by giving to the Lord, and by praising the Lord. But here is the heart of it: by trusting in the Lord. We fear Him by trusting in the Lord.

In Psalm 115:11, it says,

You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord.
He is their help and their shield.

The choir sang that God is a shield about us. We learned in the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence. He is a place of refuge, as we are leaning on the everlasting arms.

I do not know where you stand today, but I will tell you that we need to trust the Lord with all of our hearts and not lean to our own understanding.

In Psalm 119:74 it says,

Those who fear You will be glad when they see me because I
have hoped in Your Word.

Do you trust in the Lord? Let's close with prayer.

Father, You know who in this audience fears You and who does not; who trusts and hopes in You; who recognizes You in all that they do and say; and who relies upon You daily. God, I pray for those in our audience who have never come to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. I pray that You would, right now, by the Holy Spirit of God, draw them to Yourself. Bring them, Father, by Your power, to see that we are sinners and cannot save ourselves and we need the Savior, who died on a cross 1900 years ago to pay for our sins and rose again from the dead, that we might live forever with Him. God help us to learn to fear You all of our days and to trust with all of our heart and not to lean on our own understanding. Father, work in our hearts to make those commitments that we know we should make. I pray for Your people, who claim to be Christians, who are not walking in the fear of the Lord. God bring us to a place of repentance and change so that we would come back to Your loving heart. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 150. This is the last psalm of this hymnbook of Israel, a praise book. Our subject today is the praise of God. We want to speak about what it means to praise the Lord.

Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary;
praise Him in His mighty firmament!
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals;
praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD! (Psalm 150:1–6)

The words “praise the Lord” is *hallelujah*. Count to three and let’s say, “Hallelujah.” One, two, three—“Hallelujah!”

I was sitting in an orchestra (right in front of it) waiting to go out and say a few comments, not realizing that I was right in front of the gentleman who played the cymbals. The first time he clashed those babies over my head I thought I was going home to be with the Lord. Little did I realize that all through that number he would continue to smash those things. And I’ll tell you that I had a headache for a week. And then I read this verse and not only does God want to be praised with loud cymbals—He says “with high sounding cymbals.”

God is into noise and He likes it loud. And in a day where it seems like we need just a moment to have a little quiet, it is such a relief and it is important to remember that God likes noise—lots of it.

How reluctant we are to praise Him. Sometimes we are embarrassed or hesitant, whatever. We do not want to make fools of ourselves. I would rather be a fool for Jesus’ sake. How about you? Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Let’s pray and ask God to help us praise Him.

Father, we thank You so much for this time. And God I pray that in these few moments together, You will help us, by examining the Word of God, to know what it means to praise You. And may, out of our hearts, come a tremendous

volume of praise to Your name. Thank You, Lord, for all the wonderful things that You are and that You do. And I pray that those in our audience who really are not sure of their own relationship with You, that they will understand that You are the God who alone is worthy to be praised. And we need to come through Your Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible says that He is the way, the truth and the life. And no man can come to You except through Him. Help us, Lord, to learn that, to apply it, and to believe it. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

What does it mean to praise the Lord? Turn to Psalm 34 and get your Bible handy. We are going to turn to a lot of verses and most of them will be in the Psalms. What does it mean to praise the Lord?

The praise of God, first of all, means that we exalt Him. We exalt Him. You cannot exalt Him too much. Psalm 34 says,

1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.
3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together. (Psalm 34:1-3)

Let's say verse three together again.

Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt His name together.

Turn to Psalm 108:5. When you say, "Praise God," you mean "exalt Him". You cannot put Him too high. He is the most high above all.

In Psalm 108:5 it says,

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,
and Your glory above all the earth.

Really folks, no one deserves to be mentioned in the same sentence with Him. We are to exalt the Lord.

Psalm 118:28 says,

You are my God, and I will praise You;
You are my God, I will exalt You.

“Praise” and “exaltation” are parallel words. What does it mean to praise God? It means to exalt to Him. Notice the psalmist indicates that a personal relationship with Him is necessary. “You are my God and I will praise You. You are my God and I will exalt You.” No one here is going to really praise and exalt the Lord without a personal relationship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ. That is so important to understand. That means we exalt Him.

Please turn to Psalm 66. The second thing we mean when we say, “praise the Lord,” is not only that we exalt Him, but that we also worship Him. We worship Him. Jesus, by the way, said in John 4 that God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in the realm of spirit and in the realm of the truth (John 4:23, paraphrased). It is God’s Word that gives us the content of worship. And it is inside, not outside, where true worship takes place. You could come here, go through all the motions of being in a “worship” service and actually not ever once worship the Lord. It means we worship Him.

Psalm 66:1–4 says,

Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!
Sing out the honor of His name;
Make His praise glorious.
Say to God, "How awesome are Your works!
Through the greatness of Your power
Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.
All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You;
They shall sing praises to Your name.

The Hebrew word for worship is *shekah*, and its primary meaning is “to bow down.” To bow down. I think there is very little of worship going on in many, many hearts. God wants submission to Him.

Turn to Psalm 138, please. When we worship the Lord there is a submission in our hearts that says, “Not my will but Thine be done.” It is good that we physically get on our knees at times to remind ourselves that the primary meaning of worship is to bow down. It is to get on one’s knees.

Ps 138:1–2 says,

I will praise You with my whole heart;
Before the gods I will sing praises to You.
I will worship toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name for
Your lovingkindness and Your truth;
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

What does it mean to praise God? It means we exalt Him and it means we worship Him.

Turn to Psalm 5, please. The third thing that it means when we say, “Praise the Lord,” is not only that we exalt Him and we worship Him, but that we rejoice in Him—that we rejoice in Him.

Psalm 5:11 says,

But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name be joyful in You.

Turn to Psalm 9, please, and look at verses 1 and 2. My friends, a lot of us get discouraged and defeated in life and depressed with our circumstances and our problems and our relationships with people. We forget that the antidote to that is praise. It is praise. A lot of us are lacking in joy—not because of a temperament that is prone towards being pessimistic—but we are lacking in joy because we do not focus on the Lord and we do not praise Him. A lot of people try to blame it on temperament or personality traits. I do not know if you have ever met somebody who is really “up”—I mean all the time. I mean, they seem like they are up every single day of their lives. I mean, you pray that they go down. You know what I mean? I mean, it irritates you that they are so “up”. And then you meet somebody who is “down”. I mean they are down, down, down, down. They are so low it is unbelievable. They drag on the floor and you want to do something to pump them up. Listen, it does not matter what your personality traits are or what your struggles are. It does not matter what your discouragements are or what your difficulties are. Everyone is to praise the Lord. “Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6). And when we praise God it means we rejoice in Him.

Psalm 9:1–2 says,

1 I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart;
I will tell of all Your marvelous works.
2 I will be glad and rejoice in You;
I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.

Turn to Psalm 33, please, and look at verse 21. Do you rejoice in the Lord? Are you joyful in Him? Does the sheer mention of the name of the Lord and His attributes give you praise inside? Give you joy? Do you rejoice in the Lord?

Paul wrote to the Philippian church regarding a personal problem between a couple of ladies that resulted in a very difficult division in the church. And he said, in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, rejoice!” Do you get the idea we are supposed to be happy in the Lord? Rejoice in the Lord, the Bible says.

It is not easy to rejoice in your circumstances, especially when they are not to your liking. But we can always rejoice in the Lord and who He is. Psalm 33:21 says, “For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name.”

Look at Psalm 68:4, please. It is a constant theme, to rejoice in the Lord.

Sing to God, sing praises to His name;
Extol Him who rides on the clouds,
By His name YAH,
And rejoice before Him.

The Bible says, “In His presence there is fullness of joy and at His right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 116:11). The Bible tells us to rejoice in the Lord constantly. And you will not find a lot of joy in life when you leave the Lord out. But you find much joy when you center it on who He is and what He can do.

Turn to Psalm 149. We are to rejoice in the Lord. Look at the opening three verses. Talk about joy and rejoicing.

1 Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song,
And His praise in the assembly of saints.
2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
3 Let them praise His name with the dance;
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.
4 For the LORD takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the humble with salvation. (Psalm 149:1–4)

What beautiful words. Do you rejoice in the Lord, your Maker? Do you praise His wonderful name? Are you going bonkers for Him? That is my translation of dance. I heard one pastor on the radio recently say, “Let them praise His name with choreography.” I think he had trouble with the word dance. Modern dances do not have much worth to praise the Lord with that is for sure. But let me tell you, the dance where an individual is praising the Lord is a word that is referring to his leaping around and literally going bonkers. He is so happy! Does the Lord do that to you?

The Bible says, “Delight thyself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). The Hebrew text says, “Make Him the joy of your heart and He will give you everything you desire.” Is the Lord that to you? Is the Lord your joy and strength?

What does it mean to praise God? Exalt Him. Worship Him. Rejoice in Him.

Turn back to Psalm 34, please, to see the fourth thing it means when we say, “Praise the Lord.” It means that we boast in Him. The Bible tells us not to boast in man. It tells us not even to boast in tomorrow as though you think you know what is going to take place. The Bible says to boast in the Lord. In Psalm 34:1–2, we read this a moment ago.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.

Look at Psalm 44:8, regarding boasting in the Lord. Several years ago I was walking through the Sunday school halls on a Sunday morning and there were two little kids. I know they were small—maybe preschool, maybe kindergarten at best. And they were having a fight. You know, at church in Sunday school, it does happen. Anyway, these two kids were going at it. And when I walked up to try to intervene, the only thing I heard was this little kid shouted—it was like the final word—and the kid said, “My God is bigger than your God.” It was as though the other kid was supposed to panic now or something. But I listened to that and I thought, “Boy, that is terrific!” The boy’s statement is true, isn’t it? My God is bigger than anyone and anything.

“My soul shall boast in the Lord” (Psalm 34:2). Do you boast in the Lord? In Psalm 44:8 it says, “In God we boast all day long and praise Your name forever.” Again, the parallel statements are showing the meaning of praise. In God we boast all day long.

When somebody says something that you know contradicts what the Bible says and you know that God is able, you ought to speak up and boast in the Lord. “Hey, my God can do that. It says so in the Bible. God can do anything.” A lot of us are so miserable in our praise that we are questioning everything as though God cannot do it because He has not done it in my eyesight or in my experience. Listen, God can do anything.

Carol and I were in Yakima, Washington last March. We spoke at a conference there and a dear husband brought his wife up to us in a wheelchair. Because of a very terminal disease she was all crumpled up, she could not walk and she was in this wheelchair. And he asked if I would pray for her so that she would be healed. And I gave him a few verses from the Word of God on healing and said I would pray for it. But it would certainly not be from me, because I do not have that power. But I said that I would have a number of people pray along with me, so that we would be sure to give God all the glory. He said, “Well that’s what we want.”

And so we prayed for this dear lady. And she was all crumpled up in this wheelchair. And it was kind of a pitiful thing. We wanted to be compassionate. So we prayed that if it was going to honor God and praise Him, and if He wanted to do it in His sovereignty, to please heal her. We did not think much more about it. The next morning Carol and I flew out of Yakima and came home. We had not thought really anything about it since then. And this last week we were in Yakima, Washington for a “Biola Hour” rally. I no sooner walked out to greet the audience before the meeting started, than this gal came running up to me and threw her arms around me. It embarrassed me a little bit and I asked, “Do I know you?” She said, “I’m the girl that was in the wheelchair that you prayed for last March.” She said, “To God be the glory! God healed me and I walk.” You know, I could hardly speak. I said, “Are you sure you’re the right one?” She said, “Yeah.” I couldn’t believe it. So, I introduced her to the whole audience and they all knew about it and what a testimony of praise it was to the Lord. This is boasting in God. I was surprised that God healed her, which shows you what gift I do not have.

But you understand, folks, that we are to boast in God and what God can do. And He can do anything. Some of us have not learned that yet. That is why we are weak in praise. “Praise the Lord,” means that we boast in Him.

Turn to Psalm 18. It not only means we exalt Him, we worship Him, we rejoice in Him, and we boast in Him, but do you know what else it means to praise God? It means we give thanks to Him. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 that in everything we are to give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. That is in everything. The Bible speaks about the Spirit-filled believers in Ephesians 5:18, commanding us to be filled with the Spirit. It says in verse 20 that we are to give thanks for all things. When you are filled with the Spirit there is a constant spirit of gratefulness and of gratitude in your heart.

In Psalm 18:49 it says,

Therefore I will give thanks to You,
O LORD, among the Gentiles,
And sing praises to Your name.

Now some people believe that from a Jewish point of view, “Gentiles” is referring to everybody else. We will praise the Lord among all of them and declare His works among them; but technically, folks, that is a term referring to all people who do not know the Lord. We would say the pagans out there. And how interesting, that a lot of us are stone dead silent in front of the pagans. We will not even thank God for our food if everybody at the table is an unbeliever. Hey, that ought to turn you on for God. To give thanks ought to turn you on for God. Don’t ever neglect prayer. You may say, “Well, what do you do? I mean all these guys I work with, are not Christians. Why should I embarrass them and embarrass myself. I will just pray silently.” My response is, “Use it as an opportunity.” Say to them, “Hey I’m going to pray for my meal if you guys don’t mind.” Somebody ought to. And pray and thank God right in their presence. Bow your head. You know what I have found? I have found unbelievers are a lot sweeter and kinder than some believers on this issue. Most of them, I think, fear that God is going to zap them. They immediately bow their heads. Do not hesitate to pray.

I just did that with a waitress early this morning over there in the restaurant when I was having breakfast. I said, “Excuse me, (she was talking to me) I am going to bow my head and thank the Lord for my food.” She stood right there and bowed her head. I do not know if they are supposed to do that or not, but do you understand what I’m saying? We are to give thanks to the Lord. Even among all the nations and the pagans. Let them know that everything that happens to you in your life, you are praising God for. I thank the Lord for all things.

Let’s look at Psalm 30:4. What wonderful words throughout the psalms. We could pick scores of verses, as you know if you have read them.

Sing praise to the LORD, You saints of His,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

Sing praise. Give thanks. Psalm 92:1–3 says, “It is good to give thanks to the LORD.” You will find that praise repeated in the Psalms. It is good. It is good for you. It is good, in every sense of the word, to give thanks to the Lord.

1 And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High.
2 To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness every night,
3 On an instrument of ten strings, on the lute,
And on the harp, with harmonious sound.

By the way, those of you who are non-musical, do you get the idea that God is into music? Sing, sing, sing. Play, play, play. God wants you to do these things. You may say, “Well, I can’t carry a tune. Your favorite verse: “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.” Make a holy grunt. Whatever it is, man, praise God! Let it out. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord! Don’t stop—give thanks constantly. Thank God for the flat on the freeway during the rush hour. Amen?”

I had a cute letter from a radio listener who heard me tell the story of getting a flat early in the morning when I was on the Grapevine, and then I went a little bit further and got another flat. Of course, that means the tire in the back was now flat. And she wrote me a letter saying that she was so blessed by my story. She just thanked the Lord because she was not sure about radio speakers and whether anything ever went wrong in their lives. And she said, “I just praised the Lord to think that you had a flat and then had another one and couldn’t do anything about it. And you had all that trouble.” She said, “That really thrilled me.”

Give thanks constantly to the Lord.

Turn to Hebrews 13, in the New Testament. The Bible indicates that God wants us to do this, folks. In Hebrews 13:15–16 it says,

15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of
praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to
His name.
16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such
sacrifices God is well pleased.

What does it mean to praise God? It means we exalt Him. It means we worship Him. It means we rejoice in Him. We boast in Him. We give thanks to Him.

Turn to Psalm 69. The sixth thing that it means is that we please Him. You want to please the Lord in your life? Then praise Him. It means that we please Him. Look, please, at verses 30 and 31.

I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bull, which has horns and hooves.

Folks, listen, he is talking about a sacrificial animal that you bring in worship to the Lord into the temple or tabernacle. What he is saying is that it is better to praise the Lord and to give thanks to Him than to even offer the sacrifice.

The Bible says in Micah 6 that God is deeply offended by sacrifices that are not backed up with the lifestyle that is centered in the Lord. Hey, you could go through all the mechanics of worship. You could give your money in worship to the Lord. You could sing all the songs, listen to God's Word, even fellowship with Christians; and yet, not be pleasing the Lord. You can go through the motions so easy. Just do what you are supposed to do, but in your heart it is cold and apathetic and complacent towards the God who made you.

Folks, let me tell you something: true worship is in the heart. It is inside. You want to please the Lord? Then stop looking at all that you do. And understand that inside there can be a heart filled with praise and filled with thanks; and with that, God is pleased. Although no one else knows it, He does. We please the Lord when we praise the Lord. That is what it means.

Turn to Psalm 135 and look at the opening verses.

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; praise Him, O you servants of the LORD!
2 You who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God,
3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant. (Psalm 135:1–3)

It pleases the Lord. It delights the heart of God when you praise the Lord. Do you praise Him in your heart? With such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Turn please to Psalm 34 again. What does it mean to praise God? It means we exalt Him. It means we worship Him. It means we rejoice in Him, we boast in Him, we give thanks to Him, and we please Him. It also means—and perhaps this is the most common definition of praise in the Psalms—it means we bless His name. We bless His name.

Now often we ask God to bless us and He certainly does. We think of it in terms of His provision, and it means that. It means that He will take care of us and provide for our needs. He will bless us. But it basically means to speak well of God. We are to bless His name and to speak well of many things about God—to proclaim it. Psalm 34:1 says, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Is that true of us?

Turn to Psalm 63. When we say, “Bless the name of the Lord,” what are we talking about? What are we to speak well of? And there are several things mentioned in the Psalms—for instance, the lovingkindness of God. When we bless the name of the Lord, it is for His “lovingkindness”. This is a beautiful English word describing a Hebrew word, which indicates God’s covenant relationship to us. It means that He will be faithful and show us mercy and compassion and graciousness. And I think the English word is gorgeous—lovingkindness.

In Psalm 63:3–5 we read,

3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips
shall praise You.
4 Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands
in Your name.
5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.

And I think it is only appropriate in this message on praise, and the emphasis of the Psalms, to sing it to the Lord, that we might just sing this passage right now to the Lord.

Thy lovingkindness is better than life.
Thy lovingkindness is better than life.
My lips shall praise Thee,
Thus will I bless Thee.
I will lift up my hands unto Thy name.
I lift my hands up unto They name.
I lift my hands up unto They name.
My lips shall praise Thee,
Thus will I bless Thee.
I will lift up my hands unto Thy name.

When we bless the Lord, we bless Him for His lovingkindness to us.

Turn to Psalm 72. When we bless the name of the Lord, it is not only for His lovingkindness; but it is for His wondrous works and the wondrous things that God does. The word “wondrous” means difficult to understand. There are so many things that God does that we do not know, and we are to praise Him for that. Praise Him that He knows and that we do not; even though it is incomprehensible to us. His ways are past finding out, says Romans 11:33. His greatness is unsearchable, Psalm 145:3. God has told us in His Word that He does things that He does not expect us to ever know. And He wants us to praise Him for it.

Psalm 72:18–19 says,

18 Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things.

19 And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.

All God's people said, "Amen" for what God does. So be it. Praise the Lord! He does lots of things, folks, that we cannot figure out and we do not know why He does them. Praise the Lord means to speak well of God that He knows. To speak well of God and say that He can do anything. To speak well of God and say that He alone does things that are too wonderful for me to understand. Praise the name of the Lord!

Turn to Psalm 96. Not only His lovingkindness and His wondrous things, but the Bible tells us to bless the Lord for His salvation. Psalm 96:1–2 says,

1 Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
2 Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.

When you bless the Lord, you are proclaiming the good news of God's salvation from day to day. We thank the Lord and we praise Him for His salvation. Bless the Lord for all that He has done.

Turn to Psalm 100. We not only bless Him for lovingkindness, for His wondrous things, and His salvation; we bless Him for His goodness. In Psalm 100:4–5 it says,

4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.
5 For the LORD is good;
His mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endures to all generations.

The last two statements on the compassion and faithfulness of God are expressing how good He is. Bless His name, for the Lord is good. Has the Lord been good to you?

God is so good, God is so good.
God is so good. He's so good to me.
I'll praise His name. I'll praise His name.
I'll praise His name. He's so good to me.

Turn to Psalm 103. When you say you are going to bless the name of the Lord, to speak well of Him, it is not only His lovingkindness and His wondrous power and deeds and the things that He does: His salvation, His goodness, but also His many benefits to us. Bless Him for His many benefits. In Psalm 103:1–5 it says,

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless His holy name!
2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His
benefits: [He names a few:]
3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
4 Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

And on and on it goes with all the many benefits of the Lord.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
He has done great things. He has done great things.
He has done great things, bless His holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!

When we bless the Lord, we bless Him for His lovingkindness, for His wondrous things, for His salvation, for His goodness, and for His benefits.

Turn to Psalm 113. We also bless Him for His exalted position. We speak well of Him because He is in charge. Everything is not out of control. He is working all things after the counsel of His will. He is upholding all things by the word of His power.

Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD,
Praise the name of the LORD!
Blessed be the name of the LORD
From this time forth and forevermore!
From the rising of the sun to its going down
The LORD'S name is to be praised.
The LORD is high above all nations,
His glory above the heavens. [His exalted position]
Who is like the LORD our God, who dwells on high,
Who humbles Himself to behold the things
That are in the heavens and in the earth? (Psalm 113:1-6)

The exalted position of the Lord causes us to bless Him. You know, I see a lot of reasons to believe that things are out of control, don't you? Sometimes you wonder who is in charge. Aren't you glad you know somebody who is? The Lord is in charge. And the

Lord is over everything. And He does whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth. Bless His name for His exalted position over everything.

Turn to Psalm 145. The last thing out of many that we will bring to your attention is the greatness of God. We should bless the Lord for the greatness of the Lord. Psalm 145:1 says,

I will extol You, my God, O King;
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless You,
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.
Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
And His greatness is unsearchable.

Praise the Lord for that. You know how I look at all of these things? What is it to praise the Lord? It means we exalt Him. It means we worship Him. We rejoice in Him. We boast in Him. We give thanks to Him. We please Him. We bless His name. And I say, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” I will count to three again and you say, “Hallelujah” at the top of your lungs. One, two, three—“Hallelujah!” The Lord likes it loud, even though some of you need to adjust your hearing aids.

When I think of all of this, I speak from a heart that is concerned about people who do not know the Lord. Did you know that the demons of hell are going to praise God? Did you know that? If there is no personal relationship between you and God and you know it, I want you to understand that even if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are going to one day praise the Lord. The Bible says that one day every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I pray that you will not be one of those who will stand at the great white throne judgment of God having rejected His Son, Jesus Christ. You will be facing an eternity without God in hell. I pray you will not be that person. But I know that even if you are there, you will at that moment praise the Lord, even though you have never praised Him before. As you go into hell itself, you will have to acknowledge that He is who He claimed to be. I plead with you, on the basis of what the Bible tells us about the name of the Lord, to turn to Him before it is too late. The Bible says, “Neither is there salvation in any other name. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Let’s close with prayer.

Father, You know who in this meeting can really praise You and who cannot. You even know among the believers who truly worshipped and praised You, as we went over these Scriptures and those who just went through the mechanics. We can become so cold to the praise and the adoration and the blessing of our God. Father, our hearts go

out to those in our meeting right now who have never made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior—Jesus, who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Father, I pray that You by the Holy Spirit, would draw people to the Lord Jesus; so that they would know that their ability to praise Him begins when they come to know the Savior. And I pray, Lord, that You would open up their hearts to the good news of the gospel. There is forgiveness of our sin and there is eternal life to all who will believe in Jesus Christ. God, I pray You would draw people to Jesus. That we would praise You for all of Your people who know You. God how we need to be set free in our hearts to praise and bless and give thanks to the wonderful name of the Lord. We are so pessimistic and complaining. We are so questioning and suspicious and doubtful. We are defeated and discouraged and life has not treated us the way we wanted. And there is so little praise. You say that the Lord inhabits the praises of His people. The Lord delights in the praises of His people. God, I pray that there will never be a time in our lives from the rising of the sun until its going down each day that will not be filled with praise. We thank You, Lord. And it is in Jesus' wonderful name we pray. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” Let’s take our Bibles, please, and turn to Isaiah 6. A. W. Tozer in his excellent little book called, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, on pages 112 and 113 wrote this about God’s holiness:

Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, His attributes are holy. That is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy.

Isaiah 6:1 says, “In the year that King Uzziah died.” He was a good king, a wonderful king. It was a sad moment in history. The last sixteen years of his life he was a leper and Jothan, his son, reigned as co-regent. Everyone that came into the palace and would see this godly man Uzziah, as a leper, would hear from his lips the cry to them to warn them: “Unclean, unclean!” Imagine being king of the realm and having to say that to people. The loneliness of those with leprosy is well known. There was isolation and the awfulness of the disease for sixteen years before he died.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.

Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”

And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” (Isaiah 6:1-8)

And now turn to Revelation 4, please. As we have a commentary on these words of Isaiah 6, and a portion of it is quoted word for word. In Revelation 4, the scene is heaven. God the Father is sitting on a throne that is like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance. There is a rainbow about the throne which has the appearance like an emerald. Twenty-four thrones around the throne and from the head throne were going lightnings and thunders and voices. And there are seven lamps of fire there and the whole throne room is sitting on a sea of glass like crystal. Around the throne on all four sides of it are four angels. We call them the worship leaders of heaven.

The Bible says in Revelation 4:8–11

The four living creatures, each having six wings, [just like Isaiah's account] were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night saying: [And what do they proclaim? They are constantly say this:] "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come! Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,
The twenty-four elders [who we believe represent a completed body of the church in heaven, and they] fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:
"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

What brought forth all this worship was the announcement by the worship leaders of heaven saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." And everyone bowed down and worshipped.

Let's look to the Lord in prayer.

Father, as we attempt to discuss the holiness of God from Your Word, I pray that there would be a deep and profound sense in our hearts of our need to be holy. May the Holy Spirit of God convict us of sin and convict us of unholy and ungodly attitudes and lifestyles. May the Holy Spirit of God convict us that sinful man and woman cannot possibly enter the presence of a holy God apart from the work of Jesus Christ. Give us a new understanding of holiness, we pray, that it would make a difference in how we live. It is in Jesus' name that we ask these things. Amen.

One hardly knows where to begin because the subject is so vast. We are going to deal with two things about the holiness of God. We first want to look at the nature of God's holiness—what He is. And then we are going to look at our need for personal holiness in our lives because of it.

The title of this study is, "The Nature of God's Holiness". Holiness means "separation" and is translated *sanctify* or *purify*. To be made holy is to be set apart and there are several ways in which God is set apart. Please turn in your Bibles to Exodus 15:11. When you speak of the nature of God's holiness, it refers to His unique person—that there is no one like Him. He is separate from anyone you have ever met or known. God is totally different. Radically, unusually, and completely different from anyone you have ever known. And the Bible emphasizes His uniqueness all the time, especially in Isaiah the prophet.

In Exodus 15:11, it says in the Song of Moses: "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness." No one is like the Lord in holiness, in being separate, He is totally separate.

Turn to 1 Samuel 2 where it refers to the unique person of God in that there is not anyone like Him. When you say He is holy, no one is comparable to Him. In 1 Samuel 2, Hannah the mother of Samuel, prayed for a child. She was barren and God answered her prayer. She started to rejoice in the Lord and in a wonderful prayer in 1 Samuel 2:2 she said, "No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God."

What a statement! There is none holy (separate) like You. When you speak of the holiness of God, you mean He is totally different and separate from anyone you have ever met in your life.

Secondly, turn to Psalm 99. It also refers to His exalted position. There is no one in the same camp who is over everything like He is. I like what one writer said: "Every man on the face of the earth who ever entered politics has tried to be over someone or something." Now, there is no way anyone on the face of this planet could possibly be higher than God Almighty. He is holy. He is separate from anyone who has ever tried to be over anyone. He is, in His exalted position, absolutely separate from everyone.

In Psalm 99:1-2 it says,

The LORD is great in Zion,
And He is high above all the peoples
Let them praise Your great and awesome name—
He is holy.

What? What does it say? "Holy."

Exalt the LORD our God,

And worship at His footstool—
He is holy.
[Verse 9 repeats it again.]
Exalt the LORD our God,
And worship at His holy hill;
For the LORD our God is holy.

It refers to His unique person. It refers to His exalted position.

In Isaiah 57:15 it says, “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, Whose name is Holy.” He is absolutely separate because of His exalted position. He is high and lofty. He is above all the peoples, above everyone and everything. That is how separate He is.

It also refers to the places where He dwells. Without having you turn, I want to list several of them for you, just to show you what I am talking about. When you talk of God’s holiness, His separateness, it is interesting that wherever He dwells, God always adds the adjective “holy” to it. We read in Psalm 99:9, “His holy hill”. We are to worship at His holy hill. You can read in 2 Chronicles 30:27 that the holy dwelling place of God is heaven. You can read in Psalm 5:7 about His holy temple. You can read in Ephesians 2:21 that the church (all the believers having God dwelling in them) become a holy temple in the Lord. You can read in Isaiah 56:7 that we are to worship at a holy mountain because that is where God is. It is the same thing in Isaiah 66:20, speaking of the coming kingdom of God on earth, the millennium, when God dwells among His people. It calls it a holy mountain. In Psalm 24:3, where He dwells is called a holy place. Heaven itself, the new city in Revelation 21:10 is holy Jerusalem. Revelation 22:19 says, “holy city”.

Folks, wherever God dwells, it becomes a unique and separated place. And God puts with it an adjective and says, “That is holy ground.”

Turn to Exodus 19. When we speak of the holiness of God, it refers to His unique person, His exalted position, and the specific places where He dwells. But it also refers to His special people. His special people are mentioned in Exodus 19—I love this. God said, “You shall be to me, [speaking to the children of Israel] a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” Israel is called a holy nation. Now, did Israel ever sin? Oh yes. Were they ever disobedient? Yes, they were idolatrous. They were immoral. They sinned against God and they were certainly not “holy” in the sense of being separate from sin. But God says, “You are a holy nation. I want you separated from all nations on the face of the earth” (Exodus 19:6, paraphrased).

Turn to Leviticus 11. In order to show that they were holy, God made them eat kosher. Amen? It would not be a bad idea if you tried it. But in Leviticus 11 God said, “I am going to give you a diet so that everybody will know that you are weird.” This is my translation, but it gives you the idea. God wanted all of the children of Israel to be totally different from everybody around them. So He said, “You are going to eat differently.

You are going to stay away from all that stuff that the goyim like. Lobster, crab, shrimp—get rid of that junk. Oh by the way, there is one animal and everything it produces that I do not even want to see on your plate. They call it pig, hog, ham, pork, bacon—get it out of your life. Amen?

In Leviticus 11:44, God said,

For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

Turn to Deuteronomy 7. When we talk about the holiness of God it refers to His special people. He wants His people to be separate from all nations around. In Deuteronomy 7:6 He said:

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath.

My friends, the holiness of God referred to the nation of Israel. He wants them to be separate. Turn to 1 Peter 2 and we will see an interesting thing is that the special people of God not only refers to the children of Israel, it also refers to the church of Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 2:9-10, Peter writes to believers and says:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

1 Peter 3:5 says, “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves.” The point is that there are special people who are believers, who trust in God, who God puts the adjective with and says that they are “holy” now. He says, “They are people for Me.” They are the people of God. All

believers of the church of Jesus Christ are called “a holy nation” because we now belong to God. God does not want us to talk like, think like, act like, or speak like, any of the world around us. He wants us to be different.

One of the cultural problems that we are having in western civilization today is that we are adopting secular viewpoints into Christian thinking. We are amalgamating the two viewpoints and thinking that this is the way to reach people. No, it is not and it never has been. God does not want us to talk like them, to do what they do, to think like them, or to go where they go. He wants us to be different and a lot of us are afraid of being different. The message in society today is to be the same with everybody alike. No, Christians are to be different. God wants us different. I like to use the word “weird” or I throw in “wacko.” God wants us to be different. Paul even said, “I am a fool for Christ’s sake” (1 Corinthians 4:10, paraphrased).

Holiness refers to His people.

Turn back to Leviticus 21. The holiness of God refers to His unique person, to His exalted position, to the specific places where He dwells, and to His special people. It also refers to His designated priests. Boy, you get a glimpse, of holiness when you look at what God said about priests in Leviticus 21. There is no group of people on the face of the earth that have had higher standards than the priests of the Old Testament.

Leviticus 21:1 says,

And the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: ‘None shall defile himself for the dead among his people.’”

He was saying, “You cannot even touch a dead body. If somebody dies in your presence, you have to call for help.” You talk about tough things!

They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. (Leviticus 21:5)

I mean nothing, folks, not even haircuts. Why? Because it says,

They shall be holy to their God. They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; [Why?] for the priest is holy to his God. He is holy. And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot— these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife. (Leviticus 21:6, 7, 13, 14)

By the way, another passage tells us the priest could not divorce her either. And verse 17 says that no man who has any defect may approach God. The priest could not have a defect, could not be blind, could not be lame, and could not have a broken foot or a broken hand. He could not be a hunchback or a dwarf. He could have no eye problems and no scabs. Nothing!

Hey, are you reading this?
You got a sore, then you are out.
I got a limp.
You're out!
I lean over a little.
Get out!
You're kidding? Why would God do that?
Because He wanted them to be different from everybody else.

The priests were not the same; they were totally different. They had different standards physically. They had different standards socially in terms of marriage and family. They were absolutely to be different. Why? It was because they were to be holy to the Lord.

Let me tell you what else He did. Out of all these priests God said, "Oh by the way, one of you is really going to be different. And he is the only one who can go into the special little room I have in the tabernacle or temple that I call the holy of holies. This is the holiest place on earth, I know! This is where My presence is going to come once a year on the Day of Atonement and it will be so holy. By the way, there are no chairs. I do not ever want to see the priest sitting down. Oh by the way, put a rope on the end of his robe because if he dies, nobody can go in to get him since he is the only one who can go in there. So you have to pull his dead body out if he dies in there of a heart attack. This guy is holy unto the Lord. In fact, I want him to wear a giant turban and I am going to label that turban, 'Holiness to the Lord.' And everybody will know that this is the weirdest guy in Israel. We call him the high priest. Do not even get close to him. And he is the only one who can go in to the holy of holies. And all the rest of you guys are also going to be different from everybody else. And you are going to serve Me day and night in this holy place."

Now I do not care what you think about all this, I really do not. The American generation does not like those kinds of things. Today's generation thinks that everybody should be treated alike. No, God never did that. He never did it. God is no respecter of persons, but don't think that He does not have standards of holiness. He does. And He had it among the priests.

What does this mean to you and me? Turn to 1 Peter 2. This might surprise a great many of you, what I am going to say now. 1 Peter 2:4-5 says,

Coming to Him [that's our Lord Jesus Christ] as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and

precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood.

Stop right there. You know I understand why Martin Luther had such a problem, I really do. Martin Luther, at the time of the Reformation, was an Augustinian monk. By the way, he died an Augustinian monk. In the technical sense he was not the founder of the Lutheran Church, although certainly the teachings of Martin Luther became precious to the Lutheran people. He was an Augustinian monk and he wrote a lot of things about the church needing to be reformed. There were three basic tenets that caused the Protestant Reformation. One was the authority of Scripture over the authority of the church. Number two was justification by faith alone, not by works. But the third one is the one that believers today do not know much about, but it was indeed the most controversial tenets and the straw that broke the camel's back. And it was a treatise that Martin Luther wrote on the priesthood of the believer.

For a thousand years, as many of you who have been to school and studied it know, we had a period of time called the Middle Ages or the Dark Ages. There was a separation between priests and people. And Martin Luther, through his study of the Scripture, came to the conviction that every believer is a priest and that we do not need to go through men who are priests to get to God. Behind this was a theological problem that exists to this day, not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but in many Protestant denominations. This is because they equate Israel and the church as one and the same; therefore, pastors are the same as priests.

Therefore there is a division between clergy and laity. Is everybody following? I just want everybody to know that the principle of the Protestant Reformation, the principle that should characterize every Bible-believing church, is that everybody (including the pastor and the people in the pew) are priests. We can all go directly to God and we do not need to go through any other human agency; and that way has been prepared for us by Jesus Christ, our Lord. We have access into the very presence of God because He died on the cross for us. He is our sacrifice. He is our atonement. He is the mercy seat. He is all of it. And we now have “entered into the veil,” the Bible says in Hebrews 10. And we can talk to God directly because of what Jesus did.

What I want to say is that God calls the people of His church “priests” and He says we are “holy priests”. We have lost a sense of that today. We like the fact that everybody is a priest and can do what we want—we think. But what God calls it is “a holy priesthood.”

Turn please to Revelation 15. When we speak of the nature of God's holiness, it refers to His unique person, His exalted position, the places where He dwells, His special people, and His designated priests. It also refers to His remarkable power.

God is holy. His power is separate from any power you have ever seen or understood. Any explanation you have ever given does not adequately explain the power of God. And I am going to show you something I think is really special in Revelation 15. The scene is heaven and verse 1 says that the seven last plagues are the attention of this moment and

then the wrath of God is complete. They sing the song of Moses in verse 3, the song of the Lamb. And here is what it says:

Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!
Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are [What?] holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested.

What caused the people of heaven to declare the holiness of God upon seeing the power of God displayed in the tribulation period? It was His holiness. It was separate from anything they had ever seen before. The power of God is separate, folks, from anything you have ever seen.

Let me give you one illustration. Let's take earthquakes. Isn't it interesting how we have analyzed earthquakes today and we use the science of seismology? We are really studying it. We know where the faults are. We are even talking about predicting the movements in the earth. We have what we call a "Richter" scale to determine how severe the movements are. We are getting a handle on it, we are told. We are beginning to understand earthquakes like we have never understood them before. And I say, "Praise the Lord!" May that continue for the protection of us all.

But I want you to know that God is going to do something in the tribulation period that is going to blow the science of seismology to kingdom come. He is going to have an earthquake on this planet like the world has never seen or ever measured. The Bible says that every island and mountain is going to be removed out of its place. All of the cities of the nations will fall. The Bible says in the Old Testament, describing this event that it is like God taking the planet in His hands and giving it a shaking. The entire globe will have one massive earthquake. Men's hearts will fail them for fear. There will be worldwide panic and they will know it comes from God because it is unlike anything they have seen before. And all heaven breaks out in praise because, "You alone, Lord, are holy" (Revelation 15:4).

That is only one example. The tribulation period, in that holocaust of terror that God will bring on the earth, is going to be the greatest demonstration of the power of God that the world has ever seen. And they will know He is holy in His power.

Turn please to Psalm 89. It not only refers to His remarkable power, but His holiness also refers to His faithful promises. God is different from anybody you have ever known and loved who has made a promise to you. He is totally different. You may say, "In what sense?" He never goes back on His word. You say, "Oh, I knew somebody like that. He always did what he said." Well, God is even better than that. He not only doesn't go back on His word, He never makes it conditional. He does it no matter what you do. A lot of people have trouble with this.

Let me show you something that I think is absolutely wonderful. If this does not bless your socks off, you are unbleisable. Psalm 89:30–37 says,

If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments,
[And I would like to add, they did not.]
If they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments,
[And that was certainly true of them also.
They didn't keep them but they broke them.]
Then I will punish their transgression with the rod,
and their iniquity with stripes.
[And He did that and judged them.]
Nevertheless, My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him,
nor allow My faithfulness to fail.
My covenant I will not break,
nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.
Once I have sworn by My [What?] holiness; I will not lie to David:
His seed shall endure forever,
and his throne as the sun before Me;
It shall be established forever like the moon,
even like the faithful witness in the sky.

Presumably the rainbow and the flood is mentioned there.

Psalm 60:6 says that God has spoken in His holiness. God is so separate, so different, and so unique that whatever He promises will come true no matter what happens in anybody's life. Aren't you glad of that? Heaven and earth may pass away. My words will never pass away. You say, "What if I can't keep holding on?" No sweat. It is no problem to God whatsoever. God is holding on to you by the way, if you are a believer, so do not worry about it.

Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life. They shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28). And it just amuses me how often I hear somebody say, "Well what if you could jump out of His hand?" Jump out of His hand? The whole universe is in His hand, so where are you going to go? You might move from knuckle to knuckle but you are not getting out. Talk about security—isn't it wonderful? Nothing can alter the word of God. Why? It is because He swore by His what? Holiness.

You see, He is separate from man who changes and who makes things conditional, and who does not keep His word. God always keeps His word. The Bible calls this, in Hebrews 6, "a sure anchor to the soul." It says it is impossible for God to lie. That by these immutable things (unchangeable things), the character of God and the Word of God, we know that everything God promised will come to pass. Hallelujah! Aren't you glad of that?

Imagine being in a ministry where everything was dependent upon your performance. Imagine! Unfortunately, some churches teach that. It is no wonder that people are so insecure.

Turn please to Leviticus 19. When we talk about the nature of God's holiness it refers to His unique person, His exalted position, the specific places where He dwells, His special people, His designated priests, His remarkable power, and His faithful promises. But it also refers to His absolute purity, which is what most people think of when they hear the word *holy*.

Leviticus 19:2 says,

Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."

Then it goes on to tell you what you are not to do.

Leviticus 20:7 says,

Sanctify yourselves [that is the word, be holy] therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

It tells you what not to do. You can look at the list following it.

Leviticus 20:26 says,

You shall be holy to Me, for I, the Lord, am holy and I have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.

Turn to 1 Peter 1 in the New Testament. When God talks about holiness, He tells us about things He does not want us to do. The holiness of God refers to His absolute purity. He cannot sin—there is no sin in Him.

1 Peter 1:13–16 says,

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

This is the absolute purity of God. We talked about the nature of God's holiness. For a few moments I want us to reflect on why we need God's holiness in our lives. It should be obvious.

Let me give you an example of your need and mine. If you are a believer I think that you want to know about God. I mean, you really do even if you are not a believer. There are a lot of people who are unbelievers that would like to know about God. We like to see, at least with our mind's eye, and understand about who God is, how He functions, and how He works, so that we know how to relate to Him. And it seems like such a tragedy to me that a lot of us are trying to know that and are running up against a blank wall. We do not see where the problem lies. I will give you an example.

In Hebrews 12:14 it tells us to pursue holiness, without which no one can see the Lord. Isn't that interesting? We want to see, at least with our mind's eye, with our heart, we want to understand who God is and how He works. Yet the Bible says to pursue holiness because without that, you cannot see Him.

Jesus said in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). In our concern to see and know and understand the Lord, I say to all of us that we need holiness.

In addition to our concern to see the Lord, we have the whole matter of our conversion. You cannot be converted to Jesus Christ without holiness—it is impossible. In 1 Corinthians 6:11 it says, "But such were some of you: but you were sanctified." The word means "declared holy." God made you holy. By what? It is by the work of Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, the following things are necessary to make you holy in your conversion. Number one, you need Jesus Christ Himself. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "He is our holiness, our sanctification." Apart from Jesus Christ, I do not stand a chance. He is my holiness. He is the way. He is the truth. He is life. He is my holiness.

Next I need the Holy Spirit. According to the Bible, sanctification or holiness happens in our hearts when we are converted by the Holy Spirit of God. You will find that in 1 Peter 1:2. Sanctification is by means of the work of the Holy Spirit. He causes us to be made holy.

Finally, I need the blood of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 9 and 10 it tells me that the sacrifice of Jesus, the blood of Christ, is what sanctifies and makes me holy—once and for all. I can never be holy before God apart from the blood of Jesus Christ. By the way, this has nothing to do with your performance, nothing.

Not only do I need Jesus and the Holy Spirit and the blood of Christ at His cross, I also need the Word of God. Jesus, in His prayer to His heavenly Father in John 17:17 said, "Sanctify them, make them holy through Thy truth. Thy word is truth" (paraphrased).

Ephesians 5 says that God wants to cleanse and sanctify the church by the washing of water of the Word. It is the Word of God that the Holy Spirit uses. We are talking about

Jesus at His death on the cross. And the death of Christ 1900 years ago is essential to our holiness, without which no one can serve the Lord.

In my conversion, I need holiness. In my commitment to serve God and to worship Him, I need to be holy.

In Romans 12:1–2 it says,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,
that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, [what's the
next word?] holy, acceptable to God, which is your
reasonable service.

Do you want to serve God? That is wonderful. We need holiness to serve God. “Be holy for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16).

In our communication of love and affection to other believers, we need holiness. There is nothing as awful as attending a church that is cold, dead, unresponsive, and filled with people that look like spiritual zombies. The last time they smiled was probably when their doctor pulled their lips up. You know what I mean? I do not like churches like that. There ought to be a smile on our faces if it is physically possible. There ought to be joy in our hearts. We have come to worship the Lord. There should be wonderful fellowship and we are to express our love for each other. You probably know that in the Bible there is an exhortation to greet people with a holy kiss.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 3. God does not want us to be cold and apathetic and indifferent to each other. But God also wants us to be careful and He wants us to be holy. And in our communication of love and affection to other believers, we are to be holy.

1 Thessalonians 3:11 says,

Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus
Christ, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you
increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just
as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts
blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the
coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus
that you should abound more and more, just as you
received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;
for you know what commandments we gave you through
the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, [your holiness]
your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual
immorality. (1 Thessalonians 3:11–4:3)

He starts out by saying, “I want you to love each other.” We need to love each other, but watch out; you must abstain from sexual immorality.

For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.
Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God,
who has also given us His Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians
4:7–8)

Folks, listen to me. There is hardly a week that goes by in the ministry of this church, in this community, that somebody does not justify what is pure sexual immorality in the name of love. The compromise here is so incredible. Kids are having sex with each other before marriage all in the name of loving each other. They say, “We’re not hurting anybody.” You are hurting yourself and it is unholy.

God wants you to be separate. God is not trying to keep you from having fun or being satisfied. God knows how you work. God knows how you function physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He wants you to be happier than you could ever possibly imagine and He knows what it takes. This world has gone bonkers for sexual immorality. However, they do not call it sexual immorality anymore. But God still calls it that and we ought to also.

My dear friends, we have never lived in a day like today when there is such a need for holiness in our communication of love and affection to each other. We need holiness and God frequently says so.

Turn please to 1 Peter 1 again. We also need it in our conduct before God and others. We need to be holy in whatever we do.

The Bible says,

As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the
former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called
you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
[Whatever you do.] because it is written, “Be holy, for I am
holy.” (1 Peter 1:14–16)

In our conduct we need to be holy.

Now folks, I hear this and sometimes I wonder if we can do anything about it. In fact, one man told me that sanctification is a work of God. There is nothing any believer can do about it. Turn to 2 Corinthians 7. I want to show you a verse that troubles me on that question. I want you to look at it for yourself. People have told me for many years that you cannot possibly be holy. They say that the only way we can be holy is through Jesus Christ. I agree. There is a position of holiness. What I am confronting us all with is whether there is a practice of holiness? Yes, I know that in my standing before God I am made holy only by the work of Christ. But I want to ask you about your present state as a

believer. Do you have a responsibility to be holy in your life? Was God tricking us when He said, “You be holy, because I am holy?” Is that an impossibility and they were just words?

And how about 2 Corinthians 6:14 where Paul tells us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers? In verse 17 he says, “Come out from among them and be separate.” That is holiness—separation. “Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you. I will be a father to you,” he said. And verse 1 of the next chapter he says, “Therefore having these promises [of that special father/son relationship with God], beloved [beloved means he is writing to Christians] let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Now you tell me if you believe that you can cleanse yourself? I have a lot of believers who say, “No”. You are only cleansed by the cross. Hey, I believe the only way I can be forgiven of my sins is through the death of Christ. But do I have responsibility to cleanse myself? And the Bible says, “Yes”. This is seen in 2 Corinthians 7:1. In the Greek grammar it even demands that it is in and of myself. It is not being done to me; it is my responsibility.

Is there some filthiness of the spirit in disposition or attitude in your heart? Is there some bitterness or resentment or complaint? God says, “You clean it up.” Is there something that we are doing in our lifestyle that is demonstrating the lust of the flesh? Clean it up! We are to perfect, or “bring to a completion,” holiness in the fear of God, recognizing our accountability to God.

Yes friends, among believers there is to be a practical holiness where we cleanse ourselves, where we get right with God. There is nobody who is going to cause you to stop sinning but you. There is nobody who is responsible for sinning but you. We can be tempted and baited and enticed by the enemy, but we sin.

James 1:13–15 says,

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.

In our generation, with all of its counseling procedures, it is trying to absolve us of responsibility. Blame it on somebody—your parents, your children, your environment, or somebody. Just do not stand there and say that you did it.

Listen, the only way to try freedom is to admit that you did sin. The only way to true freedom is to confess your sin and forsake it. Do you have to confess your sin to become a Christian? That is being asked now numerous times when I go in other cities. Why is that question being asked when Christians have believed it for years? I will tell you why.

It is because of the gigantic toleration of sin. We are bringing people into the Christian camp without going through what the Bible says they should go through. They are to confess their sins.

1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.” People need to repent of their sin. That question has been asked of me maybe a hundred times in the last two years, both formally and publicly. Do people have to repent? Listen, it was the preaching of Jesus Christ and of the apostles in the New Testament that we are to repent of our sins. The Bible says, “If you cover your sin you will not prosper. If you confess and forsake it you will find compassion” (Proverbs 28:13, paraphrased).

It is no wonder that we have a weak Christianity. There is an anemic belief because we have not dealt with sin. And a lot of us, as believers, are not dealing with sin. Who cares? Nobody is going to bring it up and everybody tolerates it. Let me tell you something friends, God is not fooled. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

I have to tell you the good news. The good news is that at the second coming of Jesus Christ, you are going to finally be holy. Amen? Praise the Lord! I struggle like you do to be holy in front of God. I know positionally that it is true because I put my faith in Jesus, but I struggle with it. One day I will not struggle anymore. God says that we will be holy and blameless at the second coming of Jesus Christ. We will. No more problems. We will be separated from sin, its power, and its consequences forever. No more sin. No more pain. No more struggle. No more tears. It will be all gone. Praise the Lord!

“Now unto Him who can keep you from falling and present you faultless (holy) at His glorious appearing, unto Him be glory” (Judges 1:24).

God can keep you, folks. And one day He who has begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). We will be holy at last. But until that day, I do not want to lose my joy. Do you? I do not want to lose my peace. I do not want to lose the thrill of being His servant. I want to know His power. Don't you? Then be holy, for God is holy.

Let's pray.

Father, You know how messed up we are in this generation about holiness and about sin. God, I thank You for Your Word. And I pray that You would cause the believers here to rush to it frequently and to think what You would think about sin, to say what You would say and to do what You would do. Lord, I pray for those in our audience who perhaps have thought that becoming a Christian is simply a matter of our own doing and performance. God, please deliver them from that and help them to understand that

sinful people can only possibly approach a holy God through Jesus Christ our Lord, who made the way possible by His own shed blood. Thank You that we have forgiveness of sin and access into the presence of God through His work. Lord, I pray for people in this audience that are not sure of their relationship to You. Would You cause them, by Your Holy Spirit, to flee to the Lord Jesus before it is too late. Lord, we who are believers, are in serious need of the practice of holiness in our lives. Oh God, convict us of sin. May there be a holy desire to get right with You. We thank You, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Would you take your Bibles and turn to Revelation 4? We have come to worship Him. The English word “worship”—which is used in our Bible both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament—has four different Hebrew words behind it. But there is one primary word in Hebrew that is used 172 times. It is the word, *tsedeq*. It basically means “to bow down.”

In the New Testament it is interesting, as you read the word “worship,” there are eight different Greek words behind that word. And again, there is one primary word, *proskyneō*, which is a compound word of the verb “to kiss” and the preposition “toward”. And the way it was used is interesting. If you came into a courtroom of a king or a dignitary and you were invited to come near to him, across usually a marble or glass pavement, the first thing that you would do to honor him would be to bow down and to kiss his hand or his ring or his scepter. And that word “to kiss toward” is the word used in the New Testament which is translated worship.

I like a lot of what Leslie Flynn writes in his book on worship:

True worship is based on the inexhaustible excellencies of God. To worship God is to affirm His supreme worth, for He alone is worthy.

Dr. Vernon Grounds writes in his book:

Worship involves awareness of God, awe in His presence, adoration of Him because of His excellencies and acts, and an affirmation of praise in all He is and does.

My good friend, Dr. John MacArthur said,

Perhaps the greatest need in all of Christendom is the clear understanding of the biblical teaching about worship. That consuming, selfless desire to give to God is the essence and the heart of worship.

James Christianson, in a text that is used in schools on worship says,

Genuine worship takes place only when God is worshipped for His own sake. The greatest achievement of the human soul is to be able to commune with God. The most significant activity of any group of people is to come into His presence and to magnify and worship His holy name.

In Revelation 4 the scene is heaven—the center of that is the throne of God. Let’s read it:

Rev 4:1-11

1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

6 Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.

8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders—[who we believe represent the church of Jesus Christ in heaven, the twenty-four elders]—fall

10 down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

11 “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”

Let’s pray.

Father, I would ask in these few moments together that You would open up our hearts to the meaning of worship. And may the result be that those of us who are far from worship would draw near to God, for He has promised to draw near

to us. You said, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.” And we read that in heaven those before Your throne fall down and worship You; may that really happen in our hearts. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

What does it mean to worship? How do you tell a generation consumed with itself—its own rights, its own demands, the pursuit of pleasure dominating our culture—how do you tell them to worship? I like our church constitution because it has it right. It says that the first purpose is the worship and praise of Almighty God and that is true. The number one reason why we gather together is to worship the Lord, but I do not know whether you are worshipping or not. It is amazing that some people can smile and shine and make the preacher think they are listening. And I do not know whether they are worshipping or not. They are just good at it. There are others who can “sack” through it and actually hear the whole thing. How they do that, I don’t know; but they are no blessing to me.

I tell you that only God knows whether or not worship will occur as we listen to what the Bible says about worship. Only God knows and it seems to me that understanding this and evaluating this from my own heart, the only time I really know is when I am all alone. So when nobody else is watching and nobody else is with me to be impressed or to be influenced or motivated, it is when I am alone that I find out whether I really worship God or not. And that is true, I believe, for all of us. Our Father who sees in secret, Jesus said, will reward us openly.

Now what is worship? I want to give you the following six things: Number one, it is right there in Revelation 4, in front of our eyes. The reason behind the creation of all things is worship. What is worship? It is the reason behind the creation of all things. The Bible says in verse 10, the twenty-four elders fall down and worship Him. And what they say is, “You are worthy to receive glory, honor and power, for You created all things.” God created everything.

Last night was a rare Southern California night. There was air that we could not see and we could see the beautiful stars. And the birds were not coughing. What a night it was! And I looked at the beautiful stars filling the sky and I said, “Hey, all the host of heaven, including the stars, the Bible says, were designed to worship God.” All the stuff that is life—all the things we have, every last inanimate material thing that has ever been designed or made by man, any material that has ever come from the surface of the globe or put together in any way that is technologically exciting or interesting to us—has all been designed to worship Him.

My dear friends, you want to worship? The reason behind the creation is worship. Turn to Nehemiah 9 please. When the children of Israel came back to the land after the Babylonian captivity, everything was in disarray. Their homes and towns were destroyed by Babylon. The temple was smashed to the ground and it was a dismal sight. They came back under the leadership of several people, one of whom was Nehemiah. He has to exhort them to rebuild and it is not going to be an easy task. There are people in the land

who are going to oppose those who are half breeds through the intermarriage of Assyrians with the Israelis. We saw that the Samaritans were hated by the Jews and these Samaritans are in the land. They have been there for quite a while and they are going to oppose the Jews who come back trying to rebuild after the Babylonian captivity.

Nehemiah is trying to challenge them to build but he knew what we should all know. Building the external buildings is not what really needs to be done. What we really need to do is to rebuild our hearts. He knew that people had to get right with the Lord. And in Nehemiah 9:6 there was a great celebration—a day of prayer and fasting and celebration. And all the Levites were on duty, according to verse 5. And all of them are shouting out with a loud voice according to verse 4. This is no quiet deal. This is a loud burst of praise. It says to the people:

5 Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever!
“Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

6 You alone are the LORD; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven—[Does what? What does it say?—worships You. (Nehemiah 9:5-6)

What is worship? It is the reason behind the creation of all things. “You alone are the Lord. You have made it all. You are to be worshipped.”

Turn please to 1 Chronicles 16. Not only is worship the reason behind the creation of all things, but it is the realization of the holiness of God. What is worship? It is a personal realization in our hearts of the holiness of God. What does that mean? It means the separateness of God. How God is different from us and not how He is the same.

Listen to me, people, this generation is into what we call “relational theology”. It has been for a long time and they come to church to get blessed, to get stroked, and to be encouraged. There is nothing wrong with being encouraged but the focus has been wrong. It has not been God, it has been man. People went to seminary to prepare for the ministry and we are still being told to preach to people’s needs. My dear friends, we are to preach the Word of God and it will handle people’s needs. We are to give glory to God. We are accountable to God to give God’s message.

The Bible warns that in the last days congregations will not endure sound doctrine. They will want teachers who have itching ears; that is, they want to hear the applause of people and their appreciation. So they will not preach the truth, they will give the people what they want. I am warning us all (warning myself as a preacher and you who listen) that we need to hear from God. This generation is not focused on God, it is focused on man. And worship is the realization of the holiness of God, how He is different. And now we have radio and television preachers telling us boldly on television that man can be God. My

friends, that was the lie of Satan in the Garden of Eden when he said, “You should be as God. We will never be God. And by the way, God is not mere man; God became a man, but never ceased being God. We’d better wake up!

Hey, I love to think about how I am the same as God. That helps me. I think because God thinks. I feel because I have emotions—because God does. I have volitional choice and rational thought because God does. I am made in His image, after His likeness, but I am not God. And even in the sense in which I am the same, I am so inadequate, imperfect, and so insufficient to even compare myself with the eternal God who is perfect in His personality.

My friends, it is the holiness of God—the separateness is what holiness means—that causes me to worship. I am not going to fall down and worship somebody who is the same as I am. I am going to fall down and worship He who is greater than I am.

It is interesting that in 1 Chronicles we have an offering being taken. Amen? Hey, I do not want laughter, I want *amens*! I was preaching up in Portland, Oregon at one of our Biola Hour Gospel Celebrations and a man came up to me after the service and he said,

“I really disagree with your taking a public offering.”

He said, “We don’t do that in our church.”

And I said, “Well how do you pay for things?”

He said, “Well, we do it privately. We have a box out in the lobby and if you want to give, you give. We don’t ask anybody to give.”

Well, you know, I am not real tactful and I said,

“Well you are disobedient to the Lord.”

He said, “No you are disobedient to the Lord.”

I said, “Well, the Scripture will have to determine that.” I said, “I believe in public offerings.”

“Well, we don’t. It’s private.”

I said, “No, it’s not private. You said you had the box in the lobby. If you want to be private put it in the toilet or something.

“What are you saying?”

Hey, come on. I mean we check off our brains to try and prove a point. I said, “In the Bible everything is public. Why, it was so public that in Acts 5 they laid the money in front of the apostles’ feet for everybody to see.” That would be interesting to put a little pressure on us. We, in this individualistic country, are so obsessed with our privacy or our little world of rights; we are scared to death of exposure. What if God asked us to do that? “Hey, David is asking for an offering publicly to bring this stuff here.” And I want you to see what he said.

Look at 1 Chronicles 16:28–29, please.

Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, give to the
LORD glory and strength.

Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him.
Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of—[What ?]—holiness![Separateness]—
Tremble before Him, all the earth.

The interesting thing is that God says: “Bring an offering and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

Let me give you an application to this. Turn to 2 Samuel 12:15 where I am going to show you somebody who worshipped the Lord in an unusual set of circumstances; it is King David. It is the story of the baby that he and Bathsheba had through their adulterous affair. The baby died and it is an interesting story as it relates to worship.

In verses 15–19 it says:

15 And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill.
16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.
17 So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them.
18 Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died.

David has been fasting for seven days, pouring his heart out. He would not listen to anybody and he would not eat. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said,

18 “Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!”

They were thinking, “He is going to take his life, commit suicide, because he is under so much grief.”

19 When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, “He is dead.”

You know, that reminds me of a time many years ago when I was asked by a family to communicate information to their mother. She was dying of cancer in a hospital and her husband had just died of a heart attack. And the family asked me to tell her that. The man who was calling on them in the hospital was ministering to them and encouraging them,

but they felt this situation was a very serious deal. They said, “David, you should go and tell the woman because she has known you since you were a child. Tell her that her husband died.” I said, “Why don’t you tell her?” “Well, we just can’t. If we do, it will kill her.”

Now I do not have immediate compassion. You know what I mean? People, please pray for me about that. I have been trying to learn, but I do not immediately feel compassion. I immediately question things. I do not want to, I just do.

Now here is a woman who is dying, she is terminally ill and they say if I tell her that her husband died, it would kill her. She is already dying! Wouldn’t it be an act of mercy to tell her so that she could die and go home to be with the Lord and not suffer anymore? Do you understand what I’m saying? Now that thought did bother me and it is good that I didn’t say it because then my ministry would be to speak to folks directly and kill them. So I had to think that through a little bit.

But they said to me,

“Now be careful.”

I said, “What do you mean, be careful?”

“Well, don’t just come out and tell her. We know what you’re like.”

I said, “I think people want to know.”

“Don’t do that.”

“Well, I’ll try to the best—“

“Just be careful.”

“Okay.”

So I walked into the room and the woman has known me since I was a child.

She said, “David, what’s wrong?” Hey, I didn’t ask that. She did.

She said, “What’s wrong?”

I said, “Who said anything is wrong?”

She said, “Why are you here?”

She said, “If I wanted somebody to minister to me it wouldn’t be you! The only thing I can figure is there is something real serious here or why would they send you?”

I said, “Hey I didn’t say...”

She said, “There is. There’s something wrong. It’s probably my husband. Is it my husband? Well, what has happened to him? He’s dead!”

Folks, I tried. You know what she did? She grabbed me and hugged me and kissed me. She said, “Thank you. I knew somebody would tell me the truth. She said, “They have been running around here for a day. I knew something was wrong.” People want to know the truth.

And you know what happened when David's little baby died? For seven days he had been weeping and fasting and people were worried he was going to kill himself. He was so distraught and you know what he did? Look at 2 Samuel 12:20–23

20 So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel; and came into the house of the LORD and [What does it say? He] worshiped. [The will of God is done. Praise the Lord.] Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.

Most people panic when that happens or they have deep sorrow. I am sure David felt some of that.

21 Then his servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.”

22 And he said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’

23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?”

And here is a wonderful statement of encouragement to any parent who has ever lost a baby or a child.

23 “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

My dear friends, for seven days David is on his face weeping before God and begging God. And the moment the child dies, he worships. Worship is a realization of the holiness of God. God is not me—God's ways are not my ways. God's thoughts are not my thoughts. God decided to take the child. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

You know what worship is? It is the realization of the holiness of God and that He is not us. He does not work like us. Does not think like us or act like us. He does not feel like us because He is the eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, wonderful God. And He always does what is right.

Worship, it is the reason behind the creation of all things. It is also a realization of the holiness of God—His separateness. How different He is from us and for that we should be praising Him every day of our lives.

Turn please to Exodus 34. You ask me what worship is? Worship is also the recognition of our sin and unworthiness before God. If there is one thing that is causing this generation not to worship God, it is our attitude toward sin. We tolerate it. We accept it. We kid about it. We act like it is no big deal. No wonder we do not worship—we are so arrogant!

One of the most serious reflections of our arrogance that I can see is when somebody has committed one of the big five, or nasty nine, or dirty dozen, or whatever is on our biggie list of sins. When somebody has done that and has fallen there is an immediate response. It is our natural tendency to think that we are really glad that it did not happen to us. Now we ought to be thankful it did not happen to us, but folks there is something wrong with that.

Jesus said that it is not what is out there that is defiling the world and defiling us. It is what is coming out of our own hearts—our own depravity is not understood. And as a result there is very little worship. If we really knew who we were then we would know why we should worship Him. The failure to realize and recognize our sin and unworthiness before God is one of the major reasons why we are not worshipping God.

Let me give you some examples from Exodus 34:6. It says that everything that is rotten—adultery, murder, homosexuality, theft—whatever it is that you think is rotten, Jesus says it comes out of your own heart.

If anything, Exodus 34:6 should cause us to go to our knees and know that we cannot make it without the Lord. And when somebody falls into sin, the number one reaction should be, “But for the grace of God, there go I” Get on your knees and say, “Oh God, thank You for Your forgiveness. Thank You for Your strength. Thank You for Your power. Thank You for Your patience. Thank You for the way You deal with me, because I deserve hell. That could be me! And it is only Your loving grace that has spared me in that moment.”

We do not hear that. We hear arrogance today. Like the Pharisee, “I thank You that I am not—” and jokes are told. I remember the first time I heard about the televangelist scandal from the years past. The first time it came to my attention, I was really shocked because I was told this at a public meeting. It was not given to me in private. It was the first time I heard it in public and I was asked what I thought about it. And my immediate thought that came into my mind was the tragedy and the awfulness of it. And then, without even hesitation I said, “But that could have been all of us.” And since then we have watched a parade of scandals. A parade of them and they are shameful and disgraceful. And we all look at it with a certain arrogance thinking, “Well, that is what they are really like. That is what charlatans are like.” Stop it, folks! That is what we are all like.

And the reason we do not worship God and call upon Him for mercy and grace and forgiveness is because we do not know about sin. We are covering sin up. We are sweeping it under the rug. We are redefining it. We are acting like it is no big deal anymore. Well it still is a big deal.

In Exodus 34 Moses asked God, “What is Your name?” God proclaimed His name in verses 6–9. Here is what His name is:

6 The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious,
longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,
7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and
transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the
guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
and the children's children unto the third and to the fourth
generation.
8 So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the
earth, [And did what?] and worshiped.
9 Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O
Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are
a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin,
and take us as Your inheritance."

When somebody really worships, he recognizes his sin and unworthiness before God.

Turn to Joshua 5 to see another illustration. Joshua was like a water boy to Moses. He hung around Moses all the time and he was a servant of Moses. Can you imagine what he felt when God asked him to take over and lead the children of Israel (that complaining, murmuring group of people) into the land of Canaan, to defeat thirty-one Canaanite kings with iron chariots? Here they are, a motley crew counting men, women, and children; there were some three million of them and their animals. And the first great fortress they face is Jericho. And can you believe it—God told him to walk around the city with the people once a day for six days!

Then on the seventh day they were to do it seven times! I mean, they could hardly walk by the end of the day. Can you imagine what people were saying back in the line somewhere?

"What in the world is going on? We are the laughing stock of the city. What do we do?"

"Well, when we get there that last time the walls are going to fold up."

"Sure. How does he know that?"

"Well, God told him that."

"God told him that. How do we know? Maybe he just ate too much chili. How do we know that?"

Do you know why Joshua was so determined? Because something happened to him before they started marching. Turn to Joshua 5:13-15.

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that
he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood
opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And
Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or
for our adversaries?" [Smart to ask that question.]

14 So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and—[did what?—]worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”

15 Then the Commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.

According to Joshua 6:2, it was the Lord talking to him. I think this was an appearance of Jesus Christ, but that is another subject.

What happened here is that Joshua found out who he is and who God is. You know the same thing happened to Moses when he came to the burning bush. You know what the voice said? “Take your shoes off. The place you are standing is holy ground. Who do you think you are?” Worship.

In the Orient and still in the Hawaiian Islands, it is a custom to this day to take your shoes off before you enter somebody's house, in honor and respect for them. You take your shoes off and leave them at the door. This custom is deeply rooted into the past that is in our Bibles. Honor and respect come with the idea of worship. You are honoring somebody's home that you are going into so you take your shoes off so that you do not get their rugs dirty.

“Take your sandals off, Joshua. The place where you are standing is holy ground.” A lot of us do not have this in our hearts. We do not really understand.

Turn to Nehemiah 9. Why is there so little worship? It is because there is a failure to recognize our sin and unworthiness before God. In Nehemiah 9, in the opening verses, it was quite a day. We read just one verse previously but I want you to see the opening three verses of Nehemiah 9, a day when Nehemiah challenged the people of God.

Nehemiah 9:1–3 says,

1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.—[This is the recognition of sin and unworthiness before God.]

2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

You see, real worship also involves a confession of our sin. If you are going to worship God then you realize and recognize in your heart, your own sin and unworthiness before a holy God who is separate from you.

Turn to Revelation 11. What is worship? It is not only the reason behind the creation of all things, the realization of the holiness of God, the recognition of our sin and unworthiness before God, but worship is also the result of those who know the greatness and power of God. Maybe one reason why we do not worship in our hearts is because we have never experienced that. We do not know the greatness and the power of God.

In Revelation 11 the scene is heaven again. The twenty-four elders, who represent the church of God, do what they always do in Revelation—they always fall on their faces and worship God. In verses 17–18 they worshipped Him and what did they say?

17 We give You thanks, O Lord God, Almighty, all powerful, the One who is and was and who is to come. Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.
18 The nations were angry. Your wrath has come and the time of the dead, that they should be judged and that You should reward Your servants, the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great; And should destroy those who destroy the earth.

Why are they praising the Lord? Why are they worshipping the Lord? It is because He has displayed His power in the judgments of the tribulation. Worship is a result of those who know the greatness and the power of God.

Now turn to Revelation 15 where once again the scene is in heaven. The Bible says, in verses 3–4 that they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb saying,

3 Great and marvelous are works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints.
4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and—[do what?]-worship before You,—[Why?]- For Your judgments have been manifested.

When the world sees the judgments of God (the world of unbelievers) they refuse to repent. They refuse to worship. They continue to worship demons, according to the Bible. But when the believers in heaven see the manifestation of God's power on earth, they fall down on their faces and worship God because they see His power as they have never seen it before.

Worship is the result of those who know the greatness and power of God.

Turn back to Revelation 5. My friends, in the fifth place, worship is also the response of one who knows the salvation of God. Are you saved? Have you come to know the Lord? Have your sins been washed in the precious blood of Christ? Are you declared righteous? Have you been sanctified? Have you been cleansed of your sin? Are you forgiven? Are you saved? The natural response of one who knows the salvation of God is to worship the Lord.

Put the whole package together—I did not deserve it. It is His sovereign choice of me. He loved me before the foundation of the world. I do not understand any of it. I do not deserve it. I have never done anything to prove that I am worthy of it and He still loved me and He saved me. What do you think I should do but praise Him every day of my life! Are you glad you are saved? It is better than the other side, amen?

We read in Revelation 5 that the worship in heaven is for Jesus Christ. In chapter 4 it was God the Father. In chapter 5 it is God the Son, the Lamb of God. Revelation 5:9–13 says,

9 They sang a new song saying:
“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals for
You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your
blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
10 And have made us kings and priests to our God. And we
shall reign on the earth.”
11 Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels
around the throne. The living creatures, the elders, the
number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand,
thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:
12 “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power
and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory
and blessing!”
13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth
and under the earth, such as are in the sea and all that are in
them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and
power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
forever and ever!”

Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” The Greek indicates that they kept saying it. And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever. Why did they worship Him here? Because—“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain who has redeemed us by His precious blood.” My friend, worship is the response—what we ought to expect of one who knows the salvation of God.

Looking at one last thing, let’s turn to John 4. What is worship? In John 4 we have a classic text on worship from the lips of Jesus Christ. He was talking to a Samaritan woman whose life was really messed up. She’d had a number of husbands and was having an affair at the time she was talking with Jesus. Her life was really in need and she

found the living water that day, the water of everlasting life. And God used her as a witness to win many Samaritans to the Lord because they knew about her and they saw the change. In the course of that witnessing of our Lord Jesus to this Samaritan woman, they discussed worship. The woman, being a Samaritan said as all Samaritans do, “We worship on Mt. Gerizim. You Jews worship in Jerusalem. At least we are both worshipping.”

In John 4:21–24

21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;— [Watch this line]—for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 God is Spirit: and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Now a lot of people believe the word “spirit” here refers to the Holy Spirit. They are well-meaning. Naturally the Holy Spirit is fundamental to all Christian ministry and salvation, but it is not referring to the Holy Spirit. If God wanted us to believe it was the Holy Spirit there, all He would have to do is one simple thing, put the definite article there in the Greek text—“In or by means of the Spirit.” He did not do that. The words, “in spirit” are in contrast to “in flesh”. We would say in English, “inward versus outward” or “internal versus external.” What it is saying is that in contrast to all the teaching of the Pharisees with the religionists of Jesus’ day, everything was external. Jesus said, “No, those who worship God, worship in the realm of spirit and not in the realm of external activities of the flesh.”

Look, there are acts of worship that we could all do here. One would be to bow down, which we have already done in our service. That is an act of worship. Does that mean you worshipped in your heart? No. It should be a demonstration of what is in the heart. There are many acts of worship; it is to bring an offering. Did you do that today? That is an act of worship. Should you do it in obedience to the Lord and honor Him? You bet. Does that mean you worshipped Him? Not necessarily.

Those who worship God worship Him inside. The most important evaluation that any believer in this audience can make is the same one that was in my heart in putting this together, and that is to realize the only time that I can be sure my heart is worshipping the Lord is when I am alone. Hey, I believe in public worship. Part of the reason we gather together as Christians in the church is to worship and praise God. We want to challenge ourselves, motivate ourselves, encourage one another, and challenge us about a lost world, and challenge us about praising God and worshipping. I can do that and you can

do that. We can all do that to each other. Great! But let me tell you, when you leave this place and you are all alone and nobody is there to watch you, nobody is there for you to impress, or to convince of what your true spiritual state is, when you are all alone that is when you will discover if worship is a reality in your heart. The Father sees in secret and He will reward you openly, Jesus said.

There are many acts of worship but the question is: “What is going on in our heart?” It has to be in the spirit and in truth. The truth that we know is from the Word of God. You want to know the truth about what worship should be? Hey, then read God’s Word and let the Word control your thoughts, your praise, your prayer. Let the Word dominate your life. We worship God in the realm of spirit, inside, and in the realm of truth. We do not make up our own thoughts. We let the Word of God and God’s truth control us in all that we say. Whether we eat and drink or whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God. The Bible says,

9 Therefore God has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him a name that is above every name.
10 that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

I want to do that.

Then what is worship? Here it is and I leave it with you. Worship to me is that personal relationship of the believer with God that makes all other pursuits secondary. Let me repeat it again. Worship is the personal relationship of the believer with God that makes all other pursuits in life secondary. Now we have it.

Let’s close with prayer.

Lord, we confess that there are a lot of pursuits in life that have become very important to us—job, career, success, money, even happiness. Sometimes it is just busyness itself and having something to do. God, I pray that You would set us free to worship You no matter what. In the midst of all the activities of this holiday season, how we need to worship You. Father, I pray for those in our audience who have never come to put personal faith in Jesus Christ for what He did when He died on the cross for their sins and rose again from the dead. They have never made a personal commitment of their life and future to Him as Savior and Lord. God, I know You said no one can even come to the Father except through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help them, Lord, to see that worship begins the day they come to Jesus Christ. And for all of us who have made that commitment,

God restore in our hearts the priority of worship, of loving You, of adoring You. Clean all those things out of our hearts that have taken first place. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Hallelujah for His sovereign majesty! Turn to Psalm 145, please. When I think of the majesty of our Lord, this Psalm comes into my mind probably like yours. In one of Jack Hayford's songs and I think he has written about 500 hymns now, but he wrote one that is really a blessing to me. It has captured the hearts of Christians for a number of years now.

Majesty. Worship His majesty. Unto Thee be all glory,
honor and praise. Majesty, kingdom authority flows from
the throne unto His own. His anthem raise. So exalt, lift up
on high the name of Jesus. Magnify! Glorify!

You know I think sometimes we forget that the number one thing God wants from us is praise. In the final stanza it says, "Jesus, who died, now glorified, King of all kings." He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Hallelujah for His sovereign majesty.

In Psalm 145:10-13 it says,

10 All Your works shall praise You, O Lord. And Your
saints shall bless You.
11 They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk
of Your power.
12 O make known to the sons of men His mighty acts
and the glorious majesty of His kingdom.
[Some translations say, splendor.]
13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and Your
dominion endures throughout all generations.

Let's go to Revelation 19. I would like you to notice the scene of this praise—this shouting of *hallelujah* to God. What is the scene? It is in heaven. It says in Revelation 19:1, "After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven." It is heaven we are looking at.

By the way, if you are into the historical background of the writing of the Book of Revelation, you know that John was somehow transferred in some kind of spiritual time machine into the future where he actually saw the events. If you stop and think about it, you and I who know the Lord are reading about ourselves and what we will be doing. So as you read through the passage, just remember that if you know the Lord that includes you. You may say, "Hey, that is me there. Did you hear my voice? It is the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven."

You know, we need balance when we talk about how many folks are going to be in heaven. The scene of this praise is heaven, but when I look at the size of it, man, God

blows my mind apart! He says, “A great multitude.” In chapter 7 He says, “a multitude that no one can number.” In chapter 5 He says, “ten thousand times ten thousand.” In the Greek mathematical system, ten thousand is the highest number they have and that is multiplied by itself. There are so many people. We need balance with that.

Here is what I mean. There are a lot of folks talking about heaven who are not going there, amen? Jesus said, “In the last day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not done many wonderful works in Your name? Have we not cast out demons in Your name? Have we not prophesied in Your name?’” He will say to them, “Depart from Me ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you” (Luke 13:25-27, paraphrased).

Apparently in the scene at the end before Christ comes, there are a lot of people who profess Christianity. Maybe it is a lot like the early days of Constantine in the 300s, when he declared Christianity is the state religion and all of a sudden everybody brought their paganism right in. We have been suffering ever since. Christianity will be popular and people will mention they are Christians whether they have ever made a commitment to Christ and regardless of whether they have ever been born again. Jesus said there will be many people like that.

So a lot of us may ask, “Hey, how many folks are really going to heaven?” And others respond, “There will not be very many.” I have heard that from folks but I want you to know that in reading the Bible, I have discovered that there are going to be more folks in heaven than I could ever possibly dream would be there. God is into lots of people. He likes people and He wants lots of them in heaven. And there will be a great multitude in heaven—all His servants are those who fear Him, both small and great—it says in Revelation 19:5. They are all going to be there. How many are going to be there? Well there is no way to count the number of them. There will be so many people in heaven. I thought about this last week.

A couple days ago I went over to get a Christmas tree at one of those lots. You know one of those pagan symbols—a Christmas tree? I went over to get one. The guy and his father bring trees down from Nevada, from way up near the Nevada border. They actually live in California in a small little town and they grow all these trees and they are selling them right here in our neighborhood in these lots. Well he heard me in Sacramento on one of our radio rallies. So I had a wonderful time talking to him. By the way, they provided the actual live branches around the church free of charge. But anyway, we were talking about the fact that he likes a small town. He said, “Boy you have so many people around here.” You know, we were talking about people and traffic. I said, “Boy, I sure hope you are going to like heaven.” He said, “Hey, I’m a Christian. I’m going to like heaven.” I said, “Well, there are lots of folks up there.”

I do not know what you thought. Maybe you thought just you and a few of your friends are going to be there, I don’t know. Believers are going to come out of every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. Heaven is going to be filled with people. And I love to read this, “A great multitude in heaven.” This represents the size of that praise and look at the sound of that praise. Here is where some of you check off. The sound, it says in verse 1,

is a loud voice. Look down at Revelation 19:6. It says, “the voice of a great multitude; it is as the sound of many waters, as the sound of mighty thunderings.” Chapter 4 says that these mighty sounds come out of the throne—these mighty thunderings. The number one most characteristic word of Revelation is the word “loud.” It is actually the Greek word for “great” which is *mega*. We use the word *mega* to really describe something—like a megapolis—which is really a giant metropolitan area. Or megatrends are really influential or gigantic trends in the world. Mega is being used a lot today in various literature and business articles. Listen, “mega” is heaven. The mega sounds of the world are in heaven and God is into loud. And some of you are into quiet. Amen?

Now we need balance here. God does speak in the still, small voice. And God does speak when it is quiet, but some of you are convinced that the only thing God wants is quiet. You are wrong, very wrong! But the good news is that God is going to change your ears so you can handle it in heaven, okay. You are going to have a brand new body, so do not worry. When your kid turns up the sound system in the upstairs, remember it is loud in heaven. At that moment when your kids are playing music so loud you cannot stand it, just say to yourself, “Praise God that He is going to change my ears.” You might also pray that God will help them with their hearing because they are blowing their ears away.

The Bible says it will be a loud sound in heaven, so God is into loud sounds. Can you imagine what heaven is going to be like? What is the subject of this praise? In Revelation 19:1 it says, “Alleluia! [and the next word] Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!” Verse 2 explains that it is because He judged the Great Harlot, this pagan religious system that has existed from the days of Babylon until now. In its final form—who knows what it will be—but this system has corrupted the earth with her fornication. It was false; it was not true. And why are they shouting to God? It was because now they have the truth and God has smashed the false religion to smithereens. Now there is no more deception. There it is in all of its glory and purity, the truth of God. And they are rejoicing that He has avenged also the blood of all of God’s saints who have been killed in the name of false religion. And they shout, “Hallelujah!”

Also look at verse 6. The subject of the praise is Hallelujah. And the next statement is: “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent [all powerful] reigns!”

It is “hallelujah” for His sovereign majesty. The Lord reigns. Don’t you love the Messiah and the Hallelujah Chorus? I almost feel like we could insert it right now and go for it. Get it on your stereo sets and your radios and plug in those cassettes and play the Messiah and let God speak to your heart. “Hallelujah for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”

Let’s come to the second paragraph in verse 7. “Hallelujah, for our coming marriage.” Are you going to be there? This is the marriage supper of the Lamb. Do you like weddings? I love weddings. They are so great. The only one I did not like was the one I had to pay for. I just love weddings. I am into extravagance just because I know what the Bible teaches and yet I am into good stewardship and I do not believe we should spend too much money. But then on the other hand, what better occasion is there to spend

money on than for a wedding? The Bible says that earthly marriages are a type of our Lord's marriage to us.

Boy, what is it going to be like in heaven? Is it going to be great or is it going to be the greatest? "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). What a celebration it is going to be! Are you going to be there?

Let me tell you four things about that day. Our purpose is stated right there in verse 7, right away. "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory." That has been the purpose of everything from the beginning. According to Revelation 4:9-11, God created everything to bring glory and praise and honor to Himself. Let us give Him glory. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Give Him glory.

You know in the Bible, in the Book of Acts and also in Revelation it describes those who have truly become believers. Do you know what it says? It says they glorified God. It is a technical expression for belief. What is our purpose? To give Him glory.

Secondly, look at our preparation. You have to be prepared to come to this wedding. You have to have the right clothes on. It says in verse 7, "His wife has made herself ready." Are you ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb? Jesus told several parables dealing with folks who should be ready. He said that those who were at the wedding of God and did not have a wedding garment were cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. They were thrown out of the wedding. Why? It was because they did not have the right wedding garment on.

"His wife has made herself ready." There is balance here, is there not? The eternal God saves us. God calls us to Himself. God works His plan of salvation in us. God, the Holy Spirit, brings us to supernatural awakening, as we call it being "born again." God does it. But it is interesting the text says that the wife has made herself ready. You see, we also have a responsibility to that message which is to receive it and to believe it. And it is God that is working it in us. There is a balance between those two things—the work of God and the responsibility of man. The wife made herself ready.

And the next statement is the balance to that when it says, "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright." Now what is the fine linen? It says it is the righteousness or the righteous acts of the saints. We notice in verse 14 that the armies of heaven have come. They are clothed in fine linen. Back up, please, in your Bibles, to Revelation 3:4-5. Let's look briefly and see the right garments that are necessary for us to be prepared for the marriage supper of the Lamb. In chapter 3 are the messages to the seven churches and this one is to Sardis. It says,

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments.

By the way, all overcomers are true believers. The same writer wrote the Book of 1 John 5 and said, “Who is he who overcomes but he who believes in the name of the Son of God.” All overcomers are true believers. “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life.” They are in white garments. Look at 1 John 4:4. In heaven we have twenty-four elders who represent, we believe, the completed church of God in heaven. And it says they are clothed in white robes.

Look at Revelation 6:11, please. Dealing with the martyrs of all the past who are asking God how long until He avenges their blood. And verse 11 says that a white robe was given to each of them.

Look at Revelation 7:9, where we see a multitude of people getting saved during the tribulation. It says that a great multitude, which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues are standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes. And look down at verses 13-14, where one of the elders said, “Who are these arrayed in white robes and where did they come from?” He said, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the Great Tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” That is all I need to know. In order to get into this marriage supper you have to be clothed with the white garments.

Jesus taught this clearly in His parables. You have to have a wedding garment on and it is to be white. And it is white according to the Bible because it has been washed in the blood of the Lamb. There is only one way to be at that marriage supper. There is only one way to share the joys of heaven and that is to come through the death of Jesus Christ our Lord. He died on the cross for your sins and mine. We are washed by the blood of the Lamb. There is no other way.

In Zechariah 13:1 the prophet said that there is a fountain that will come for cleansing, a fountain to the house of David. And a songwriter wrote, “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.” Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb? The song says, “What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” It fills our hymnbooks and it has filled the praise of Christians for centuries. There is only one way to be there and that is to come through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Look back at Revelation 1 where John is giving his greetings to the seven churches to whom he was writing and saying, “Grace and peace.” In verse 5 he said it was “from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth. It is to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins, in His own blood.” There is no other way to have a white robe and to have that garment clean and fine as God requires for that wedding which He calls the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” than to be washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Are you ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ? Are you really?

It is not only our purpose and our preparation seen there, but notice the plan of God is also mentioned in Revelation 19:9 in the marriage supper. It says, “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” The plan of God is there. He called us to Himself.

1 Corinthians 1:9 says, “We have been called into the fellowship of His Son.” Hey, there is a universal invitation that says in Romans 10:13, “Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But there is what we call an effectual call or a call that really works and that is God calling you to Himself. Jesus said, “You did not choose Me. I chose you.”

Jesus told a story about a wedding in Matthew 20:2. And at the conclusion He said, “Many are called or invited, but few are chosen. Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Jesus spoke about a centurion who was a Gentile, and he had such great faith. He said, “I have not found that much faith in Israel.” And in Matthew 8:11 He said, “Many will come from all the corners of the earth. Many will come and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the marriage supper of the Lamb.” We are going to be fellowshiping with the saints of all the ages. That is why I tell you this marriage supper is not in heaven during the Tribulation. This is what a lot of pretribulationists have taught.

I am a pretribulationist. I am committed to that but I am also a post tribulationist. I am “pre” because I believe the Lord is coming for His church before the Tribulation. I am “post” because He is coming to the earth in power and great glory at the end. And when the Lord comes and sets up His kingdom, the kingdom is likened unto a marriage and a wedding. And there is a feast or a supper that will inaugurate it. So the beginning of the kingdom, which will be on the earth will be the marriage supper on earth, as He will introduce His bride, the church of Jesus Christ.

He will also have there at that wedding, all of the Old Testament believers that could not be in heaven because they would not have their resurrected bodies yet. The Bible says in Daniel 12 at the end of the Tribulation is when the Old Testament saints will be resurrected along with all the Tribulation believers who have died during the Tribulation, In setting up His kingdom on earth, the Messiah shall reign. The Lord God Omnipotent reigns. The marriage supper of the Lamb will begin as all the believers of all the ages will be there.

The thing I like, in kind of a practical sense, is that we will be eating in heaven. Amen? I think a great blessing there will be eating and never getting fat. You know, one of our elders here told a story just Thursday night about two elderly ladies who died and went to heaven. And the first lady was so excited at what she saw. She just could not believe it. Her heart was just giving praise to God. She looked at her friend who was crying her heart out and she asked, “Why are you crying? This is such a wonderful place, Matilda. I don’t understand your tears. Why are you crying?” She answered, “Just think, we could

have been here twenty years ago if it hadn't been for oat bran." Is it not a paradox that we work so hard to stay here? Absent from the body and present with the Lord. Paul said, "My true desire is to be with Christ, which is far better."

I think you ought to eat right, okay. You should enjoy your time here and be more healthy and all that sort of thing. But listen, food does not commend us to God; whether we eat little or much, the Bible is very clear on that. So do not get so excited about it. Now if you really like to eat, praise God, you can do it at the marriage supper of the Lamb. I do not know what is going to be served, but you will like it. Believe me, you will like it. What a day that is going to be!

I think a lot of us wonder about it. Is it really true? Isn't it interesting how this ends in verse 9? Because it is not only our purpose and our preparation mentioned in the plan of God, but it is God's promise. It says, "These are the true sayings of God." The timing is good. It is almost like, is it really true? Is there really going to be something like this? Yes, these are the true sayings of God.

Look at Revelation 21:4-5. You will see the same thing. He says some wonderful, beautiful words to all of our hearts.

4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.
5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write: for these words are true and faithful."

How interesting. Is it all true?

Turn to Revelation 22. After telling us about the beauties and glories of heaven, now in verse 6 He said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And to back it all up, look at how it ends in verse 20, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.'"

Why are these words the true sayings of God? It is because they are backed up by the truthfulness, trustworthiness, and the veracity of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:1-3,

1 Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, then believe also in Me.
2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.

These are the true sayings of God. He who testifies says, “Surely, I come quickly.” He is either telling the truth or He is the greatest liar and imposter the world has ever seen. At best He is a lunatic with delusions of grandeur, but He said, “I am coming again.” Hallelujah! Blessed are those who are invited and called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. These are the true sayings of God.

Back to Revelation 19:11-16, which said not only, “Hallelujah for His sovereign majesty,” and that He is the “Lord God Omnipotent reigning,” but it also said, “Hallelujah for our coming marriage.” I want to say also in conclusion, “Hallelujah to our wonderful Messiah.” He is our wonderful Messiah.

There is so much here in these verses. I want to focus on three things. First, what He is called is found in verse 11. It says, “Behold a white horse and He who sat on him was called, Faithful and True.” You see, the reliability of Christ is again mentioned to us. He is not lying. It is impossible for God to lie. He is faithful and true. You can rely on Him. He said, “Heaven and earth might pass away, but My words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35). He said, “Not one jot or tittle of any of it will go unfulfilled” (Matthew 5:18, paraphrased). Every last bit of it will be fulfilled. He is called “Faithful and True”.

Next, look at Revelation 19:13. “And His name is called the Word of God.” John, the same writer of Revelation, wrote in his Gospel, John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” He wrote in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh.” The word “Word” is referring to the revelation of God. You see *logos* in Greek is also in English. *Biology*, *-ology*, and *logos*, all mean “the study of life”. Literally, *logos* is the revelation or the understanding of something. Zoology is the study of life also. We sometimes think of the differences there. But “theology” is the study of God. Literally it is a revelation of God. “Ology” is the unveiling, understanding, seeing it, or displaying it.

The Bible says in John 1:18, “No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” He has revealed Him or He has put Him on display. What is the name of the last book of the Bible? Revelation is the unveiling, the apocalypse, or the unveiling of Jesus Christ. It is putting Him on display. So you may say, “What is He called, our wonderful Messiah?” He is called “Faithful and True”—dealing with the reliability. He is called the “Word of God”—dealing with the fact that He is the everlasting revelation of the eternal God.

Now look at verse 16. “And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” That refers to His reign and that He is the sovereign One who will reign over everything, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

By the way, I look for unique ways to witness. Do you? I think this is a society that is not paying attention. And so I look for all kinds of crazy and unique ways to say something about our Lord in certain situations. And when I say these things up here, I am not trying to be whacko. I have a point. I want to drop some “seed thoughts” into your brain that

you might join me in this crazy form of witnessing. Okay? Because I think people need to be confronted. Now some of you are getting very upset right now, but just relax.

When you go into a store—which undoubtedly you will do before the holidays get here—you are going to come back and say, “Oh, I got all my shopping done.” Someone says, “Oh, you are going to be back and you know it.” You say, “I’m not going back down there in that traffic.” “Yes, you are.” And you just want to because it’s a disease, okay.

Now when you go into a store, let’s suppose it is the sports department and you are going to buy some sweats because basically they are inexpensive. They come in all colors and you have probably noticed the preponderance of sweats that have something down the thigh. It might say *Adidas* or *Puma* or something else down the side. This is your opportunity. You can say, “I am looking for something that has on the thigh, King of kings and Lord of lords.” You like it? Okay, try something else.

The Lord has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What He is called caused me to say, “Hallelujah to our wonderful Messiah.”

Let’s look at how He is crowned in verse 12. “On His head were many crowns.” You know, the Bible says that Christians are going to be crowned. Every time it speaks about Christians being crowned, it uses a different word than this one though. It uses the Greek word, *stephanos*. Stephen means crown. *Stephanos* is a crummy crown. I am sorry, but it’s crummy. Okay, so it is special in what it represents, but it is not anything, really. When a guy wins a race in the Greek games, the official is going to put a little laurel wreath on top of his head. It is just a bunch of twigs, people. That is all it is—twigs! They might put a ribbon through it, but that’s all it is, a ring of twigs. It is not worth anything, but it is what it represents that matters. And what God says is, “I’m going to give you crowns.” We get all excited. And I think some of you are really into those jewel things. You know what I mean? You got gold stacked up on your head and jewels and all that. That’s what is in your mind. But whenever God speaks about Christians being crowned, He just says, “We are going to give you a little twig deal and tell you thank you. That is what it represents. It is having the Lord say, “Well done thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

But when He came to Jesus’ crown there has to be a change. And so he takes the Greek word, “diadems”. Which everybody in the ancient world knew only belongs to Him who is most high, the One who is top dog. And it said, “On His head are many diadems” (Revelation 19:12). This is so that we would know how He was crowned.

If you have your hymnbook, please turn to number three hundred and forty-five, as we are looking at how He is crowned. The songwriter expressed this in the glorious song called, “Crown Him with Many Crowns.” Sometimes there is a little clue about the lyrics or music. Would you look at the clue that is on the right side, up near the top? It has the word *diademeta* or “diadem”. That is the Greek word for crowns in Revelation 19. How interesting!

Crown Him with many crowns, The Lamb upon His throne.
Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake my soul and sing of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity.

Crown Him the Lord of love. Behold His hands and side,
Rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified.
No angel in the sky can fully bear that sight
But downward bends his wondering eye at mysteries so bright.

Crown Him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave,
Who rose victorious to the strife for those He came to save.
His glories now we sing, Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.

Crown Him the Lord of heaven, one with the Father known.
One with the Spirit, thru Him given from yonder glorious throne.
To Thee be endless praise, for Thou for us hast died.
Be Thou, O Lord, through endless days, adored and magnified.

Crown Him the Lord of years, the Potentate of time.
Creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail. For Thou hast died for me.
Thy praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity.

And all God's people said: Hallelujah!

Let's turn back to Revelation 19:13. We looked at how He is crowned and what He is called. But let me give you the final point and that is how He is clothed. He is clothed so uniquely that some have called this gross, abhorrent, contradictory—amazing! It says, His robe was dipped in blood. There are some that have not handled this well in church history and thought maybe it is a typology here referring to the blood of the cross. No it is not. Verse 15 says, "He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

These are quotations from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 63. When we are talking about the Messiah who will come, to where will He come? And the prophet says, "Who is this coming from Bozrah? *Bozrah*, in English, is a city on the eastern plains that we call Jordan today. It is the natural place where the Bible predicts that all the armies of the world will assemble against Israel. What He is going to do is come to Bozrah and the Bible says that He will trample out the vengeance of Almighty God against all the nations of the world that came against Him and His people. He will slaughter and the blood will be everywhere and flow as high as the horses' bridles. And He will come up the Mount of Olives like all the ancient kings did, in the victory ascent when they conquered. And He will come up and put His feet on the Mount of Olives. No, He is not coming from the sky and standing on the Mount of Olives as we were taught for years. That is not what the Bible says. His feet are going to stand there because He has conquered and that is a place of victory as it overlooks the city of Jerusalem.

And what will He look like? His clothing will be dipped in blood; for He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He raises the sword of victory to the sky and all of heaven and all of earth will bow the knee and proclaim Him King of kings and Lord of lords.

I can't wait. How about you? That is my Savior! That is my King! That is my Lord! There is only one response that any of us can give to this; it is the same one that we read in Revelation 19:10 that John gave. The Bible says, "I fell at His feet to worship Him." He is talking to the angel. The angel said, "You cannot do that. I am your fellow servant, your brethren, who has the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." It is not just finding facts about when He is going to come. The issue of prophecy is to worship God and to understand where it is all going to end up. Praise the Lord.

Look at Revelation 22:8-9

8 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.
9 Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that; For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.

Philippians 2: 9-11 says,

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and those under the earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If you still have your hymnbook, turn to three hundred twenty-six. This is one of the great songs. Notice again on the right at the top. What does it describe it? It calls it *diadem* or many crowns from Revelation 19:12. It gives you the understanding of how the song should be sung as well.

All hail the power of Jesus name.
Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him [What?] Lord of all.
Ye chosen seed of Israel's race, Ye ransomed from the fall
Hail Him who saves you by His grace and crown Him Lord of all.
Let every kindred, every tribe, on this terrestrial [or earthly] ball
To Him all majesty ascribe and crown Him Lord of all.
O that with yonder sacred throng, we at His feet may fall,

We'll join the everlasting song and crown Him Lord of all.

And all God's people said: "Hallelujah to our Lord God, King of kings and Lord of Lords." And our hearts go out to everybody right now who does not know in their heart whether they are ready for that great event. Do you have on the right clothes? Have you ever been washed in the blood of the Lamb? Have you never come to make a commitment to Jesus Christ, who died and rose again from the dead? There is no other hope. There is no other way. There is no other Savior. There is no other coming king. He is our Messiah and our prayer is that you will give your hearts to Him before it is too late.

Let's close in prayer.

Father, I thank You for Your wonderful Word. And I thank You for the Good News of the gospel that Jesus died for our sins and rose again, and one day He shall return in power and great glory. I pray for those in our audience who have never made a commitment to Jesus Christ. God, help them now to put their trust in You before it is too late. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Take your Bibles please and turn to John 1. Our subject is the incarnation of God. The word “incarnation” means that He “became flesh”—God, becoming flesh.

Multonomah Press published a little booklet that I wrote several years ago. You can get it here at our bookstore or at others. It is called, *What the Bible Says about Jesus Christ*. And I want to read to you what it says in the opening of this booklet.

Jesus. Has anyone’s name ever generated so much emotion and difference of opinion? Even religious people often argue about His real identity and at times have gone to war over it. What do you believe about Jesus Christ and what difference does it really make?

The greatest problem that people have about Jesus Christ is the claim Christians make that He is God. Muslims speak highly of Jesus and list Him among the great prophets, but do not accept the Christian claim of His deity. Jews accept His Jewish roots and speak well of His teachings, as they would about many great rabbis of the past. But they are deeply troubled over the assertion that Jesus is Israel’s promised Messiah and that He is God in human flesh. That’s a tough pill to swallow if you are Jewish.

Historic Christianity has witnessed bitter partings by many over the issue of Christ’s deity. Factions that refuse to accept His deity often developed into other religious sects. Mormons, who form one of today’s largest cults, speak quite highly of Jesus Christ; and in fact, they believe themselves to be true Christians. But to say that He is God in human flesh is not theologically acceptable to them, except in the sense that they believe we can all be gods. Following that line of reasoning, each of us could speak as easily of the godhead of Jesus as we could of our own. In Mormon theology, deity is something all of us can achieve.

Jehovah’s Witnesses can be commended for their intense desire to study the Bible, although only their own version, and for their dedication to God’s unity and uniqueness. But they are especially dogmatic in their disagreement with historic Christianity concerning Christ’s identity. Like so many others, they speak well of Him and profess to follow

His teachings. But they are quick to react to claims of His deity, insisting that those who make such claims from Scripture have mistranslated or misinterpreted Bible passages.

History confirms that a man named Jesus, a Jewish man, lived in Israel more than 1900 years ago. He has had a remarkable impact on the entire world. In His own day He was called Jesus of Nazareth, since His boyhood days were spent in that city; although, the Bible indicates He had been born in Bethlehem. His mother Mary was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Because of a Roman-imposed census requiring the Jews to register in their ancestral cities, Joseph and Mary were temporarily in Bethlehem (which had been David's home) when Jesus was born.

Only a few details are known about the rest of Jesus' life until He reached the age of thirty. When He was baptized by John in the Jordan River, John the Baptist urged the people of Israel to repent of their sins, to be baptized and to prepare themselves to receive the Messiah. When John baptized Jesus, he proclaimed Him to be the Messiah and the Savior of the world. For more than three years Jesus caused quite a stir in Israel. Jewish religious leaders refused to accept His claims and made plans to get rid of Him. They succeeded, as history records, in motivating the Romans to execute Jesus by crucifixion.

Anyone reading the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth is immediately impressed with their depth and simplicity. Such concentrated wisdom is unequaled among any sages and teachers of the past. He gave encouragement to all who needed strength to go on another day. He talked much about future events and gave people hope that one day things would be different. But His most difficult words to believe, then and now, are His claims about His real identity.

Turn to John 1 please. The book goes on, by the way, to discuss those claims.

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 He was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.
8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.
11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
13 Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’”
16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.
17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (John 1:1-18)

Will you join me, please, in a moment of prayer?

Father, I would ask in these few moments together as we study Your Word that the true identity of Jesus Christ will be clear to every heart. We realize by these words the enormous responsibility we have to the God who made us. We realize that it is not a minor issue as to who Jesus is. We realize that our salvation and eternal life, our eternal destiny is resting on what we believe about Jesus Christ. Help us to understand that the Babe in Bethlehem was, according to the Bible, God in human flesh. We ask You to help us understand as well as to believe. And it is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

I want you to see three things about the incarnation of God, that God became flesh. Before I do that, I want to illustrate something. If there were a group of ants crawling on the top of this pulpit—as far as I can determine there are none—but if there were and I wanted to communicate with those ants and I wanted to reach them on their level, the question would be: how would I do that? I might put a book up here and say, “Please, ants, read this.” Or, I might scream—“Hey, I’m talking to you!” I might pound the pulpit, hopefully missing them. But my dear friends, from a philosophical and logical point of view, there is only one way that I could really communicate with those ants and that is to become one of them.

It is not a mystery to me, from a logical point of view, why God became man. If God made us and wanted to communicate with us His wonderful love and grace so that we would understand and know Him, then the best way to do that would be to become a man.

The incarnation of God was, first of all, according to the opening five verses, an eternal relationship with God. Jesus did not just begin when the baby was born in Bethlehem or even when He was conceived in the womb of Mary. Jesus has always existed. It was an eternal relationship with God.

Secondly, in verses 6–13, we are going to see that incarnation was a divine reason for the people that He had created. If God created us as we said, and He wanted to communicate with us, then the most important way is for Him to become a man. It is a divine reason, the incarnation, for the very people that He created. And we will see what that is in a moment.

And finally, I want you to know that the incarnation from verses 14–18, was a full revelation of the glory of God. It is not inadequate. It is not insufficient. It is not lacking in detail. It is a full and complete revelation of all the glory of God in human form.

Now let’s back up with the opening five verses and examine how the incarnation—God becoming a man—was an eternal relationship with God Himself. There are four things I would like to point out to you. One, the Bible indicates that His presence, the presence of Jesus Christ, was declared in the beginning. Look, please, at John 1:ok1 again. “In the beginning was the Word.” The Jehovah Witnesses, in trying to explain that to their people who study with them say, and it is printed in their literature, that there was a point at which Jesus began. He was created by God the Father. They use this verse to prove their point. “In the beginning was the Word.” The problem is that in the Greek text the definite article “the” is not in the text, although it is put here in English. It does not say, “In the beginning,” meaning a point of time. It simply says, “In beginning.” The point is that whatever it is that is beginning of anything, for God is an eternal God—there was the Word. In beginning the Word was there. His presence is declared long before He was born as a baby in Bethlehem.

Secondly, His personality is distinct. The Bible says in John 1 that “the Word was with God.” According to the Bible, Jesus is not the Father. The Father is not Jesus. Look down at verse 18: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son”—some translations read, “God.” I think the best evidence reads, “Son.” “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” The Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Son. But notice the Son was in the bosom of the Father. It is a loving, close relationship. And it is the Son who has declared the Father.

According to verse 1, “The Word was with God.” The word “with” in Greek is *pros*, which means “toward.” Literally in Greek, it is “facing.” It suggests equality. The Son was facing the Father in a perfect, loving, equal relationship as Father and Son.

Thirdly, the text says that His person was divine. It says at the end of verse 1, “the Word was God.” Jehovah Witnesses say that proves their point. They say the definite article “the” is not in front of the word “God” and they are correct. So they say what it really says is, “The Word was a god.” No, that is not what it says. When you leave the definite article out it is even stronger. It is referring to the essence and substance of what something is. “The word” was in fact, “God.” As a matter of fact, the Greek has a different word order than is in my English Bible, and I suggest it is probably different in all of your English Bibles. Let me read the actual Greek word order. The word order in the Greek says: “And God was the Word.” It does not say, “The Word was God.” It says, “And God was the Word. “In beginning God. The Word with God. And God was the Word.” It would be very hard to find a more powerful statement in all of literature to declare a person as being God in human flesh. That is what the Bible is saying about Jesus Christ.

A fourth thing I will point out to you, in verses 3–5, is that His power was demonstrated and it has to be God. Look at verse 3. “All things were [according to the Bible] made through Him. And without Him, nothing [the Greek has “not one thing”] was ever made that was made.” Out of all the material and physical creation in the universe—the trees, the mountains, the stars—the Bible says none of it was ever made without the power of Jesus Christ.

It is not just the creation of all of the material universe, it also deals with human life. Look at verse 4, “In Him, was life.” Why are you alive? You say, “Hey, if you knew my weekend, you would know that I am half dead.” Why are you alive? Why do you have life? The Bible says that when God made man, He formed man’s body out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Job says, “The breath of the Almighty gives me life.” “The body without the spirit is dead,” says James 2:26. What is life? We still debate that. We still argue that in medical journals. What is life? The Bible says that it is the breath of Almighty God. There is no life apart from God. In Him, Jesus Christ, was life. And that is the light that lights every man that comes into the world, whether he believes or he does not. All of human life is the product of the creative work of God Almighty. And according to this text of “the Word,” who is Jesus Christ.

You ask what is the incarnation of God or God becoming flesh? It is an eternal relationship with God. In the beginning or “in beginning” was the Word. The Word was with God. “The Word” or “God” was the Word. And that person who is being described made everything and gave everybody human life.

Next we will look at verses 6–13. In the second paragraph of this opening prologue to John’s Gospel, we learn that there was a divine reason for the people that He created, and why God became a man. Why, for instance, would I want to communicate with ants crawling on this pulpit? Well, only if I wanted to really talk to them or communicate. I do not see any human purpose for doing so. But if I wanted to communicate with them, I would. But God lists several purposes in the Bible for becoming man, one of which is the most important and it is in this text.

Look at John 1:7, please. Concerning John the Baptist who would witness to the light, it says that “all through him might”—What does it say? It says, “might believe.” What is the divine reason for God becoming a man? It is so that you would believe. You say, “Well wouldn’t there be some other way?” No. Verse 18 says, “No one has seen God at any time.” How in the world could you and I possibly fathom God? No one has seen Him. If God had not come in physical form and become man, how would we ever know about Him? It would be impossible.

Have you ever been to a philosophy class in college? I kind of like that stuff. Now as I look back, I do not know why, but I like that stuff. I like the way men think and reason with their puny brains. We had a textbook which was called—it was an old timer called—“From Phaeles to Dewey.” Phaeles was a nut and you know about Dewey. These people said that “ultimate reality,” or we would say “God,” is a lot of things. In fact, in that course, we had to make a list of them. I learned that some men thought it was water. Some thought it was air. Some thought it was the sun. Some did not know. Someone thought it was imagery—he was a nut. I read all this stuff about what philosophers thought was ultimate reality. And to me the whole course demonstrated one thing—man! We could have solved this problem. If I was God, the only solution to this problem is to throw the textbook out and become a man. If He became a man, we could solve the whole thing.

When I see the logic and the reasonableness of the whole argument of the gospel, it is the most beautiful story that a human mind could ever comprehend. If God made us and wanted to communicate with us, there is one way He could do it. If God wanted us to believe in Him and to love Him and to worship Him, there is one way to do it and that is to become a man.

In John 1: 6–13, consider the following three things: One, you have the witness and his responsibility. In verses 6–9, it introduces us to John the Baptist. It is interesting that Jesus said that no greater man has ever been born of woman than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11, paraphrased). But it was John the Baptist who said, “He must increase and I must decrease” (John 3:30). This passage says that John is not the light. John came to bear witness of the light.

My dear friends, the light that lights every man is Jesus Christ. The ones who speak about Jesus Christ are not important. They are the witnesses and only the witnesses. They are not the light, only He is the light. It is a natural tendency of man to want to receive glory and to want to make people believe that somehow he has the power to help them. My friends, no human beings on the face of this globe can really help you in the final analysis—only God can do that.

I believe that about everything. I love it when a doctor informs you of something that is very seriously wrong. I have done this with other folks and I have seen the impact. I had the joy of seeing my mother-in-law do it. My mother-in-law was informed that she has a terminal illness. And I told her how to handle it. I said, “If he tells you that, you say to him, ‘Tell me something I don’t know.’” He will repeat it again, “Let me tell you the seriousness of this, Mrs. McCullum, you are going to die!” Say to him, “So are you, doctor. By the way, you don’t look too well.” They are not telling you a blooming thing. For twenty-one years we listened to that story about my mother-in-law who was going to die. Listen my friends, God is in charge. Almighty God is running things and we are accountable to Him.

The witness is not important. The light is that which lights every man who comes into the world. We think we are in charge. We are not in charge.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 4, please. I believe a lot of Christians have lost sight of what our purpose is. If we really understand the incarnation of God, we have one purpose. As witnesses we are to tell people about the light. This is the only thing that can change them. It is about the purpose of God, which is to believe in Him and to love Him and to serve Him. It is to know the God who made you.

In 2 Corinthians 4 it says,

If our gospel is veiled or hidden, it’s hidden to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, [John said, I am not that light.] but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We have this treasure [this knowledge of God’s glory in Jesus] in earthen vessels [just clay pots, not worth much] that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Corinthians 4:3-7, paraphrased)

John the Baptist was not the light. Jesus was the light.

Come back to John chapter 1 again. When you see the divine reason for the people He created, that all through Him might believe, you understand what our job is. It is to tell people about the light. That is why I get ticked. That is from the Greek “tickeo,” if you were worried. I get mad. And if you do not think I should, then pray for me. But I get mad because I think every year at Christmastime it is worse. I see the evidence of the world, the society that has decided to get God out of the picture, and they do not want to mention Jesus Christ—that is for sure. When you mention Jesus Christ, to them it is like you swore. They can say every gross word under the sun with great freedom and shock the best of us in terms of their vocabulary. They can do anything they want, but you mention Jesus and it is like panic sets in. What is Christmas without Jesus? It is nothing. It is spending too much money. That is what it is. Is it the paganism and commercialism of Christmas that they want us to just go along and talk sweetly about it? No! This culture needs to be confronted. We are removing the only reason for Christmas and that is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Why do you celebrate Christmas? I dare say a lot of you already have plans for family gatherings in which Jesus Christ will not be number one. It is in the name of being kind to your family, in the name of showing love by giving gifts, and in the name of the festive spirit of the holidays that you will celebrate; but little will be said of Jesus. I warn you in the name of our Lord that Christmas is not what the world is telling us. Christmas is about God becoming a man. Christmas is the gospel. How God, in love, came into this world to die on a cross for our sins. Where will Jesus’ place be in your home and in your heart this Christmas season?

The world needs Him desperately. The Bible says that God became a man. Jesus was born in Bethlehem so that all through Him might believe. And that tells me my responsibility. I am not the light, He is the light. But I am sent, like John, to bear witness of the light and so are you.

Come back to John 1:10-11 and look at the world and its response after seeing the witness and his responsibility, according to the Bible.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him,
and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and
His own did not receive Him.

What is the response of the world to Jesus Christ? First, they did not know Him; and secondly, they did not receive Him. Now I believe a lot of people who are Christians and know this passage have not understood the argument. The argument is building up to the fact that that the very person who made everybody, literally came to those folks and they not only did not recognize His true identity as God, but they did not really receive Him. And the fact is that they cannot receive Him without His help. That is the argument of the passage. So it is going to tell you that you cannot really know Him or receive Him without His help. It is a fascinating argument. The world did not know Him. His own did not receive Him.

Now there are several ways to look at the words, “His own.” For instance, the standard way that many of us view this in our churches is that the “world” in verse 10 refers to the “Gentiles” and that “His own” is referring to the “Jewish people.” I do not see that. I understand why people believe that, but I do not see that as being the main point. It does not fit the whole context.

Another possibility is that it is speaking of people in general. The world did not know Him. He came to His own, His people (backing up to verse 3), “All things were made by Him.” Verse 4 says, “In Him was life.” The point is that these are His own people, but they did not receive Him.

A third possibility, which is very interesting and probably fits the context, is that the words “His own” is referring to those who would believe in Him. “He was in the world and the world did not know Him.” He came even unto His own in His high priestly prayer in John 17 where He prayed to the Father. He said, “I pray not for these who have believed in Me—[referring to His disciples]—but I pray for those who are going to believe on Me.” He thanked the Father for “those You have given to Me” (John 17:9-10, paraphrased).

The Bible says we are chosen before the foundation of the world. Follow this carefully. Jesus came unto His own, even the ones He knows are going to believe in Him, and His own did not receive Him. You see, you must understand that salvation is of God and left to yourself you will not believe. You will not receive Him. It requires God’s help in order for you to believe. “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him.”

Let’s look at the way to belief and its requirements. How can I know Him? John 1:12-13 says, “As many as”—don’t you love that?

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Now notice verse 12. He gave the right or authority to become little ones born of God. And verse 13 tells you how it happens. You are born not of blood. You are not a Christian because your parents are. It amazes me, folks, how many people in our generation believe they are Christians and they have really no understanding of the true nature of the gospel.

I was talking with a man yesterday, just in a brief conversation and trying to share a little gospel with him. He let me know that he is a Christian.

He said, “I have always been a Christian.”

“Really?”

He said, “I’m a member of a church.”

I said, “That’s wonderful. What is the pastor preaching on these days?”

He said, “Well, I don’t go now.”

“Well, why not?”

“Well, it doesn’t meet my needs.”

“Church doesn’t meet your needs? Did you find in the Bible that church was supposed to meet your needs? Jesus meets our needs.”

“Well, I went to a rest home years ago,” he said.

I mean, he was getting more uncomfortable. “What did you do there?”

“Well, I sang there.”

I said, “That’s wonderful. You know the Bible teaches you’ve got to be born again.”

“We don’t believe that kind of stuff. We’re Christians.”

“Wait a minute!”

We get letters all the time in the radio ministry that tell us, “We have always been Christians.” But I love the letter I got from this particular lady. This is great. She said, “I have always known that I was a Christian until I heard you.” Hey, I am not trying to talk you out of it, but I know a lot of folks talking about going to heaven who are not going there. There are a lot of folks who say they are Christians that have never been born again.

My dear friends, this text says you are not born again simply because your parents are Christians. It is not of blood. It is not of the will of the flesh. That is a statement dealing with your own desire. You may think, “Well, I will turn over a new leaf. I will really do this. I will follow what He says.” You are going to blow it in the first week.

You are not born by your own desire. It says that it is not by the will of any other man either. No other person on the face of this globe can save you. Then how is a man born of God? He is born of God. It has to be God. So the whole context when you put it together is fascinating. Here is “the Word,” who is God, the one who made everything and gave you life. He came into this world and the world did not respond. They did not know Him. They did not receive Him. He came to even His own who were going to believe in Him and they did not receive Him. But as many as did, He gave the right, the authority to become children of God. This is even to those who believe on His name and who were born not of blood—not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man—but born of God. Wow!

The incarnation of God is an eternal relationship with God. It was also a divine reason for the people He created. If God did not become a man, none of us could be saved. If you ask me, “Why did God become a man?” I would say, “First it was to show us what He is like. Secondly, I would tell you that He became a man so that He would know human life by personal experience. The Bible says, “He was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). It says He was made like unto His brethren so He could be a merciful and faithful high priest (Hebrews 2:17, paraphrased). He can sympathize with us and He can comfort us in our trials. Why? It is because He knows human life by personal experience. You might say, “Why did He become a man?” I tell you that He became a man to show us what we ought to be. He showed us what man ought to be like by the way He lived.

And many people believe in what we call “liberal theology” and that is the only message they see of the incarnation. Just try to be what He wants you to be. But, my friends, without a spiritual awakening you are going to fall flat on your face. If you ask me, “What is the major reason why Jesus came?” I would tell you that the Bible says, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He came to die on a cross for your sins and mine. This is because we could not pay for our own sins. We could not redeem ourselves. He came to not only die, but to rise from the dead to guarantee our own resurrection. And He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). He came, folks, to give us everlasting life. “I am come that you might have life,” Jesus said in John 10:10, “and that you might have it more abundantly.” In John 10:28 He said, “I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. Yes, our Lord came for the divine reason that all through Him might believe.

Will you please notice in John 1:14–18 that the incarnation was not only an eternal relationship with God, and it was not only a divine reason for the people He created, but it was also a full revelation of the glory of God. Verse 14 says, “The Word became flesh.” That verse does not say in Greek or in English that the Word was flesh. If you touched Jesus Christ’s body while He was on earth, was it flesh? Yes. But the Bible does not say, “the Word was flesh.” It says He became flesh. The word “became” in Greek is indicating a change of condition. It indicates He already existed before He became flesh. First His preexistence is taught and secondly that His essential nature is not flesh.

Listen to me, my Christian brothers and sisters, we get messed up a lot when we try to tell folks about who Jesus is. Was Jesus flesh and bones and blood? Yes! Was He a real human being? Yes. Is that what He is—man? No. Was He a man? Yes. The Bible describes this and tells us He was God manifest in the flesh. What is the essential nature of Jesus Christ? It is God Almighty, the God who made us and created the universe; it is He who became man, so that we could know Him and have everlasting life. It was a full revelation.

Let me give you three things: 1) It was seen by eyewitnesses. You may say, “I don’t know this.” I say that you have to trust the eyewitnesses. The whole Bible is built on the fact that the record about Jesus Christ is written by eyewitnesses. John 1:14 says, “We beheld His glory.”

Turn please to 2 Peter 1 in the New Testament. Peter was one of those, like John, who knew Jesus well. It was a full revelation of the glory of God, Jesus Christ. It was seen by eyewitnesses.

2 Peter 1:16. It says,

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Turn please to 1 John 1:1-4 which is just a page or two to the right, and look at what it says in the opening verses.

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—[That was John’s favorite word for Jesus, the *logos*, concerning the Word]—
2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us
3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

I want to ask the true believers in the congregation, is your joy full that Jesus is God? You better believe it! There is not any joy apart from that. What assurance would we have of forgiveness or eternal life if He is not God? This is the fullness of joy. It was a full revelation of the glory of God. It was seen by eyewitnesses.

Now let’s go back to John 1. This revelation of God was sufficient to save us all. It was sufficient to save us all and nothing more was needed. I read in verse 14, that He was full—not half filled—but full of grace. God gives you grace. He gives you what you do not deserve. And the truth—what you believe about Jesus Christ—that is essential! He was full of grace and truth.

Look at verse 16, please. “And of—[or literally, out of]—His fullness, we have all received and grace for grace.” What does that mean? Well, in order to be saved you have to have grace from God. The Bible says, “We are saved by grace through faith, and that salvation by grace is not of ourselves; it is a gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8, paraphrased). Grace gives you what you do not deserve. You cannot earn salvation. It is not based on human performance. God must grace it to you.

Now the Bible says, of His fullness that we have all received, “grace for grace.” The English word “for” is the Greek preposition *unti*, which in English today means “against.” But in ancient Greece, *unti* meant “instead of.” It is a word of substitution or exchange. What it is saying is that when you get saved, you receive grace. But guess what? That does not end God’s grace. That grace you receive when you get saved is

going to be exchanged for more grace to sustain you in your Christian life and give you blessings that you never dreamed possible and guess what? It is not even worthy to be compared with the grace that will be given to you in the future. “Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those that love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Amen? All this and heaven too! Grace for grace.

The songwriter said,

His love has no limit. His grace has no measure. His power
has no boundary known unto man. But He gives and gives
and gives again. His grace! Grace for grace!

Yes, according to the Bible it was seen by eyewitnesses and was sufficient to save us all.

I love John 1:17. It says, “The law came through Moses.” The law condemns us. It tells us we are sinners. But it says, “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” I do not want to bore you with little Greek details unnecessarily, but this one is special. In the Greek language the definite article “the” is in front of grace and truth. The point is that we are not talking about any old grace or any old truth. We are talking about the one in the context. This is the grace that God must give you in order for you to receive Him because when He came you didn’t. And He even came to His own and they did not receive Him. We believers do not automatically believe in Him of our own desire. We need the help of God and so God graces to us even our salvation. And the grace comes through Jesus Christ.

Let’s also look at, “the truth.” What is “the truth” he is talking about? The truth that sets us free is that Jesus is God in human flesh. “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). And the truth came only through Jesus Christ. God became flesh and dwelt among us.

One final point—look at verse 18, please. This full revelation of God was seen by eyewitnesses. It is sufficient to save us all. But it was also sufficient in revealing the Father. You may ask, “The Father?” Yes. When Jesus came into this world, when God became man, He showed us the Father. Verse 18 says, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

Turn to chapter 14 and with this, we are done. When I read the gospels and evaluate what the disciples said, I often get amused. They are just like us. And I like their audacity. I mean, sometimes, if it was not for our loving Savior, if it was just one of us talking to them, I mean you would slap them around a little bit and say, “Shape up, guys!” I mean the audacity of those guys was incredible. But this is one of my favorites. John 14. Jesus announces to them that He is going to leave them. It is the night before He went to the cross.

And in John 14:9 Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” You know, you can just feel it as you read it. He is making a deal with Him. “Okay,

you have been asking us to run around with You now for three years. Now You are telling us You are going to whip out of here. Okay, I will tell you what, we will do all You say if You just do one thing, just one last deal. That is all we ask. Just show us who the Father is and then it will be okay.” Don’t you like that? You may say, “Philip, do you know what you are asking?” I can just hear the other guys, “Hey, cool it, Philip. Now show us who He is and we will keep on with this, okay?” I love what Jesus does.

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”

Watch what happens and ask yourself, who could do that? Only God. Do you believe that Jesus is God in human flesh and the only One who can save you from your sin and give you eternal life?

Let’s close with prayer.

Father, thank You so much for the good news of the gospel. We read that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. You tell us that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. We thank You, God. I pray for those listening right now who know in their hearts that they have never made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. And here in the Bible it says we have to receive it. There are people in this audience who have never really been sure about the identity of Jesus Christ. And You say that if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we would be saved. You know this issue is not a minor one; it is essential to our salvation. And I pray, Lord, that those in our audience who have never come to make that personal commitment to Christ, might at this moment, right now, make that decision and see their life changed for all eternity. We thank You, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

How can God be three and one at the same time? The word “trinity,” as our Jehovah Witness friends constantly say, does not appear in the English Bible. They are correct. In English, the word “trinity” has two ideas. One is the idea which is known among Christians who grew up with the word and have some religious background to understand what it means. But to the person who does not have that background, “trinity” means “three gods.” We Christians do not believe in three gods. There have never been three gods. There are not two gods. There is only one God.

I prefer the word, “tri-unity”—God is one unity, but He manifests Himself in three persons. This is a doctrine that is rarely understood even by Christians who supposedly believe it, or its impact upon our lives.

Let me give you just one example. A lot of people say the reason why God made us in the beginning was because God is love. He is love, not merely or only love; but He *is* love. The Bible says this in 1 John 4:8. Well, if He is love and love demands an object, then He made us because He needed somebody to love. Now in a narcissistic culture that really appeals to our self-esteem and worth because we are all looking for strokes and we want to be loved and appreciated. “So, that is why God made us,” we may say. Well, that really is not true. God did not need to love anybody. In the triune God we have perfect love being manifested. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Father. The Spirit loves the Son. The Spirit loves the Father and so on. How in the world could we be any better substitute than a person of the triune God in terms of loving?

Let me give you another thought. We talked in our last message about the incarnation of God, that God became flesh. God revealed Himself to us. But I tell you, just from a logical point of view that only God could really reveal God adequately, when you think about it. And so the triune God is really the only answer to the revelation of God Himself. Without God being manifested in three persons, then how could God reveal God? Did God have to depend upon us to understand or could God have revealed Himself perfectly in human form? We believe He did that. “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,” says 1 Timothy 3:16.

We are taking it a step further today. If God became flesh, incarnation, that implies that we have more than one person involved in the Godhead. And Christians have traditionally believed that God is one, but He manifests Himself in three persons. Jews, Muslims, and many cults who identify with Christianity, argue that this is not taught in the Bible. Jesus is not the Father and the Father is not Jesus. And the Spirit is not Jesus and the Spirit is not the Father. Yet there are many religious groups that say that it is the teaching of the Bible.

What is tri-unity of God? How can God be three and one at the same time? Take your Bibles and turn to Deuteronomy 6 and Matthew 28. Put your finger in both passages. In

Deuteronomy 6, we have two verses that are recited every Shabbot or every Sabbath day in Jewish synagogues all over the world every Saturday. Deuteronomy 6: 4-5 says,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is—
[What? What does it say?]-one.
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.

There is intensity in that verse! And the Lord is what? He is one, so Jewish people say that it is impossible to believe in a trinity. They say that the Lord is one and one can never be more than one. I am sorry, but one can involve more than one. For an example, the same exact Hebrew word, *echad*, meaning “one” is also used in Genesis 2:24, where it says “a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.” It is the same word. If two can be one in marriage, then we can have the Lord being one and yet being more than one at the same time.

Turn to Matthew 28. In the New Testament we have an interesting statement in what is called the “Great Commission of Jesus Christ.” In Matthew 28:19 Jesus says,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,
baptizing them in the name [Singular. He did not say in the
names, plural. He said in the name] of the Father and of the
Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In both the Old Testament and New Testament the word “name,” when it refers to God, never once appears in the plural—never! It is always in the singular. It is the name of the Father, not names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but it is name, singular. It is tri-unity or three in one.

Let me give you an illustration. Suppose I had a can of paint up here that was mixed with red, white, and blue paint, in the same can. Then I also had three separate cans, one of red, one of white, and one of blue paint. If I was going to dip a block of wood into these cans and I wanted to describe it without showing you, I would phrase my sentence in English, like this: “I am going to dip this block of wood in “a” can of red, blue, and white paint. You would know it would be one can, mixed with three paints. Tri-unity. Now what if I wanted to say, I am going to dip the block of wood in each of those cans? I would say this: “I am going to dip this block of wood in a can of red paint, and a can of white paint, and a can of blue paint. And then you would know it was three separate cans of paint.

My friends, what we have in Matthew 28:19 is the first can, with red, white, and blue paint in it. It is not “the names.” The word “name” is not even repeated. It does not say in the name of the Father, and the name of the Son and the name of the Spirit. It does not say that because the Bible never treats the name of God that way. “The Lord our God is one Lord.” It is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is one name which is fascinating!

Let's just ask God, right now, to help us as we begin to look at what the Bible says about the tri-unity of God and what that means to us now.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your word. And we realize that our subject today is vast, difficult, confusing, and often controversial. But I pray, Lord, that Your Word would bring clarity to our minds and peace to our hearts. I pray that we will know what we believe and why. I pray, Lord, for those in our midst who are not really sure of what Christians really believe and for those who may have never really made the commitment they should make to You. And God this would be a life-changing time for them. We thank You for what You are going to do in Jesus' name. Amen.

In approaching this subject, I want to give you seven facts from the Bible about the tri-unity of God. Perhaps you will want to write them down because many times we are confronted about this. Whether it is by somebody coming to our door trying to sell us a different message, or a friend who is confused about what you believe and why; we need to understand the tri-unity of God.

The first thing I want you to do is turn to Genesis 1 and tell you that the tri-unity of God is defined by the use of plural pronouns. Let me repeat that again. The tri-unity of God is defined in the Bible by the use of plural pronouns. In Genesis 1:26 we find the creation of man and woman.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Now here we have tri-unity in the same passage. In verse 27 it uses the third person singular of the verb form. God created man in "His" (third person singular pronoun) image. "In the image of God, He created him. Male and female, He created them." Yet in verse 26 it says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image after *our* likeness"—plural pronouns.

Now how do people handle this who do not believe in the tri-unity of God? Well first of all, there are many religious groups, and one prominent group in America believes that there is a race of people previous to Genesis 1 and 2, who are up in heaven. They came to the earth and they are going to go up there again. And so they believe that God was just discussing this with all of them. Let us make man.

Another group believes that God was discussing this with the angels. Let “us” make man, although there is not one verse that indicates angels ever created anybody or did anything in that regard. Yet the Bible says, “Let us”—and God is talking—“Let us make man.”

How do Jewish people handle it? Well, I am always fascinated by reading writings of Jewish rabbis. First of all, they are often more loyal to the Bible than Protestant interpreters. But Jewish rabbis, on this passage, are very interesting. It is what they call a “majestic plural.” You may ask, “What’s a majestic plural?” I do not know. I have read all that they said and I still do not know. The way I see it, it is their answer to the problem. Majestic plural means it is just to really emphasize how great God is. Why use the plural pronoun? Isn’t God still great when it uses the singular? Well, of course! Then why is the plural pronoun used?

They go on pages and pages to describe that the Christians are wrong, but that they understand our difficulty. They understand that we would conclude by plural pronouns that God must be more than one. But we really do not understand that it is a majestic plural, which they also do not understand. Having read them, I can assure you of that. Let me tell you something folks, that is like proving it by an indirect way. The writers against it are proving the fact that the plural pronoun is indeed a problem and it demonstrates that God may be more than one.

Let me give you another example. Look at Genesis 11. When you ask me about the tri-unity of God, that God is three in one, that is defined in the Bible by the use of plural pronouns in Genesis 11:4. The men are building a city and a tower called the Tower of Babel. In verse 5, the Lord came down to see the city and the tower. In verse 7, the Lord said, “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language.” Let *us*? Yet verse 6 says it is the Lord Jehovah talking and He uses the plural pronoun of Himself. Let *us* go down. The tri-unity of God is defined by the use of plural pronouns.

Point number two. Please turn to John 10 in the New Testament. The tri-unity of God is also dependent upon the uniqueness and unity of each Person of the Godhead. Let me repeat that again. The tri-unity of God, that He is three in one, is dependent on the uniqueness and unity of each Person of the Godhead. What I mean by this is that the Father is not the Son. There is a uniqueness in each Person. The Spirit is not the Son or the Father and vice versa. But there is unity among them to the point that it appears there is only one person talking when in fact, there are three persons who are distinct and yet they see themselves as one.

Deuteronomy 6 says, “The Lord our God is one.” In Matthew 28:19 says, “Baptize them in the name (singular) of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

But look at this in John 10:28-9, we have these wonderful words of encouragement from Jesus.

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;
neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My

Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are [What?] one.

Now the Jehovah's Witness say, "Well that does not mean that they are equal. What it means is they are one in spirit, in attitude, in purpose." Now wait a minute! That could be said of any of us. Could we not be one in spirit, in attitude, and purpose with God? Well the Jews actually believe they are one in spirit and attitude. So why would they be upset if they thought that is all that Jesus meant. As a matter of fact, look at what they did. Verse 31 says, "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him."

Hey, you stone somebody for blasphemy. You may not believe the Christian message about the tri-unity of God, but understand something: when you read the Bible, just examine it scientifically. The fact is that the people who heard what Jesus said, knew what He meant and disagreed with what He was saying and wanted to stone Him for it.

I like what a contemporary radio preacher, a young guy who was preaching on the radio, said about all these stonings of Christ. He said, "It looks to me like they are holding a rock concert for Jesus. They are throwing rocks at Him all the time, trying to have a stoning of our Lord. They did not misunderstand. They knew exactly what He said."

"I and My Father are one," is a tremendous statement. The tri-unity of God is dependent upon the uniqueness and unity of each person of the Godhead. The Father is not the Son.

You have in America what is called the "Jesus Only" cult. They believe the Father and Jesus are the same. They use verses like, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Jesus did not say He was the Father. He is a revelation in human form of everything that God the Father is, but He is not the Father. Here in this passage He is saying, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). This is uniqueness. "I and the Father are one,"—unity. The tri-unity of God is dependent on the uniqueness or distinctiveness of each person of the Godhead, as well as its unity—that the Lord our God is one.

Let's take it a step further. Turn please to John 6—you are in the Gospel of John. The tri-unity of God also is declared in the Bible when each person is called God. Now here is where a lot of people check out. They just do not believe this. The tri-unity of God is declared when each person is called God. If I asked you, "Is the Father God?" You may ask, "Is the sky blue and the grass green?" I mean in this culture, everybody automatically accepts the fact that the Father is God. But if I asked you to prove it in the Bible, where would you turn?

I did ask that one time to a student of mine in graduate school. He spent hours searching it. Did you know there are only two places? Do you know it is easier to prove that Jesus is God than to prove that the Father is God? A lot of people have never put that together. They have never understood that.

John 6:27 is one example of Scripture that you could use to prove that God is the Father, the Father is God. In John 6:27 Jesus says,

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.

There you have the Father identified as being God, God the Father.

Turn back to John 5:18.

Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him [that is Jesus] because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

So at least they reported what Jesus had said, that God was His Father. There is not much to go on really when you realize how widespread is the argument that the Father is God, yet in fact, we do not find many verses that actually call Him “God.”

What about the Son? Is He called God? In John 1:1 it says, “In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God.” Verse 14 says, “The Word became flesh.” Romans 9:5, “Christ is called ‘God blessed forever.’” Hebrews 1:8 says, the Father says to the Son, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” There are a lot of verses. But I want to give you one that you cannot get out of, Titus 2. I do not think you can get out of the others, but a lot of people try.

Turn to Titus 2:13, please. Is Jesus Christ called “God” directly in the Bible?

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. (KJV)

You may say, “Well how do people who do not believe the tri-unity of God, deal with that?” Well, it is very easy. They say the first words, “great God,” are referring to the Father and of course the second ones refer to our Savior, Jesus Christ. So what they teach is that both the Father and Jesus Christ are coming back again. I do not know if you know that or not. Those guys that wear white shirts, long ties, ride bicycles, and come to your door, they believe the Father and Jesus both are coming to the earth. Why? It is because they cannot get out of this problem. Now is that an answer to the problem? No way. Why? Excuse me for referring to Greek, but there is no way to answer this problem without helping you to see something.

In Greek we have a basic rule of Greek grammar that says, “Two nouns connected by “and,” if the definite article “the” is in front of the first noun but not the second one, it

connects equals. Now I do not know what you think is a rule. Do you believe that a rule is a rule even if there are some exceptions? That is an interesting question.

I was in an English class one day in high school and I learned about a rule of grammar, and then the teacher proceeded to explain all the exceptions. Now I do not happen to believe that it is a rule that you can depend upon if there is an exception. And we always say, “Well there are always exceptions to the rule.” Well, if there are then it is not a rule. It is an opinion maybe or a theory, but it is not a rule. A rule has no exceptions to it. What is this?” Hang on.

Over 250 times you will find two nouns connected by and with a definite article in front of the first noun and none on the second. This is true of the whole New Testament and there is no exception to the rule. That is exactly what you have in Titus 2:13, “the great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” It is connecting equals. The great God is the Savior and there is no way of getting out of it.

I think it is interesting that the Bible not only calls our Savior “God” in Titus 2:13, but it calls Him “the great God.” Aren’t you glad Jesus is the great God? He is the only one in the Bible who is coming again. The Bible says that Jesus said of Himself, “I will come again” (John 14:3). The Bible speaks about the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ our Lord, but it never tells us that the Father is also coming with Him. As a matter of fact, the Bible indicates that the Father is not coming with Him and Jesus is coming by Himself and the Father remains in heaven. Interesting!

The tri-unity of God is declared when each person is called “God.” You may ask, “What about the Holy Spirit?” You know, I wonder how many of you really believe the Holy Spirit is God. You believe He acts like God, but do you believe He is God? Do you believe He is a real person? The Bible teaches that He lives within us. I have seen an enormous change happen in American Christianity over my preaching ministry. And I want to speak about it just briefly to show you the problem here. The tri-unity of God affects a lot of things and we do not even know it.

Let’s talk about the Holy Spirit. When I grew up I learned that I could not live my Christian life without the help of the Holy Spirit of God. Do you know that? That was programmed into my brain. I learned that I could not make it. I could not cope with it. I could not handle life. I needed the help and presence of the Holy Spirit of God. I grew up believing that and I grew up believing that you had to be filled with the Holy Spirit as a constant thing in your life. It was not a creative option only for a few supersaints. I learned that every Christian cannot function well unless he is filled with the Holy Spirit of God. That is what I grew up learning.

In my day, the difference between being Pentecostal and not being Pentecostal was always connected with the gift of tongues. Today because Christians realize the differences, we have what we call “charismatic Christians” and “non-charismatic Christians.” And it is not just talking about tongues or gifts of the Spirit. It deals with our attitude toward the Holy Spirit. There are many non-charismatics who have forsaken the

basic teaching of the Bible that you cannot live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. You know what we have done? We have substituted our own performance and do not even realize it. We have substituted more witnessing, more prayer, and more Bible reading.

There is something else. We have become disciplined because we are upset with the tragedies of our Christian world. We are upset with all the mess we are in. We have come up with our own little deal. We have seminars teaching us how to live the Christian life. I just want you to know that we do not need any seminars, we need the Holy Spirit. And we are losing our understanding of the Holy Spirit in our effort to help people to grow. All of you who are “gung ho” on discipleship, listen to me. I grew up believing in discipleship, but never once thought that by my own discipline and discipleship that somehow I would have victory in the Christian life. I never believed that, but I have lived to see my Christian brothers now teaching that. I just want you to know that no matter how much you study the Word, no matter how much you are on your knees in prayer (all of which you should do), no matter how much you witness, no matter how good you are at discipline, you cannot live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. It is not you doing it, it is the Spirit of God living and working in you.

That is missing, folks. All across our Christian culture we have lost sight of it. It is one thing to shout, “Hallelujah!” It is something you hear and you know is true. It is another thing to realize how we got in this mess and what is wrong.

When you talk about the tri-unity of God, you are saying that the Holy Spirit is God, like the Father is God, and like the Son is God. And yet many Christians today are talking about the Spirit of God as though He is an influence, the power, or the force. My friends, He is God, God Almighty. He lives in me and He lives in you if you are a believer.

Turn to Acts 5 and let me prove that the Bible teaches He is God. There is not a lot to go on with this. But there is one clear text in Acts 5:3-4 where Peter says,

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to [Who? What does it say?] God.

Verse 3 says he lied to the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 says, “You have not lied to men but to God.” The Holy Spirit obviously is called “God” in Acts 5:3-4.

Now we have said so far that the tri-unity of God is defined by the use of plural pronouns, “Let us make man.” Secondly, that the tri-unity of God—and try to understand it—is dependent upon the uniqueness or the distinctiveness and the unity of each person in the Godhead. They are distinct and different, and yet, they are one. The tri-unity of God is declared when each person is called God.

The fourth point is that the tri-unity of God is also described in the Bible when divine attributes are given to each person. Now this is a tough one. Let me give you an example. God is love, but if I use “love,” I am going to have a problem because we love. When we talk divine attributes, we mean something that is true of God that is not true of man.

Here are some examples, I will just give you three. Eternal—now we have eternal life, but we had a beginning and God had no beginning or end. Omniscient—that He knows all things. We do not; God does. Omnipresent—that He is everywhere at once. Let’s just take those three. And I am asking you, if in the Bible we learn that each person, Father, Son, and Spirit had the divine attributes? That is the question.

Deuteronomy 33:27 says, “The eternal God is thy refuge. Underneath are the everlasting arms.” Is that Father? Is that Son? Or is that Holy Spirit?

Psalms 90:1-2 says, “Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.” Is it talking about the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit?

I read that Jesus, in John 8:56—turn there, please—I read Jesus making a remarkable statement about the eternal character of Himself. Is He eternal, Jesus Christ our Lord? Is He the eternal Son of God? “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day.” Wait a minute! Abraham lived 2100 years before Christ. Jesus said he saw it and was glad. Then the Jews said to Him,

You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:57-58).

Now stop and think about it. If He said, “Before Abraham was, I was,” that is quite a statement. That means He existed 2000 years ago. But He did not say that. He said, “Before Abraham was [about 2185 BC] I AM.” Meaning, at this present moment, I am existing, but I am also existing 2000 years previously. Now if you do not think He was talking about God, consider this: the Bible teaches the Lord inhabits eternity. He is not governed by the sequence of events as we are. He lives outside of time because He designed time. He can live 2000 years ago and 2000 years in the present at the same moment that we are talking about Him. And He fills it all. He inhabits, literally dwells in all eternity, according to Isaiah 57:15.

My friends, we are talking some heavy duty stuff here that makes your brain hurt. What Jesus is saying is, “I have always existed. As a matter of fact, at this present moment, I am also existing 2000 years ago.” This is inconceivable to our brains, but not to the mind of God at all. He dwells in it all and Jesus is saying this about Himself.

You may say, “Well, maybe that isn’t what He meant.” Oh yes, it is what He meant—look at John 8:59. They were not mistaken at all about what He meant. They took up stones to throw at Him again. The people who heard Jesus knew exactly what He was

claiming. They knew He was claiming to be God, which is blasphemy. And in the law, you are to be stoned to death.

Look at John 17:5. This is when Jesus is praying to His heavenly Father. You talk about being the eternal God, the eternal Son of God. John 17:5 says,

And now O Father [Jesus praying to His Father] glorify Me
together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with
You before the world was.

It indicates He was with the Father before the world ever came into existence. He is the eternal Son of God. You may say, “Yeah, but what about the Holy Spirit? Turn to Hebrews chapter 9, please.

At my door one day, a couple of those guys came by. We got into a heavy-duty argument about a lot of stuff and one topic was about the Holy Spirit. They felt that our Christian doctrine is incorrect.

They said, “You treat Him like a person.”
I said, “That is because He is.”
“No, no, no,” they said, “He’s a force.”
“No, He’s not.”
“He’s just God working.”
I said, “He is God all right. It is God working, but not like you’re talking. He is God just like the Father is God.
And they said, “That’s blasphemy.”
I said, “No, it’s not. But by the way, they did try to stone Jesus for that remark.
They said, “There is not one verse in the Bible that calls the Holy Spirit eternal.”
They shouldn’t have done that. I said, “Turn to the book of Hebrews.”

Hebrews 9:14 says,

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the
eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.

He is called eternal Spirit in Hebrews 9:14.

You see, divine attributes are given to each person of the Godhead. The fact that God knows everything is in 1 John 3:20. God knows all things. It is in Psalm 139 which says that before I even speak, before there is a word on my tongue, God knows it. He is intimately acquainted with all my ways. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is too high. I cannot attain it,” says the psalmist in 139:6. That is one thing everybody agrees about, God knows everything and we do not.

Now I want to ask you, does Jesus know everything too? Turn to John 2. Does Jesus know everything? In John 2:23 I read,

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them.

The word “commit” is the same word “believe” that is in verse 23. He did not believe in them. Why? They only believed because of the signs. They did not really commit themselves to Him. He did not believe in them. Why? It is because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

In Mark 2, they bring a paralytic man to Jesus. Jesus says, “Your sins are forgiven.” The Bible says that the scribes and Pharisees reasoned in their hearts. They were not even talking out loud but thinking, “Who can forgive sins but God only?” And Jesus, perceiving their reasoning, asked them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts?” I mean, folks, He knew what they were thinking. The Bible says He knows what is in man. Who? Jesus.

What about the Holy Spirit? Turn to 1 Corinthians 2:10-11. Does the Holy Spirit know everything? It says in verse 10,

But God has revealed them to us [These wonderful things He has prepared for us.] through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Does the Holy Spirit know everything? Yes, He knows all the things of God. The Bible says that He knows all the deep things of God. Wait a minute, God is everywhere! Is Jesus—I mean, after all? Matthew 28:20 says, “Lo, I am with you [what?] always. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you.”

And how about the Holy Spirit? Psalm 139:7 says,

Where shall I run away from Thy Spirit? Where do I go
from Your Spirit? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there. If
I make my bed in hell, Thou art there.

There is nowhere you can run away from the Spirit. Why? It is because He is everywhere. What I am trying to say is stated clearly in the Bible, that divine attributes are said of each person of the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Here is a fifth thing about the tri-unity of God. I like this. The tri-unity of God, people, is demonstrated in the Bible by the exercise of their power. Let me show you what I mean. Let’s take creation—that is power! “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Who was that? Was it the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Some people may say, “Well, that is the Father.” Wait a minute. In John 1:3 it says of Jesus,

“All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.” And how about Job 26:13 which says, “By His Spirit He has adorned or beautified the heavens.” And how about Job 33:4 which says, “By the Spirit of Almighty God, I have life.” Who was creating us? Who was creating the universe? The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all involved.

You want another example? How about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? In Ephesians 1:19-21, it says that the Father raised Jesus from the dead. But in John 10:18 Jesus said, “No man takes My life from Me. I have the power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again.” And do not leave the Holy Spirit out. In Romans 8:11 it says, “The Spirit raised Jesus’ body from the dead.” Now, who raised Jesus from the dead? The Father did, Jesus did Himself, and so did the Holy Spirit. That ought to cause you to think.

The tri-unity of God, folks, is demonstrated by the exercise of their power.

Let me give you another more wonderful, thing to our hearts. Number six in the points on the tri-unity of God, friends, is displayed in the Bible by their presence in the believer.

One day a Sunday school teacher came up to me and said,

“Pastor, we would like you to do some teaching from the pulpit that would help us in dealing with children. You know when children want to become Christians, they like to ask Jesus to come into their heart. You know, in reality Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of God. What we mean is the Holy Spirit comes into their heart. And if somehow you could clarify that from the pulpit it would be all right.”

I said, “I am not going to do it.”

“Why not? You are the pastor.”

“Well, I know that but I am not going to do it because I do not believe that.”

“What do you mean you don’t believe it?”

I said, “I believe Jesus does come into your heart.”

“He comes into your heart?”

I said, “Yeah, He comes, He is at the right hand of God, I know, but He cannot be confined to one location. You see He is God. Oh, by the way, I also believe the Father comes into your heart.”

“The Father? Are you supposed to be teaching this?”

I said, “Well it is in the Bible.”

See, I believe the Father is in me, Jesus is in me, and the Spirit is in me. So, I am not going to trouble some kid. I am just glad they know the truth even without having to go through this discussion. You may say, “Well how do you know that?”

Turn to John 14. I like this. I did not make this up, it is in the Bible. The tri-unity of God is displayed by their presence in the believer.

In John 14:16 Jesus said,

I will pray the Father [There is Jesus and the Father distinct from each other.] and He will give you another Helper [The Helper is the Holy Spirit, according to verse 26.] that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you [The Greek has, alongside of you] and will be in you.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer began on the Day of Pentecost. It was obviously future at this point.

Now look at verse 18. “I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.” Wait a minute, He is telling them He is going to ascend into heaven. He has to go away, but He is going to send the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is going to come to them. And now He says, “I will come to you.” Look at John 14:20.

At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

Verse 23 says,

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him [Watch this.] and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

The Father is in me, the Spirit is in me and the Son is in me. I have them all. It is a great team. Amen?

The eternal God, I do not have all there is to God and neither do you. But according to the Bible, God places His own nature and Himself inside of us. It includes the Father. It includes Jesus. It includes the Holy Spirit. Do you understand it? No. But I believe it.

Number seven. Finally, turn to John 17. The tri-unity of God is defined by the use of plural pronouns. It is dependent upon the uniqueness and unity of each person of the Godhead. It is declared in the Bible when each person is called “God,” and described when divine attributes are given to each person. It is demonstrated by the exercise of their power and it is also displayed by their presence in the believer.

Lastly the tri-unity of God, friends, is designed to reveal the spiritual unity of believers. And it is at this point we are really fussy. The tri-unity of God, that God is three in one, is designed to reveal to us the spiritual unity of all believers.

Turn to John 17, please. You have to think with me now for a moment. In verse 20, Jesus is talking about His disciples,

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:20-23)

It is interesting to me, as you examine this passage, that we are to be one as the Father and Jesus are one. The tri-unity of God means that God is one, but He manifests Himself in three persons; and their unity is to be exactly the same as the unity among true believers. This is why I think we are all messed up.

You see, a lot of us believe that true unity is based on whether folks agree with you or not. It is interesting to me in church life, how often that is seen. Now I want you to know that the boards of this church do not often agree with each other. Sometimes they do, but sometimes they do not. As a matter of fact, the board of elders and I, in particular, do not always agree. We really do not. It interesting to me that we are all very different. And you know, one of the easiest ways to cause a split and ill feelings is to run into another Christian who disagrees with you about something. And supposedly, we are all to agree. In fact, every now and then somebody says, “Well, what we need is a unanimous vote. We have to prove our unity.” That is a bunch of baloney. What are you talking about? That is like checking your brains off at the door. Maybe I disagree with you, but I am not one with you because we agree on the same issues. That is not what makes spiritual unity.

Or here is another misconception. I have been at occasions where there is a guy on a platform who wears clerical robes, who supposedly wants to be one with me, and he does not even know the Lord! I just want you to know he is not one with me.

All true believers are one, not because they like the same things, and not because they have the same cultural preferences or interests. That is not why we are one. By the way,

that is not true about marriage either. You know why you are one? It is because you made a vow. You know what I mean? Divorce is out because marriage is for life. The two become, what? One.

The Father and the Son and the Spirit are one because they are all, what? They are God. What makes the Father, the Son, and the Spirit one is that they are all God. They are not three Gods; there is only one God.

What makes all believers one is God; it is the same exact thing. Jesus said, “I pray that they may be one as we are one.” The reason we are one is because we all have God’s life in us. It does not matter what our likes or dislikes are or our language differences, skin color differences, or anything else; we are one when we have been born again of the Spirit of God. You are not one because you go to the same church. And everybody wants to have oneness by having the same name or come under this denominational, humungous something or other. Hey, listen folks, you are one because you have God’s life in you.

Let’s take fellowship. All Christians have fellowship whether they like it or not. And I hear Christians say, “Oh, but you can fall out of fellowship.” No you cannot. Who ever told you that? You can certainly strain the bear up a little bit, but you cannot get out. Listen, the Bible says that our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. What we have in common, which is the meaning of fellowship, is not the way we get along. What we have in common is God’s life. So we have fellowship whether we like it or not. With every true believer in Jesus Christ, you are already one. And isn’t it fascinating that Jesus said the world would know and would believe when they see it? So the manifestation of it would be what?

Look at John 13:35 which says,

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

It did not say that you would like each other. We hope you do, but you are to love one another even when you disagree.

“But I want pink on the walls and it is white.”

“So what?”

“Well, I do not know.”

“Well, we are going to another church. You know, they sing funny songs there.”

“Really?”

Exactly what do we understand to be our spiritual unity? And you wonder why we need a message on the tri-unity of God? According to the Bible, the tri-unity of God, is designed to reveal to us the true spiritual unity of all believers. And the Bible says, “Strive for the unity of the Spirit,” (Ephesians 4:3). And some of us will not even lift a finger. And if

somebody says something against us that we do not like, we are out of there. Or we go down the street to another place. We cannot take it because we want everybody to be the same. Do you want everybody to look like you and act like you? God is a God of variety. He made everybody different and He knows we disagree. I believe the highest mark of Christian maturity is agreeing to disagree and still love each other.

We are one because we share God's life. And that is the tragedy of it. A lot of you think because you belong to a church you are in. Oh no. You think because you know all that stuff and hang around us. No way. Some of us, by the way, although we are not as discerning as God naturally, but some of us because of the presence of the Spirit, can even feel when we are in your presence that you are not quite in. Did you know that? It is kind of scary when you think about it.

Christians know people who hang around thinking they are Christians but they are not and after a while, although we are not God and we cannot quickly make judgments, after a while we begin to feel, "I don't think John is in." Christians even talk that way. Did you know that? You may not like that if you are here among us and you are not a true believer. But if we know you well enough, you should be careful and you should hide a little bit more because you see, we are after you. We want every man, woman, and child to go to heaven with us that we possibly can take there. But we know that some of you are in and some are thinking you are in and you are not because you do not have God's life. You have to be born again. You have to come to know the Lord personally.

Let's close with prayer.

Father, thank You so much for Your wonderful Word. We pray that You will continue to impress us with our need of knowing the Lord in order to truly have the unity of the believers. Thank You, Lord, that You are three and one at the same time. I pray for those in our audience who have never made a commitment to Jesus Christ that You would help them now, right now, in this moment to turn to You before it is too late. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Take your Bibles, please, and turn to Romans 3 beginning at verse 21. Our subject is the righteousness of God. We begin a new series in one of the books that really puts you into the heavenly places, to say the least. It is the book of Ephesians. We are going to talk about exactly how we are blessed by God. Now there are a lot of folks who want to bless us. You know what I mean? And it may not be what we want. But God has blessed us, according to the Bible, “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). I would just like to know that I have all there is to get, spiritually speaking. How about you?

I mean, everybody comes around telling me that I need something else. My wife and I just moved into a new place and it is amazing how advertisers know we moved. And we get all these letters telling us if we only had what they have we would be much happier. I am already happy. I am already having a good time. Do not pop my bubble. I am going home to be with the Lord and I am having a wonderful time now. I do not need any of your stuff. Amen?

It is wonderful to know that you already have everything you could ever possibly get in the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet I see a lot of us walking around like we have nothing. We can be so discouraged and defeated. We have never really understood what God has said that we already have. If you are interested in that, that is the message. We are blessed and that is the subject from Ephesians 1.

We are talking about the righteousness of God. And I know that sometimes I can overstate the importance of a given message. Sometimes a person may hear a message they like a lot and that I may not have thought it was too significant, and vice versa. But I know, from the standpoint of content alone and the problem of our culture, that what we are going to talk about today is extremely important.

I know that our culture believes a person is made righteous by what he does. There is no doubt in my mind that that is what our culture believes. And unfortunately, many who call themselves Evangelical Protestant Christians also believe the same thing. It comes under different names. Sometimes the word “discipleship” is used that way. We think by what we have done, either in our knowledge of the Word or our ability to pray or witness, or to do acts of mercy and kindness to others, that somehow we are improving. We think that we are getting a little more righteous.

You can find it also in our conversation about people who are new to the faith. We speak about “us” and “them.” There are people who just have come to know Christ, perhaps in the last month, who do not look like the rest of us who have been sitting around here for thirty or forty years.

The truth of the gospel is that you are never more righteous than the day you received Christ as your Lord and Savior. You never improve on that at all. As a matter of fact, I do not believe that any one of us is made righteous at all, by our life here. Now you may have felt that. That may have given you attitudes of superiority over somebody, or a “holier than thou” attitude, or something else. But let me tell you, you are not any more righteous thirty years later than you are the day that you come to know Jesus Christ. That is why Christians need to love each other, because we do not all look and act alike. As a matter of fact, a lot of us look at others and immediately see areas in need of improvement. Have you noticed that? You can almost feel that. Just thinking about it and somebody comes into your mind. “Oh, if they would only learn.” And some wives and some husbands have been working many years on improving their partner, only to discover that very little change takes place.

My dear friends, what we are going to talk about today could really change your life. It really could, if you really get a hold of this and really understand it.

Romans 3 kind of captures the argument about the righteousness of God. Romans is a good book on that. There are ninety-one mentions of the word “righteous” in the New Testament and thirty-five of them are in the book of Romans alone. The word “faith” appears fifty-five times in this book. The theme of Romans is: “The righteous live by faith.” Martin Luther wrote in his German Bible, “faith alone.”

In Romans 3:21–28 it says,

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,
22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;
23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
25 whom God set forth as a propitiation [a mercy seat and by application a satisfaction of God’s wrath. God sent Him to be a propitiation] by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance [His patience with us] God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,
26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just [or righteous] and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.
28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Let's look to the Lord in a moment of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the wonderful book we call the Bible that reveals who You are and what You have done and what You will do. And I pray, God, that as we examine that wonderful attribute and work of righteousness, that You will help us to understand our own position before You. We know there are lots of people who call themselves Christians who have never understood the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. And I pray, God, that You would bring clarity, meaning, powerful meaning to our lives, as we begin to see what righteousness is all about. We thank You for what You are going to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I really have two questions. One, what is the righteousness of God? And two, why is it so important? When you ask me what the righteousness of God is, I can approach it from a grammatical meaning. When we look at the Hebrew word in the Old Testament, *tsedeq*, it has to do with what is "straight," in opposition to that which is "crooked." It refers to that which is "right" in opposition to that which is "wrong." Its grammatical meaning is important. When you come to Greek, it is *dikaioo* in Greek and its many forms, it means "to declare righteous." It does not mean "to make righteous."

What I just said is probably one of the most controversial statements, though you may not have known it. It is the difference between being Catholic and Protestant. Many of us come from one of those backgrounds. We need to understand that righteousness in its grammatical meaning, never means "to make righteous." But a lot of us have come to believe that somehow we are made righteous by what we do. Or in Catholic theology, some believe it is mediated to us, perhaps through the sacraments. My friends, we are not made righteous.

So let me give you some examples. In Proverbs 17:15 it says, "He who justifies the wicked is an abomination to God" (paraphrased). Now folks, we do not make the wicked righteous. The meaning of the word is we just "declare" them to be righteous. Whoever declares a wicked man to be righteous that is an abomination to God.

Let me give you another example. Luke 7:29 says, "Even the tax collectors justified God." Now I want you to know, God does not need to be made righteous by any one of us. What it is saying is that they declared Him to be righteous because of the gospel that now affected them and they became believers. So they justified God. They did not make Him righteous, that is for sure. But they declared Him to be righteous in the work of the gospel, and thus they believed in Him.

Here is another example. In 1 Timothy 3:16 it says, "Great is the mystery of godliness," which is referring to Jesus. It says, "God was manifest in the flesh; justified in the Spirit."

Once again, Jesus did not need to be made righteous. What it means is He was declared to be righteous.

Now my friends, when you understand that—and by the way, I will say this without any hesitation—I have never found one usage of the word “righteousness” in the New Testament that ever means “to make righteous.” It is a doctrine that man wants, though, because we want to believe there is something we can do to either become a Christian or to somehow live the Christian life. But not once in the Bible does it say “to make righteous,” or even mean that. As a matter of fact, it cannot mean that, which we saw in the previous examples.

So we could look at grammatical meaning, but let me give you another example. Turn to Psalm 92:15. When you ask what righteousness is, I can approach it from a grammatical meaning and it does not mean “to make righteous.” It means “to declare righteous.” I also look at it in terms of moral understanding. When you ask what righteousness is, Psalm 92:15 would be an example of this. In that verse it says, “To declare that the Lord is upright [or righteous], He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in Him.” From the standpoint of moral understanding, what does it mean when you say, “righteousness?” It means there is no moral unrighteousness. It means that it is absolutely free from any sin or unrighteousness.

If you say to me, “David, do you believe that you are declared to be righteous by God?” The answer is “yes.” If you ask me, “David, are you righteous?” Truthfully, no, I am not righteous. I am declared to be righteous by God. “Well, that sounds like you think you are perfect.” Does that mean my state? No. It means my standing before God. “Are you talking about performance?” No, I am not. I am talking about my position in Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, the only righteousness I have is that, and I do not have any other. It is just that Christianity has made me believe in moral performance and not in what the Bible teaches. Christianity has been infested and infected with a human performance system that not only is affecting how to become a Christian, but definitely has infected all of us in how to live the Christian life.

We are not living on the basis of faith in what Jesus did. We are living on the basis of our confidence in what we can do for Him. Even making such statements as, “I want the righteousness of Christ to live through me.” Really? Wait a minute! You already are as righteous as you will ever be. The moment you come to Christ, you have a position that is absolutely righteous. In a moral sense it means that you are already free from any sin or unrighteousness. You say, “I do not understand that because I do sin.” We know. We all know about each other, but that is what makes Christianity so wonderful because we are declared righteous in Christ.

Let me give you a little insight from a man who died a few years ago, a generation ago. His name was Dr. Alba J. McClain. He wrote a great book called, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*. And in discussing the whole issue of the gospel on page 59 of that book, it is interesting what he said. First turn to Romans 1:16–17, in order to know why he was saying this. This is the theme of the whole book of Romans. It says,

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

17 For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just [or righteous] shall live by faith.”

Now you can see two things there. One, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. That is what it says. And also, in it you see the righteousness of God revealed.

Dr. McClain wrote these words about those two verses, he said:

The gospel is the power of God for salvation because in the gospel is a revelation. And that revelation is a manifestation of the righteousness of God. That is the reason the gospel has the power to save a sinner. Man has no righteousness. But God, in the gospel, has provided a righteousness. And He gives that to men if he will only take it. This fact makes Christianity different from every other religion the world has ever seen. Every great scheme to save men has failed on just one point. Its success depended on man's righteousness, when in reality there is no righteousness in man. Christianity attacks the problem at this point of righteousness. It recognizes that man has no righteousness. And then brings the righteousness of God and clothes that man in that righteousness and saves him.

Boy, is that ever the truth! You see from a moral understanding, when we speak of righteousness, it is absolutely free from any sin. Are we actually saying, as believers, that we have that kind of a position before God? And the answer is “absolutely yes.” On the basis of what Jesus Christ has done at the cross, I am absolutely righteous in every sense of the word.

Now in addition to a grammatical meaning or a moral understanding, you can look at the question of what the righteousness of God is from a practical application. Turn to Psalm 145, please, and look at verse 17. Here is a practical application for when you ask what the righteousness of God is. And by this we mean that every act of God is righteous and fair. It is just and fair. So you say, “What is the righteousness of God?” I would say that it is the acts of God that are always just and fair. God never does anything unfair. Psalm 145:17 says, “The Lord is righteous in all His—[What does it say?]-ways.” He is righteous in what He does. So here is a practical application in that God, in His righteousness, would never do anything that is not right. In Genesis 18:25 it says, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” So when we speak of righteousness, it is that every act of God is definitely righteous and definitely just.

Now here is one last thing. As you begin to examine what is the righteousness of God, there is not only a grammatical meaning or a moral understanding or even a practical application. What really concerns us is the theological usage of that term and it really consists of two things. I hope you will listen carefully. I do not want these confused in your mind. It is two things, theologically. One, it refers to who God is. Folks, listen to me. That is nontransferable. You will never be righteous like God, ever. It is nontransferable. The Bible says in 1 John 2:29, “You know that He is righteous.” Righteousness is an attribute of God. It is what He is. It is nontransferable.

Secondly, it refers to what God has done. When you read about His righteousness in the Bible, it is referring to either who He is or what He has done. Now who He is, is not transferable to you and me, but what He has done is transferable. Now what do we mean by what He has done? I will give you a statement. When you ask me about the righteousness of God, it is an act of God which declares us to be righteous on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ for our sins and the satisfaction of the law’s demands.

What is the righteousness of God? It is who God is. It is also what He has done. And what He has done is an act which declares us to be righteous on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ and that He satisfied all the law’s demands.

In Isaiah 53:11 is the great messianic chapter about Him who was “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and that all of our sin was laid on Him.” That passage says, “By His knowledge My righteous servant” [that is who God is and it is nontransferable] “shall justify many.” That is the act of God to declare us righteous on the basis of the fact that Jesus would die for our sins and bear our iniquity. So, “by His knowledge My righteous servant” [the Messiah who is absolutely righteous] “will justify many.” Because He is righteous, He does not have to die for His own sin; therefore, He substituted His life for us, paid for our sins and now declares us to be righteous. And we did not do anything except believe it. That is the incredible thing!

Another example would be in Jeremiah 23:5–6 where the Bible says “God will raise up to King David a righteous Branch. And He will judge in righteousness” (paraphrased).

Now turn to Romans 3 again where we were looking when we began. It refers to what God has done. Romans 3:21 says, “The righteousness of God is revealed apart from the law.” Even though you will find it in the law and the prophets, He says that it is through faith in verse 22. He mentions that all have sinned, in verse 23 and that we are declared righteous, freely by His grace in verse 24. He gives us what we do not deserve. It is through what? Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. “Redemption” means to buy us out of the slave market of sin and death and hell and set us free. How have we been set free from the consequences of sin? By something we did or even by our faith in the Lord Jesus? No, but by the redemption that is in Christ. My faith does not save me and neither does yours. Jesus Christ saves me. Faith is simply the channel that expresses confidence in what He did.

That is why a lot of people struggle with being a Christian. It is because they think it is their ability to believe it which somehow makes it so. No it does not. Even if you do not believe it, it is still true. You see, Jesus Christ saves you. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, “He is our righteousness.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God the Father made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” He did not know any sin. Why? It is so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. How interesting!

Romans 3:25 says, “God set forth Jesus to be a propitiation by His blood through faith to demonstrate His righteousness” (paraphrased). Do you realize that we would never learn how righteous God is if we did not see it in the gospel. You see, in the gospel you learn how righteous God is. It is because He does not depend one moment on what you are going to do to somehow atone for your sin.

A lot of us are still atoning for our sins. We cover up by our busyness. We learn to do that when we grow up. We try to please our parents. And we believe if we are good, then they will bless us; and if we are bad, we are in big trouble. You know, what we think is sometimes programmed by our background. And so, when we are hit with the gospel, it filters through what we have always felt we should do in order to get people to accept us. I just want you to know that you are accepted in Christianity, not on the basis of anything you did or how you look. You are accepted in the Beloved One, Jesus Christ our Lord.

See, that helps me. I sometimes say a sentence that many of you have heard. It goes on the radio a lot and I get letters about it, but I still say it because to me it is a miracle, this thing we call a church. If you knew what was in the heart of the person sitting next to you, you would move. Isn't God's grace wonderful? I mean there are some real stinkers in here. Do you know that? And it is wonderful how God, in His love and grace, can just put us all together and act like we are having a good time. I mean it is incredible when you think about it.

God's love is so great! You see, God did not trust one thing about you to save you. And that is a message we hear. Do you know how we get that? We ask someone to share his testimony and he comes up and tells us thirty reasons why God is lucky to have him. You know, testimonies are hard to share because there is too much of man in them and not enough of Christ.

In seminary, when we were told how to give a testimony, we were to give a certain amount of time to what you were before you became a Christian, then tell how you received Christ, and finally tell what it has been like since receiving Him. And I like what one old professor, who was in his 80s said, “If I were you, when I give a testimony, I would give about one minute to what you were before Christ and at least an hour to how wonderful He is.” That got in my brain, you know. We do not need to hear what was it like. Were you a dirty rotten drug dealer? Get up there and tell us all that you were a dirty rotten depraved sinner and that will be enough. We will understand. And then move on and tell us how wonderful the Lord is.

Do you understand what I'm saying? We have no righteousness of our own. You know this is a generation that is so much into themselves and it is programming us to think that somehow we are getting better. "Man, I went to church. You know, I only missed two Sundays all year?" Well, terrific, but let me tell you that even if you went every day you are not any more righteous than the day you received Christ. You may say, "I am so glad to hear that because I really wanted to skip for about six months." There are all kinds in the body of Christ, aren't there?

So I am going to ask the question now: "Why is this righteousness of God so important to me?" It is extremely important. And I am going to give you seven reasons.

Number one. The righteousness of God establishes the validity of all that God says. Did you ever think about it? Turn to Isaiah 45. Why is His righteousness so important? Because it establishes the validity of all that He says. How can I trust Him if He is not righteous? I love this passage. In Isaiah 45:22–25, God says,

22 Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

23 I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.

24 He shall say, "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him.

25 In the LORD all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory."

Now this whole text is talking about the salvation that God will bring to His people. It is all based on the fact that you can count on His word. He said, "I have sworn by Myself and just so you know how important that is, the word that goes out of My mouth always goes in righteousness—always" (Isaiah 45:23, paraphrased).

God's righteousness establishes that He always does right. He establishes the validity of everything He says to us. And by the way, because we are not always right, that is why human opinion is always a little shaky. You ask somebody something and you have to figure out whether you should trust them or not. If they were always right and always just and always fair, then you could definitely accept everything they said as being the truth.

Number two. The righteousness of God is so important because it also explains the justice of God in judging us. A lot of people think God is unfair in that. This deals with both nonbelievers, as well as believers. Turn to Psalm 50, please, and look at verses 4–6. The righteousness of God is so important because it explains the justice of God in judging us. No matter whether you are a believer or a nonbeliever, nobody can accuse God of being unfair to them. He is going to judge you righteously.

4 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth,
that He may judge His people:
5 Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a
covenant with Me by sacrifice.
6 Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God
Himself is—[What? What does it say? He is]—Judge.

Because of the righteousness of God, then God is always just. No one can ever accuse Him of being unfair. Acts 17:31 says, “He will judge the world in righteousness.”

Turn to Revelation 16, where the final plagues from God’s judging hand fall in the tribulation period, those seven last terrible plagues. It is interesting to note the emphasis on the justice and righteousness of God. Some people think that He is not righteous in what He is going to do. It says in verse 4,

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and
springs of water, and they became blood.
5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “You are
righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is
to be, because You have judged these things.
6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and
You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just [or
righteous] due.”
7 And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord
God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

Isn’t it interesting? To describe the fairness and the justice of God, it takes one of the judgments that turns water into blood. The angel said, “It is clear to me that God is righteous and just, because in fact, the people who are experiencing that have taken the lives of people who love the Lord and shed their blood” (paraphrased). So He turned their drinking water into blood. That is justice. “It is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It is a life for a life,” says Exodus 21.

Listen, to me, I do not really want justice from God. You know, I have thought about this for a long time. I do not want God to be “just” with me at all. I really don’t. I know He will be, but I do not want Him to be. I am not interested in God being fair. I am not screaming at God saying, “Thanks a lot! Why won’t You be fair with me? I mean, look at all I have done for”... and I do not even want to say the word. I don’t want to slip it out, lest I get what I deserve. I don’t want what I deserve. I want what I don’t deserve. I want mercy. I want forgiveness. I want grace from God. If I get what I deserve, I am going to be in hell.

The gospel tells me that God, because He is a just God, is not going to sweep my sin under the rug—in case you thought that. God must judge sin and the gospel says that God was so righteous that He judged it all in the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. John 3 says that all the wrath of God against sin was laid on Jesus Christ. And if you reject Jesus

Christ, His only answer to our sin, then you deserve hell, brother and sister. You deserve it, no matter what you say. God has provided the only answer for you. If you say, “No, no, no, God let me earn it.” It would be impossible because you never could. You could never atone for all that is wrong with you. God took care of the whole thing. And if you reject that, there isn’t any other message. There isn’t any other hope.

How wonderful is the righteousness of God? Turn to Hebrews 6:10. It not only establishes the validity of all that God says, it explains the justice of God in judging us, and I like this—the righteousness of God encourages us in knowing that God will never forget what we have done. It is because God is just and fair, He will never forget.

Have you ever noticed how many people forget? They just forget. You do something nice and they forget to say, “Thank you.” Did you ever notice how that affects you? You may say, “Well you know, we sent them a gift. It has been four weeks now and we have not even heard from them.” Maybe that other person is saying, “You know, I know we thanked them. Didn’t we thank them, John? I don’t remember. Did you do it? You know, if we didn’t thank them—we probably—this is going to end our relationship.” Now I don’t know if you people go through this kind of stuff.

You see, righteousness on a human standpoint, is like a giant ledger. We are all trying to balance it out. Did they send us a card last year? What does that have to do with you sending one this year? Well, because they did last year. You have to even it out—debit and credit. Amen? That was a pretty expensive gift they gave. Well, we should give something a little more expensive.

What are we trying to do? You know, it is like all of life is built on this system. And you know, I just love the fact that God is so just and fair. He is never going to forget what we have done. Even if a thousand people forget and nobody said “thank you,” and they do not know what you did, God does. He will never forget.

I love this verse. Many of you know that my wife, thinking I needed this encouragement, cross-stitched this in a beautiful plaque and I love to look at it. Hebrews 6:10 says,

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love
which you have shown toward His name, in that you have
ministered to the saints, and do minister.

You not only did it in the past, you are still keeping on, keeping on. I know some people that want to quit because there is no appreciation around here. Do you know that? Somebody works in an area and they may say, “I tell you, does anybody know I change diapers here in the nursery at the eleven o’clock hour? I bet nobody has ever known. I bet they don’t even know my name. They’ve got a computer. They ought to have it on the computer. You know, I have been in that department for three months and I haven’t heard one person say ‘thank you.’ I am not going back.”

Hey, God is not unjust to forget what you have done. Every cup of cold water given in His name will receive a reward. You are not fooling anybody. God also knows whether you are just doing a snow job too. God knows whether you ever did anything or not. But God is not unjust. And it encourages us when we think of the righteousness of God, to know that He will never forget what you have done, although everybody else does.

Number four. Go back to Romans 3 again. The righteousness of God is very important because it eliminates any need for self-righteousness. I like to say when I come to this point, “Whoaa!—did you get that?” I do not know how that translated. It eliminates any need for self-righteousness. And I like to say, “Whoaa—praise God!” Do you ever get tired of trying to be righteous? I mean, that can wear you out. Trying to do what you are supposed to do. Listen folks, none of your righteousness is going to help one bit.

Romans 3:27–28 says,

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.
28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

I was in a store and the lady in the store asked me,

“What do you do?
And I said, “Well I preach.”
She said, “What’s that?”
I said, “I talk.”
“Lots of people talk. What do you talk about?”
I said, “I talk about God and the Bible.”
“Oh,” she said, “I think that is so wonderful. You know, I can understand why God must be pleased with you, because you do that.”
I said, “Well, He is actually not pleased with me on that basis.”
“Why? What have you done?”
So, it’s interesting. I said, “Well you see the day I became a Christian, I trusted Jesus Christ—I am perfect now.”

It was just funny. You know, I finally gave up because it was obvious, she was not following it.

It is interesting how people think that you are such a nice person. “Did you do that? You took food to the needy. Oh, that’s wonderful. You gave blankets to the homeless. That’s wonderful.” Am I criticizing that? You have me all wrong, if that is what you think. I believe the most active people in this world for those kind of issues, ought to be Bible believing Christians. But on the other hand, were you doing that to get some sort of acceptability? Is that what you thought? Did you think you would be better off by doing those things? Did you think you would become more righteous? No, that is not true at all.

You see, the gospel eliminates all of that. Turn to Romans 10 and let me show you why. In Romans 10:1–4 it says,

- 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.
- 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.
- 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.
- 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

He is the end. You cannot go any further. That is it. He has taken care of it.

Look at Titus 3:4–7 please. The Bible is very clear that when the righteousness of God is understood and applied in your life, it eliminates any need for self-righteousness. You do not need to do that anymore. You are wasting your time. Besides, it is frustrating—just don't do that anymore! You are not achieving anything. You think that you are impressing others. You are not impressing God. He has already declared you to be righteous. You are already blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. I read in Titus 3:4-7,

- 4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,
- 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,
- 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
- 7 that having been justified [or declared righteous] by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Paul wrote in Romans that if grace is works, then it is not grace. It is not by works that we have done, but it says that we are justified, declared righteous, by His grace. God is giving us something we do not deserve. And that is a wonderful, wonderful passage to remind us that when you know the righteousness of God eliminates any need for self-righteousness. Praise God! It is tiring. It wears you out. It does not achieve what you think. Relax in the wonderful love of the Lord. Relax in the fact that you are already as righteous as you ever will be if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. If you put your faith in yourself and what you do, I can understand why you are a little weary and maybe a little fearful that you cannot hang on.

Number five. Turn to 1 John 2. Why is the righteousness of God so important? Well it not only establishes the validity of all that God has said and it explains His justice in

judging us, it also encourages us to know that He will never forget what we have done. And it eliminates any need for self-righteousness. But folks, here is the interesting thing. It also enables us to practice righteousness in our own personal lives.

You may say, “Wait a minute, I thought we couldn’t be any more righteous.” That is true. But did you know that you can practice righteousness in your life? You can do something right. And because we are righteous before God, it enables us through the power of the Holy Spirit and His Word, to actually practice it.

In 1 John 2:29 it says,

If you know that He is righteous [and He certainly is], you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

In 1 John 3:7 it says,

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

This declared position actually enables me to do something right.

In 1 John 3:10 it says,

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness [that would be from God’s point of view, not man’s] is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

It gets very practical, doesn’t it?

In Titus 2:12 it says that we are to live righteously in this present age. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul said of he and his coworkers that they behaved righteously or justly among them.

Turn to 1 Peter 2:24 and it says,

Who Himself [Jesus Christ] bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, might live for [what?] righteousness—by whose stripes we were healed.

God wants us to live righteously in our lives, but we are not being made righteous. And my ability even to do something righteous is based on whether or not I have been born again by the Spirit of God, which comes through God declaring me righteous on the basis

of what Jesus did. It is almost like a giant paradox. I want to do right, but as Paul said, “Every time I try it, I blow it.”

What I need to understand is that I am already righteous in Christ. It is because of what He has done for me and how He has blessed me, and how He has given me His Holy Spirit, that I can actually, every now and then, do what I like to call “leak out glory.” I can, once in a while, do something right.

Number six. The righteousness of God is so important because it exalts God in making our salvation possible. Turn back to Romans 3 again. It exalts God in making our salvation possible. How does it do that? Well, for one thing, it exalts His grace. We are saved by grace and in Romans 3:24 it says, “Being justified [or declared righteous] freely by His grace.”

Turn over to Romans 5:18 please. Why does His righteousness exalt God? It is because it exalts His grace. In Romans 5:18–21 it says,

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense [namely Adam] judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act [that is the death of Christ] the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification [or righteousness] of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience [Adam] many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience [Jesus Christ] many will be made righteous.

20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, [what abounded much more?] grace abounded much more,

21 so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You know, I love to read that passage because God’s grace is exalted in my salvation. When sin abounds, God’s grace much more abounds. Hey, through one man’s disobedience many people became sinners. But through one Man’s obedience, Jesus Christ, many can be declared righteous in their life—just by one Man’s obedience. And so, God compares Adam on the negative side, with Christ on the positive side. We are all sinners. Adam disobeyed and we continue it. By the one act of Jesus Christ, many are made righteous.

Again, the righteousness of God in all that is seen exalts His grace. We do not do anything to earn it. It exalts His Son Jesus Christ because He is the only one through whom it comes.

One final thing. Turn to Romans 8. Why is the righteousness of God so important? Well, it not only establishes the validity of all God has said, and explains His justice in judging

us; it also encourages us to know that God will never forget what we have done and reward us. His righteousness eliminates any need for self-righteousness, enabling us to even practice righteousness, by doing something right in our personal lives, and exalting God in making our salvation possible, because where sin abounds, grace did much more abound. There is one final thing. It also expresses the reason why no one can condemn us or separate us from the love of Christ. Aren't you glad nobody can condemn you? There are a lot of people who are trying. No one can separate you from the love of Christ. Listen to these words. In Romans 8:31-39.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And all God's people said—Amen! Listen if you think you can lose your salvation, you do not know the righteousness of God.

"Well, what if you don't keep up with Him?"

Well see, your words have already shown that you do not know His righteousness. God is not asking you to keep up with anything. He is asking you to believe what Jesus Christ has already done.

"Well, you have to live it."

He knows your problem. He is going to give you His Holy Spirit.

"Well, I may get into sin. What if I backslide?"

You know, it is interesting how many people will come up with as many things as they can to somehow get themselves out of what they want to be in? It bothers me. Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life. They shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (John 10:28).

“Well, you can jump out of His hand.” Are you kidding? He holds everything in His hand. I like to say that you can move from knuckle to knuckle, but you are not getting out. Nothing—zero—can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. Why? It’s because it is God who declares you righteous.

Is there anyone around who can condemn us? Oh, they are everywhere. Hey listen, no one can condemn us! No one can bring a charge against God’s elect. You see, we have not been giving the correct message to the world. We have been making them think that Christianity teaches like the rest of the cults and “isms” that somehow you are made righteous by what you do. So if we do not measure up, then they have a case. They have no case, God says, “No charge. No condemnation.” Why? It is because Christianity is not a bunch of people trying to live by a certain standard or a code. Christianity is Jesus Christ our Lord. You are either in Him or not in Him, one or the other. You are either righteous or you are not. There is not any middle ground or any ladder. You are either His or you are not His, one or the other.

Let’s close with prayer.

Lord, You know that a lot of us fight this because we want to prove our worth. Lord, I thank You that that struggle is over the moment we believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus is everything to us. We have all in all when we have Him. We have every spiritual blessing. Father, there are those in our midst who maybe have tried to be Christian by hanging around us, by learning how we talk, by saying all the right words and by trying to be good or avoiding certain serious sins. God, I pray that You would strip all that out of our hearts and show us Jesus Christ. That it is only through His death on the cross and His resurrection that anyone can be saved. And that is the righteousness of God. We have no righteousness of our own. Oh God, help us to see that we are sinners saved by the wonderful grace of God. We thank You, in Jesus name. Amen.

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The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Turn to Psalm 89 on the faithfulness of God.

1 I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.

2 For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.”

8 O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

20 I have found My servant David; with My holy oil I have anointed him,

24 But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted.

25 Also I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers.

26 He shall cry to Me, “You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.”

27 Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

28 My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him.

29 His seed also I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

30 If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments,

31 If they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments,

32 Then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

33 Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.

34 My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.

35 Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David:

36 His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me;

37 It shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky.

Some believe that “faithful witness” in verse 37 is simply the planetary bodies, whether it is sun or moon or stars. Others believe it is referring to the rainbow. God gave the rainbow as a sign of a covenant and a promise He made that He would never destroy the world again with a flood, as He did long ago. Like the faithful witness in the sky, you can count on one thing: God is surrounded, as the psalmist said, with faithfulness. You can depend on Him and you can count on Him.

Let’s look to the Lord in prayer.

Father, in this study as we look at Your word about faithfulness, help us to see that Your character is behind all of the blessings of our life. Thank You that You are a faithful God. We see so much unfaithfulness in society today. Thank You that You are the God who does not change. You are the same yesterday, today and forever. Thank You. Help us to see, Lord, the impact upon our own lives of Your faithfulness to us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Proverbs 20:6 reminds us of the unfaithfulness of man when it says: “Who can find a faithful man?” In Proverbs 25:19 it says, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in a time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot out of joint.”

There is one man in the Bible, outside of the Lord, who is called faithful. Nehemiah 7:2. He is rather insignificant, his name is Hananiah. The Bible says he was a faithful man and feared God more than many in his generation.

It is Jesus Christ, though, that is emphasized in the Bible as being faithful. He is called a “merciful and faithful high priest” in Hebrews 2:17. In Hebrews 3:2 it says, “He is faithful to Him who appointed Him as a priest.” He is called the “Faithful Witness” in Revelation 1:5. The “Faithful and True Witness” in Revelation 3:14. And when He comes again in power and great glory at the second coming of Christ in Revelation 19, He has a name and it is called, “Faithful and True.”

Isaiah 11:5 says of the Messiah that “faithfulness is the belt of His waist, holding everything together.” The Bible says that “His commandments are faithful,” in Psalm 119. In Psalm 36:5, it says that “God’s faithfulness reaches to the clouds.” And in Psalm 119:90 it says that “God’s faithfulness endures to all generations.”

I like to tell folks about the Hebrew word. The Hebrew word for faithful is *aman*, from which we get “amen.” Amen is talking about “faithful” and anytime you want to say an “amen” it would be okay by me. Aman or amen means faithful. When you hear something from the Word of God and you know it is reliable then you say, “Amen, I agree with that!” That is faithful. That is reliable. You can depend on it.

I want to share with you on the faithfulness of God and to put it in a vernacular; we are talking about how we can depend on Him. This means that you can count on God when you cannot count on anybody else. Have you ever had your kids say to you, “You don’t trust me.”? Now parents, you know that there are different ways to handle that. You can spend a lot of emotional time just trying to explain how you do trust them, in a way. But it would be better to say, “You got that right!” The Bible says, “Have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). Why? It is because man is unfaithful.

Our confidence is in the living God who is always faithful to us. You can depend on Him for the following seven things. Take your Bible and turn to Deuteronomy 7, the most obvious one we would come up with if we just tried to think about it ourselves. We can depend on God to keep His Word. When you talk about faithfulness in people, you are talking about how you can trust them to keep their word, to keep their promise.

Deuteronomy 7 says that you can count on God to keep His word concerning the nation of Israel, and why God chose them. Deuteronomy 7:6–9 says,

6 For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;

8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

9 Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant.

You see, God keeps His word. You can rely on Him.

Turn to Hebrews 6 to see the importance of keeping your word. Proverbs 14:55 says that “a faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies.” There is an example given in the book of Proverbs of somebody who has given you a secret or a confidence and you wind up telling somebody when you shouldn’t. It says, “A tale bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Proverbs 11:13).

God will keep His word. In Hebrews 6:13, look at these words:

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

14 saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.”

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

Now God is simply recognizing here, something that is in society. When you go into a courtroom they want you to swear that you are telling the truth. There is something Freudian about that which I do not like. Why do we have to say, "I swear on a stack of Bibles that I am telling you the truth?" Does that mean when you don't do that, then we cannot trust you to tell the truth? The Bible says, "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor His footstool" (James 5:12, paraphrased). Do not swear by anything. Let your yes be yes, and your no, no. You should always tell the truth.

Put your hand on the Bible. Hey, isn't it amusing, that many of the people who put their hand on the Bible have not even read the Bible? If they knew what the Bible said, they would not be putting their hand on the Bible to swear by it. You may say, "Well you are supposed to do it." You do not have to do it. Just look at them straight in the eye and say, "I promise you that I am going to try and tell the truth, the best I can." "Why, don't you swear on the Bible?" "No, I would not want to offend God." Man is unfaithful. God is faithful. But I am going to try to say the truth every time I speak. So, we are saying, "let our yes be yes and our no, no." We ought to count on you no matter what. Not when you bring God up. "I swear by God, that I'm telling you the truth!" What does that mean? When you don't swear by God, you are not telling the truth? It is interesting, isn't it?

So here God recognizes that for all of us, if you make an oath, that settles it. There is satire here, my dear friends. Oaths and covenants and agreements and contracts that have been made between corporations and people and nations have been broken continually.

Now pick it up again in Hebrews 6:17. Knowing this background and the satire of the passage, you will appreciate what God is saying—that He is in great contrast to all of us.

17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,

18 that by two immutable things, [Things that don't change, namely God and His own word] in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, [or encouragement, comfort] who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,

20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

What the passage is saying is that you can count on what God said. When you think of God's faithfulness, you understand the basic meaning is that He will keep His word. Therefore all the hope I have in the future and in all that God promises to me is based on His faithfulness. If God is not faithful, then how can I depend on His promise to me? I have great confidence about the future. So much so that people think I am "whacko" in the present. But I really do have confidence about the future. I am not at all worried about it whatsoever. Are we in a mess in our world? You bet—but I do not worry about it at all. I know how it turns out. I have read the book.

"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul is sure and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:19). Do you feel anchored today? Do you feel steadfast and secure? It is based on the faithfulness of God that He will keep His word.

Look at Hebrews 10:23. It says,

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, [Don't doubt it. Why?] for He who promised is [What does it say?] faithful.

You see the faithfulness of God that He will keep His word, causes me to realize that what I believe and what I hope in is actually going to take place.

Look at Hebrews 11:11. You talk about faithfulness, how about Sarah who was barren all of her life and at age eighty-nine she is told she is going to have a child?

11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him [what?] faithful who had promised.

You see, the character of God is faithfulness. He is behind what He says and He keeps His word.

Now turn to Lamentations 3. You ask, "Where is that?" You have Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations is right before the book of Ezekiel. In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations is with the Book of Jeremiah. Lamentations deals with people crying in the nation of Israel over what happened to their city and their temple. It was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC and they are now in captivity. They had seventy years of captivity in Babylon and a lot of them began to wonder whether anything would ever change. In Lamentations 3, we have these dear people crying out to God and appealing to His faithfulness. You can depend on God to keep His word, number one; and number two, to extend His compassion to you when you do not deserve it. Aren't you glad for God's compassion? Boy, is He merciful. God will extend His compassion to you when you do not deserve it because He is faithful. Look at Lamentations 3:22.

22 Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed,
because His compassions fail not.
23 They are new every morning; great is Your [What?]
faithfulness.
24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I
hope in Him!"
25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the
soul who seeks Him.
26 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the
salvation of the LORD.

Jump down to verse 31 to get the idea here.

31 For the Lord will not cast off forever.
32 Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion
according to the multitude of His mercies.
33 For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children
of men.

Look down at verse 40.

40 Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back
to the LORD;
41 Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.

Flip over to Lamentations 5 and look at how it ends. In verse 19 they are appealing to
God's faithful compassion.

19 You, O LORD, remain forever; Your throne from
generation to generation. [That's describing a faithful God.]
20 Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so
long a time?
21 Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored;
renew our days as of old,
22 Unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry
with us!

They are putting two and two together. "We have been here for a long time. Is this You,
Lord—the One who promised us so many wonderful things? Lord, because Your
compassions fail not, because Your faithfulness is great, You cannot keep doing this."
And they were right. God extends His compassion to us and, boy, we do not deserve it.

Have you ever seen somebody who has been so rotten that in your heart you say, "Lord,
do it to him." Do you know what I mean? Have you ever felt that way? I mean, in your
carnal moments? But you know, you sometimes conclude that somebody is being blessed
too much. And in your heart you think, "Why doesn't God hit them a little bit?" And then

sometimes when you get hit you think, “Well what did I do to deserve this?” And you really should not ask that because if you got what you deserved, you would be in hell. So it is a miracle that you are alive.

We have a misunderstanding of who we are and who God is, don't we? God is a faithful God and because of that He will extend compassion to you even when you do not deserve it. I like to say, “He gives you a long rope.” Maybe there is somebody who has never really made a commitment to Jesus Christ but has hung around enough to know something about Christianity. God has been merciful to you and He has been compassionate. You should not presume upon it too much. The Bible says in Psalm 19, “Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins.” Thank God for His mercy and that He has been very tolerant toward a lot of gross people in this world. God is a God of mercy and He is a God of compassion, but that does not mean He will not judge us. He will.

You can depend on God to keep His word, number one. And you can depend on God to extend His compassion to you when you do not deserve it, number two. And for number three, turn to Isaiah 49. I like this. You can depend on God to restore His people through His chosen servant, the Messiah. Do you believe in restoration? Look at Isaiah 49:5. I just finished writing a very small section of a book on restoration. A lot of Christian leaders across America were asked to write in this book. It is going to come out in the summer. I had a very small part. But anyway, we were all writing on restoration. Do we believe in restoration? Boy, I sure do. As a matter of fact, I do not think we could go on another day without it.

Look at Isaiah 49:5–13. It says,

5 And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, [This is the Messiah talking, the Servant of the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant] to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him (for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and My God shall be My strength),

6 Indeed He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”

We are all the beneficiaries of that today. The Messiah not only has restored Israel, He has also been a light to the Gentiles.

7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to Him [namely the Messiah] whom man despises, [and they did and still do] to Him whom the nation abhors, to the Servant of rulers: “Kings shall see and arise, princes

also shall worship, because of the LORD who is [what?] faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You.”

8 Thus says the LORD: “In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages;

9 That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all desolate heights.

10 They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them.

11 I will make each of My mountains a road, and My highways shall be elevated.

12 Surely these shall come from afar; look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.

13 Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted.

Aren't you glad that God is a God of restoration? I hear a lot of stuff that makes me wonder if we believe in it. Have you ever heard somebody say, “We can't use him! I remember ten years ago what he did.” Hey, I just want you to know that God uses even rocks if He needs to. The Bible says He can use stones and make them cry out. He can use little babies and infants if He wants to. He used Balaam's donkey once. I like that story. If He used him, He can use me—amen?

I tell you that God will use anything, man. So, stop being enamored with yourself or anybody who is used. Be enamored with the living God, the faithful God who can restore. He can take all the broken pieces of somebody's life and put them all back together and say, “I will use them.” You are not a throw-away. You are not a meaningless thing. No matter what tragedy has happened to you, no matter what sin has corrupted your life, no matter what problems or struggles you have, our God is a faithful God and He will restore. I like that. I depend upon that and so do you. The key is that it is the Lord who is faithful.

Turn to 2 Thessalonians 3. You can not only depend upon God to keep His word and to extend His compassion to you when you do not deserve it, and to restore us through His chosen Servant the Messiah, but you can also depend on God to protect you from the enemy. He protects you from the enemy. In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul wrote to this new church and said this:

Finally, brethren pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you. And

that we might be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is [What does it say?] faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. (2 Thessalonians 3:1–3)

It came to my attention recently, that an individual was living in an environment of satanic oppression and demonism. And because of the situation it was impossible to geographically relocate out of it. This person is a believer and is really scared about what impact the enemy could have in their life. And I read the individual this passage from 2 Thessalonians 3, “Our Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.” What a wonderful passage that is. Nothing is going to happen to you that God does not want to happen. That is what God’s protection is all about.

Take the case of Job. Here is a man who walked with God in his generation and boy, did he get blasted! He lost everything he had. He was a wealthy man. He lost his family. He had boils and sores all over his body, from the top of his head down to his foot. He had three friends who came by and tried to tell him why it all happened. And he finally concluded: “Miserable comforters are you all.” They did not know and neither did Job know. His own wife said to Job, “Why don’t you curse God and die? I mean, how can you keep on with this? Look at what is happening.” Job said, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Do we receive good from the hand of God and not receive evil?” (Job 2:9-10). The Bible says that in all of this, Job did not sin. Job did not understand it. He had a lot of questions just like anybody else, but they were deeper with him. He was being affected. But he finally came to the conclusion, on the basis of who God is, he said, “Though He slay me, I will trust Him” (Job 13:15).

Is that what the faithfulness of God means to you? “If He decides to take my life, I will trust Him. I will never turn my back on Him.” You can depend on who He is; He is a faithful God. Yet a lot of us cop out or bomb out for the silliest things, we are out of here! And it is because our trust is not in the faithful God.

How about you? In discussing this with God, Satan argued, “Look God, he only trusts you because everything is going great. Take it all away and then we will see.” God even said he would put a hedge around Job and the devil could not do any more than God permitted.

My dear friends do not let anyone tell you any differently. The Bible says, “He will give His angels charge over you lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:12). God has promised protection to the believer. And if something awful and tragic happens to you, understand that God knows all about it and wants it to occur for His own purpose and His glory. Relax.

The good things are not in this life. Did you know that? Doesn’t it seem a little difficult to understand how Christians want to go to heaven so badly, but they do everything to keep out of the place? You know what I mean? It just kind of bothers me. Paul said, “I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23). We

say, “I have a desire to stay here. I want to go home when I die, okay. But I want to stay here now. Give me some more years.” Really? Hey, the good times are not here, folks. The good times are in glory. “In His presence there is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

Our God is faithful. He is faithful to protect us from the enemy.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 10. We can depend on God, not only to keep His word, and to extend His compassion to us when we do not deserve it, and to restore us through His chosen Servant the Messiah even when we have bombed out so badly, and to protect us from the enemy; but number five, we can depend on God to help us in times of temptation and suffering. Because God is faithful, He is not going to leave you alone. He will help you in times of temptation and suffering.

In 1 Corinthians 10:11 it says,

11 Now all these things happened to them [the nation of Israel] as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.

Sometimes people say, “Well you do not know what I am going through.” Well, I may not now, but I probably will. Like the fellow who came up to me one day after I had preached a sermon on suffering. This young man in his twenties said, “I don’t think I have ever suffered.” I said, “Cheer up, you will. It is only a question of time.”

13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; [But who is faithful?] but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Have you ever said, “This is too great, I cannot handle this anymore. I cannot cope with it anymore. It is greater than I can bear.” No, it is not. No, it is not! Do you know why God sometimes does not bring any relief? It is because He knows that you are struggling against this. You are still fighting it. You have not admitted that you cannot do it. When you finally say, “I’ve had it!” God says, “Amen. Praise God. Now maybe we can do something.”

See, a lot of us down deep, whether we know it or not in our human nature, we are fighters. Boy, we are real fighters! We hang in there even in the midst of despair and depression. And we are fighting it because we believe we can handle it. And then there is some counselor who comes along and tells us that we can. You can do it! I say, “Why

don't you just realize that you cannot do it. You will be happier." I say, "Let's give up earlier." Why don't we start with our depravity and the fact that we cannot handle this. Great, maybe you will call on the name of the Lord and stop trusting yourself and even your words, saying that you cannot handle it. This is like a smoke screen, for you are still fighting, aren't you? You still think somehow, even maybe by your crying out, that somebody will come up with a solution. Listen, if you get on your knees and trust God then you might see some things change. God knows us better than we know ourselves. Maybe it would be better if we recognized that we cannot handle it at all to begin with and that we need the Lord.

Turn to 1 Peter 4, where you will see much of the same thing. God is faithful and I can depend upon Him to help me in my time of temptation and suffering, which will come.

In 1 Peter 4:12 it says,

12 Beloved, do not think it strange [Don't think it's weird or unusual] concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; [Don't say to your friends, "Boy, I don't understand why that happened."]

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part [of course] He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. [If you do that, you deserve what you're getting.]

16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, [Just because of what you believe and your commitment to Christ. It says,] let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

18 Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

It is a miracle that any of us are going to be in heaven. Why are we complaining? Think of what is going to happen to those who do not believe in Christ. The whole point of this passage is: why are we so bent out of shape over suffering? The big deal is not what is happening now.

Part of the depression and discouragement that a lot of us feel is because what is big to us is what is happening now. Hey, it is not important, okay. “Well, it’s important to me.” Well, it is not important. Look, if you die in the next minute, who cares? “Well, I know that.” Why don’t you live in the light of it? Why don’t you live in the light of the fact that this might be the last breath you take? A part of us lives in the past, and a part of us worries about the future. The truth is the only time you have is right now. And even that moment is gone.

Look at the conclusion, in the light of all this. Understand the consequences of the gospel and even though you are a believer who is suffering, understand that because you are a believer you are not going to suffer the judgment of the ungodly. You are not going to be in hell. You are going to be in heaven. So why are you so discouraged?

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to [what kind of a Creator? What does it say?] a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4:19)

You see, because God is faithful you can count on Him to help you in times of temptation and suffering.

Turn over to 1 John 1:9, please. We can depend on God to keep His word, to extend His compassion to us though we do not deserve it, to restore us through His chosen Servant, the Messiah, to protect us from the enemy, and to help us in times of temptation and suffering. And also—I like this—to forgive our sins.

In 1 John 1:9 it says, “If we confess our sins.” The Greek word, “confession” means to say the same thing. It means to agree with God about your sin. You do not say, “I made a little boo-boo.” You do not say, “I did this thing.” You tell God what God says is your sin.

“If we confess our sins”—notice the word “sins” is plural, not singular. People say, “You know I have this fault.” No, you do not. You have a lot of them. “You know, I’ve got this one sin.” No, you have so many of them and that is a smoke screen for your other stuff.

“If we confess our sins—[He is what?—He is faithful and just—[or righteous]—to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” It is because of what Jesus did at the cross that God is faithful. The moment you confess your sins He says, “Hey, forgiven. Cleansed.”

It is too easy. It depends on your viewpoint. Once you learn about what He did, you realize the sacrifice from our heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Salvation is not of man or his performance. It is based on who God is because He is faithful.

One last thing. Turn to 1 Corinthians 1. You can also depend on God to preserve you blameless at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Boy, we do enough to prove the opposite,

don't we? How in the world would we be preserved blameless unto the coming of Jesus Christ?

In 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 it says,

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of
God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,
5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all
utterance and all knowledge,
6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,
7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the
revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be
blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 God is [what?] faithful, by whom you were called into the
fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is the faithfulness of God that will cause me to be preserved blameless at the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. He says it more than once. You can depend on God to preserve you blameless at the coming of Jesus Christ, even though all of your present circumstances may cause people to blame you for something. God can be counted on. He is faithful. He will preserve you blameless until the second coming of Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 it says,

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you
completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be
preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
24 He who calls you is [what?] faithful, who also will do it.

It is not you who does it. It is not your performance. It is God who does it. Philippians 1:6 says,

Being confident of this very thing that He who has begun a
good work in you, He will perform it until the day of Jesus
Christ.

Now I have had people say, as I did last week to a guy who just received Christ. He said, "Boy, I sure hope I can hang on."

I said, "To what?"

"Well," he said, "I want to make sure I don't go back on what I'm doing here."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I, you know, I want to, you know, really be a Christian. And I want it to last."

I said, “Well, if you really are a Christian, it will last.”

“Well, you know, if you believe it.”

I said, “No, no. It’s not dependent on that.”

“Well, what if I don’t believe it?”

“Well, do you believe it now? Have you come to a belief that Jesus Christ died on a cross?”

“Yeah.”

“You believe He rose again from the dead?”

“Sure.”

“You received Jesus Christ as your Savior. You’ve got eternal life.”

“Yes!”

“Well, then it is going to last.”

“Well, how can you be so sure?”

I love to talk to people like this. It is fun. It is so much fun. I said, “Because the Bible says so.”

“Where?”

Turn to 2 Timothy 2, please. There are some of you out there who are not quite sure you can hang on. Well, God is not going to waste much time trying to prove whether you can hang on or not. He never depends on you to hang on from the start. You see, God knows you better than you know yourself.

In 2 Timothy 2:11–12 it says,

11 This is a faithful saying: [something you can rely on] for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.

12 If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

This is a statement of fact about an unbeliever. Understand He will deny you. There are consequences to denial and unbelief. Is that talking about a believer who already knows the Lord and then denies Him? No. That is in the next verse.

13 If we are faithless, he remains [what?] faithful; he cannot deny Himself.

Now I have seen this in life, people. I have seen people who have known the Lord and walked with God for years, and all of a sudden, they had a physical tragedy happen to them which affected their minds. Their personalities changed and they are not the same person we once knew. And you have to use your memory system to remember what they once were like, so you do not get bent out of shape over what they are now. I have seen young people who have had accidents and literally lost their ability even to remember or understand what it means to believe in Christ. I saw that happen to a friend of mine who turned into a mentally handicapped person. And you would never have known that he was once on the ball for God and loved God with all of his heart. Listen, God knows all

about that. Even if you become faithless, He remains faithful. He will not deny Himself. Stop worrying about it. Salvation is of God and not of man.

Boy, I am thankful that God is faithful, aren't you? Let's close with prayer.

Thank You, Lord, for Your love for us and for Your faithfulness to us when we're so unfaithful. The pattern of our life demonstrates we don't deserve anything from you. And Lord, we need to know Your character and Your faithfulness. I pray for those in our audience who know that they need You desperately right now. God, don't allow other things to crowd out their need or to confuse them or to block their minds from getting the truth. God, help them to know that You are the faithful God. You will forgive them. You will extend compassion to them. You will restore them. Some of us are so messed up that we wonder if restoration could ever take place. God, thank You for Your love and Your grace and Your mercy. Because You are a faithful God, we can count on You to keep Your word and we can trust You. You said if we believe in You, if we put our trust in Jesus Christ, then we would be saved and have everlasting life. Thank You that we can count on Your Word; that the hope we have in Christ is an anchor of our soul. It keeps us steady and stable in a society that is the exact opposite. Lord, I pray for those who are in our audience that are not sure if they died now whether they would be in heaven. God, help them in this moment to know that they must put their trust and their faith in Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Savior. He is the only One who can take care of the questions of sin and death and hell. He is the only One who can give us eternal life. Help us to come to Him before it is too late. Thank You that You are a compassionate, merciful God. Though some of us have ignored You for a long time now, You are so merciful and so compassionate. You never fail, Your faithfulness is so great. Help us not to presume that it will go on another day. For You are a righteous God. Oh God, help us to make the commitments we know we ought to make before it is too late. We thank You, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Our theme today is the mercy of God.

In Proverbs 3:3–4 it says,

Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around
your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart and so
find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and men.

This is an interesting verse that blends truth and mercy. And God says, “Make sure they are always with you and never forsake them.” Truth needs to be spoken and we need to be right; but mercy needs to be combined with truth. They go together. Truth without mercy becomes callused, hard, and cold. It is often legalistic. And mercy without truth becomes sentimental and wishy-washy and does not really take a stand. And mercy alone is not courageous and has no holiness to it. It must be mercy and truth.

In Psalm 103:1–22 it says,

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me,
bless His holy name!
2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His
benefits:
3 Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your
diseases,
4 Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you
with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your
youth is renewed like the eagle's.
6 The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who
are oppressed.
7 He made known His ways to Moses, his acts to the
children of Israel.
8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and
abounding in mercy.
9 He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His
anger forever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor
punished us according to our iniquities.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is
His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He
removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him.

14 For He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

15 As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children,

18 To such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.

19 The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

20 Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word.

21 Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.

22 Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

Let's pray.

Father, we ask that in these moments together as we look into Your heart and as we try to understand Your character through the revealed Word of God that is before us, I pray, Lord, that Your mercy will strengthen us. And that Your mercy will sustain us, Your mercy will save us, Your mercy will become a great blessing to every one of us. And Lord, our hearts will be lifted in praise to You. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do in the lives of every person in this study. We thank You, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The mercy of God involves the following seven things. One, of course, is His person—who He is. This text opens up in Psalm 103 and says, “Bless the Lord. Bless His holy name.” And notice what verse 8 says: “The Lord is merciful.” Now the Lord does show mercy. The Lord has acts of mercy, but the Bible says that the Lord is mercy. The Lord is merciful, so it involves His person, who He is.

Psalm 111:4 says, “He is full of compassion.” It is interesting how often when we relate to God, we are not really sure who He is. We think we know but let me tell you something: God is not part mercy. God *is* mercy. God is everything mercy could ever hope to be. He is that kind of a Lord to us and I sure am glad. I hope you are too. He is full of compassion.

Psalm 115:5 says, “Gracious is the Lord and righteous.” Yes, our God is merciful. It refers to who He is.

Psalm 119:64 says, “The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy.”

Psalm 119:156 says, “Great are Your tender mercies, O Lord.”

Psalm 145:8 says, “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. Great in mercy.”

And also in the New Testament in Ephesians 2:4 it says that He is rich in mercy because of His great love.

I think a lot of people believe that they have blown it so bad in their life that there is no hope for them. I hear that so much. I hear people who say, “Well if he only knew what I am really like and what I have done, there is no way I could possibly be what you are asking me to be.” God never is asking you to be anything apart from who He is. He provides all that you need. He is not trusting you to perform. That should be good news to a lot of people today. That should just take a heavy burden right off of you. The good news of the gospel is who God is. We already know what stinkers we are. Amen? We often like to say if we knew what was in the heart of the person next to us, we would move. We do not want to know about depravity. We want to know about God’s grace and God’s mercy. And mercy is what God is.

When you come to the Lord, you are not coming to somebody who is sitting with a baseball bat ready to club you for every false move. The Bible teaches that His essential nature and character is mercy. Mercy holds back from us what we really deserve. While grace gives us what we do not deserve. How wonderful it is to know that it involves His person. That is what His character is like. There is never a moment when you come to the Lord that He stops being merciful.

Now that is not always true of people. Every now and then you run into somebody who you say has real compassion and care. They are very merciful and what a shock it is when you see that on a certain occasion or two, they are not merciful. Even the best among us who major in compassion, can, at certain moments, not have it. There is a gift, a spiritual gift, the Bible says, of showing mercy. We believe it is compassion on the sick and suffering. And how delightful it is, especially for those who have visited folks who are sick, to come in and know that they are full of compassion. When you are sick and lying on your bed, you do not want somebody coming in and discussing thirty-two reasons why you deserve what you are getting. I mean, at that moment you want somebody who says, “I love you.” And they exercise mercy and care when you want a few strokes. God has the spiritual gift of showing mercy and compassion on the sick and suffering.

One of my favorite stories is of my own mother when she had open heart surgery several years ago. She had four bypasses. I was sitting like a good son (also her pastor, by the way), but I was sitting as a good son in the recovery room waiting for her. And the doctor let me sit in there waiting for her to wake up. And as soon as she finally just started to

wake up, after several hours, I walked over to her and she took one look at me. Before I could even say anything, she said, “Where’s Pastor Lloyd?” She was referring to my good friend Pastor Lloyd Rinks, who works in hospital visitation. And I said, “Mother, this is your son!” She said, “Well, I know, but I need somebody with compassion.”

Dear friends, we know what mercy is and it is such a delight to be around people who are merciful and kind and compassionate. We often need that sympathy and that encouragement; but let me tell you something; even the best of us in that area often do not show care.

There is One who is in heaven, whose throne is there, who rules all the affairs of men and sees everything that we do. He is not sometimes merciful and sometimes judgmental. Our heavenly Father is always merciful. And the Bible even calls His throne, “the throne of grace where we may obtain [what?] mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Isn’t it wonderful to know that He is the Lord we come to? He is merciful. He knows what we are like and He knows we are not worth much. But He invites us to come to Him and He wants to do these wonderful things for us. How wonderful is the mercy of our Lord!

Number two, it not only involves His person, but it involves His provision. It is mercy that makes all His benefits possible. Psalm 103:2 says, “Bless the Lord and forget not all His benefits.”

And then you may like to just underline in your Bible, if that is your practice, because you can just see the flow here. Look at verse 3, “Who forgives, who heals.” Verse 4, “Who redeems, who crowns.” Verse 5 says, “Who satisfies.” It is just one verb after another telling you about the benefits of our Lord. It is God who is merciful, who provides healing, forgiveness, redemption, crowns us, and satisfies us. God does it all because He is a merciful God.

The third thing that is involved in the mercy of God is His patience. Look please at Psalm 103:8–9 again. It says, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger.” That is the word “patient.”

By the way, in the New Testament, when you read “patient,” sometimes it is translated “longsuffering,” depending upon the English translation. But it means taking a long time to boil. Slow to anger. Aren’t you glad God does not fly off the handle? Have you grown up in a home where maybe one or more of the parents had a temper? And when you did something wrong as a kid, all of a sudden, wham! I mean, it is national wipe out kids week. It is not easy to experience that.

Now there is a time to be angry. There is a righteous anger and we need to be angry at what is wrong. But sometimes that goes over to people. Have you noticed that? And so, sometimes parents can be angry with their kids because they are not living up to their expectations. Hey, that is not the character of God. God is never angry at people. He is longsuffering. He is angry at what they do—there is a difference, folks. We are to be

angry at sin; but we should be loving toward people, no matter how sinful they are. And it is a struggle that we all face. The mercy of God involves patience.

Look at verse 8 again. “Slow to anger and abounding in mercy.” There is more than enough to go around. And there is more than you need. It says in verse 9, in explaining that, “He will not always strive with us.” Now that is a true statement.

Let’s take, for instance, the longsuffering patience of God in the days of Noah. The Bible refers to it in 1 Peter 3:20 and calls it “patience.” In the days of Noah recorded in Genesis 6:3, God speaks to that corrupt, violent society. There were millions on the planet whom He was going to soon destroy with a flood and God said, “My Spirit will not always strive with men. And his days will be 120 years.” God gave them, however, 120 years. That is what I call mercy. You see, His Spirit will not always strive, verse 9 says, so we would understand the patience from God is that He will not always strive with us. He will not continue to give us all these opportunities. Nor will He keep His anger forever, God one day will reveal it. There is going to be a payday some day. There is a judgment to be faced, unless we turn to the mercy of God.

So when you read this, you see God’s patience in it. He is slow to take action. He is abounding in mercy. And I like to say, “He gives you a long rope.” A lot of times we think that we are, you know, not experiencing any judgment from God. We are just “living it up” or whatever. The world says, “It is national party time for us.” And we are just doing everything we possibly can do—what we believe the world and unbelievers do. We live like them and act like them. We are miserable inside but we do not want anybody to know it. A lot of kids do this, and as a result, they are really messing up their lives. And they say, “Well, I didn’t get zapped.” Wait a minute, the reason you did not get zapped even though you deserve it, is because the Lord is merciful. So do not presume upon His mercy. He will not strive with you forever. He will not keep His anger back forever.

But when we understand the mercy of God, what a wonderful thing it is to know that God is patient with us and He is merciful! By the way, our next message is on the patience of God, so I will say no more at this point.

Number four, when you ask what is involved in mercy? It also involves His punishment, believe it or not. I love Psalm 103:10. When God does punish us for our sins, you must understand that it is done in mercy. If God would punish you according to what you really deserve, you would be in big trouble! The Bible says in verse 10, “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.” Aren’t you glad?

God knows exactly everything that you have ever done, said, or thought. Even when you think nobody knows—even when you have lied. You shined in front of somebody and you put on a big act. But let me tell you something, the Bible says in Hebrews 4:13 that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to deal. By the way, the truth of the Bible is that you do not even know yourself. You may think you are

hiding. What are you hiding from? You do not even know what you are hiding from. You do not even know who you really are.

In Jeremiah 17:9–10 it says,

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; Who can know it? It is I, the Lord, that searches the reins of the heart. (paraphrased)

God knows us in a way that we do not even know ourselves. And all things about us are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to deal.

Now that is an interesting verse in Hebrews 4:13 because the idea of being naked and open is referring to a sacrificial animal. When the priests hold the animal and expose the neck getting ready to slice the neck and kill the animal, all of us are like the animal with an exposed neck, ready to be judged before God. Aren't you glad for the mercy of God? God will not punish us, the Bible says, in direct proportion to what we deserve. It is not according to our sins. It is not according to our iniquities. And God is gracious and He is loving.

Lamentations 3:22 says,

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed,
because His compassions fail not.

Turn to Psalm 106 and look at verse 44. When you examine the mercy of God it involves His person—who He is. It involves His wonderful provision, all of His benefits. It involves His patience; He is slow to anger and abounding in mercy. And it involves His punishment, and the fact is that He does not punish us according to our iniquity.

Psalm 106:44–46 says,

44 Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He
heard their cry;
45 And for their sake He remembered His covenant, and
relented according to the multitude of His mercies.
46 He also made them to be pitied [that's mercy again.]
by all those who carried them away captive.

Now they are reviewing the history of Israel. Israel is carried away captive and they deserve what they got. It was not even as severe as they thought, at least they were alive. Many of them in captivity were crying and weeping and lamenting over what had happened. But in fact, they were at least alive, life continued. But God heard their cry the Bible says, and for their sakes He remembered His covenant. The reason God relented and did not let it go, why He changed and restored them back, is because of His tender mercies.

Now look folks, a lot of times we mess up our lives. You know that and I know that. We get involved in something we should not be doing. And we just keep going on. And it gets worse. It may be difficult to sin the first time, but it gets easier the second time. And it is easier the third time. Before we know it, we are slaves. We are in bondage to some trap, some habit, some desire or some thing. We are in bondage and we need to be set free.

My friends, it is God's mercy that moves in at a time like that. When we deserve to suffer the consequences of our actions, the Lord relents because He is a merciful God and actually will save us and restore us. And I say, "Hallelujah for that!" Aren't you glad of that? That is who God is, but it does involve His punishment. According to the Bible, His mercy in the midst of that punishment is one of the reasons that there is hope even when we are being judged for what we have done. Wow. That is tremendous! That is the mercy of God.

Back to Psalm 103:11–12.

The fifth thing that is involved is His pardon. There are no two verses in the Bible that so clearly demonstrate what God does with our sin than these two verses.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is
His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He
removed our transgressions from us.

Boy, I tell you. I read that and I say, "Praise the Lord!" My sins are gone. They are gone. Now there are always folks around who will remind you of them. Have you noticed that? But according to the Bible, my sins are gone.

The other day I was talking to a guy who was experiencing the results of his many years of drug addiction and he is still having a few problems mentally and physically. He was asking me, "You know, if the Lord has saved me, why..." And I stopped him. Why am I experiencing this? The only I thing I could think of was an old story that I heard when I was a boy in Sunday school of how a father took a son out to explain this to him. And he had the boy pound nails into a piece of wood. He pounded all these nails into the wood. And the boy kept asking, "Well why do you want me to do that?" "Just do what I tell you." So he pounded all these nails. Then he said, "Now, pull them all out." "Well, what for? Why should I?" "Just pull them all out." So he pulled all the nails out. He said, "Now what is left?" He said, "The holes."

In this life we are going to experience scars as a result of our decisions to walk away from the Lord. Do you know that? There are some of us who are physically still suffering from the result of decisions that we made maybe as young people. When God says that He has removed it, He has removed it from a positional standpoint, though the scars remain for now. My dear friends, the hope of the gospel is that when Jesus Christ comes

again, we are going to get a brand new body and we are talking total removal. There will be no more evidence whatsoever. The holes will be gone and we will be made brand new outwardly as we are made brand new inwardly when we come to Christ.

The Bible says, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). I do not know why it is, but it almost seems like a devil’s trap to get us to remove the word “all.” To think somehow when we bring our sin to a merciful God that there is something that remains and therefore I have to atone for it. According to the Bible, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” That is why we like to say to people, “Hey, you can have a clean slate, starting right now.” If you want to talk about forgiveness—what is it rooted in? Is it in the fact that you are such a worthy possession? Are you kidding? Or that you have such great potential for the Lord? This is some of the preaching of the pulpits of America, but that is not rooted in the gospel.

Forgiveness is rooted in the character of God and that is why you are saved. God is merciful to you and no matter how gross you are or how you have messed up or blown your brain and life away, let me tell you something: God’s character is limitless. And no matter how much sin is in your life—“where sin abounds, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20). You could be cleaned up in a moment of time. And that is the gospel. And I thank God for His mercy. It involves complete pardon.

Turn to Psalm 86 please and look at verse 5. This is a wonderful theme and you cannot get it into your system enough because a lot of us are really into performance in our kind of culture. And I am afraid it has dominated the Christian community so bad that even the best among us, and I include myself, have a tendency to tip towards performance every now and then. Nobody cleans up his act by performance, either in coming to Christ or living the Christian life, in spite of what we teach about walking with God.

The only method of cleansing that God ever had is through His Son Jesus Christ and the mercy and compassion and grace of our Lord. That is why it is such a frustrating thing. You want people to walk with the Lord—you want them to do right. Parents feel that way toward their kids. We feel it about ourselves and so we try everything under the sun to somehow clean up what we have done. Folks, there is no other method that God has. You say, “Well, doesn’t it say, ‘Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken?’” Exactly right. And it is the Word that reminds us how sin is cared for. It is rooted in the character of God, not in the performance of man. I thank God for His cleansing, don’t you?

In Psalm 86:5 it says,

For You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive, And
abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.

A lot of people think that God is hesitant. “You know, you have to really barn storm. You have to knock down the doors of heaven, as it were, to really get His attention.” No you

do not. You tell me, in the Prodigal Son story, when the Prodigal Son starts coming back home the father has been waiting for him; when he saw his son a long way off, before he ever got to the house to beg his father's forgiveness, what does the Bible say the father did? He *ran* after him. God is ready to forgive.

You take one step toward our wonderful Lord—you just move a little inch in your heart— and our Lord is ready to forgive. Why? It is because He is merciful. He is compassionate. The Bible says in Psalm 86:5 that He is abundant in mercy to all those who call upon Him. Do you know where the problem lies? We do not call upon the Lord. We are using everything else instead. We are talking to our friends and using every kind of method we possibly can to somehow get our act together. And the Bible says, that the Lord is good, ready to forgive and abundant in mercy to everyone who would call on Him. Isn't that sweet? Man, that is good stuff!

Look at Psalm 130:7–8, please. This is the wonderful pardon of God to the nation of Israel. He said,

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is
mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption.
8 And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Once again, it speaks of pardon, cleansing, and being redeemed from all his iniquities. Why? It is because with the Lord there is what? Mercy. His mercy was great.

Turn to Numbers 14. Let me show you a little interesting passage. Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible. Numbers 14:18–19. Now the people really deserved to be wiped out for their rebellion in the wilderness, but look at this:

18 The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy,
forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means
clears the guilty [doesn't sweep it under a rug], visiting the
iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth
generation.

If they continue to disobey Him, you will see His judgment continue, on and on and on. But look at the next verse.

19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to
the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this
people, from Egypt even until now.

Because of all that wilderness rebellion, they deserved to be wiped out. And here is a prayer. “God, pardon them according to [what?] the greatness of Your mercy.”

When you appeal to God, you appeal to His merciful character when you want to be cleansed and pardoned from your sin. It is God and who He is that can make that happen.

Turn to Psalm 103 again. The mercy of God not only involves His person, who He is; His provision, all His benefits; His patience, that He will not always strive with us; His punishment, He does not punish us according to our sins; His pardon, He removes them as far as the east is from the west; but it also involves His pity. Mercy involves His pity.

Psalm 103:13–14 says,

13 As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those
who fear Him.

14 For He knows our frame; he remembers that we are
dust.

Parents, listen to this. You know and I know that you have to look at your kids and remember they are kids. Amen? The kids are praying that you are listening now. And there is such a tendency among those of us who are parents to want our kids to know what we know and to think the way we think. First of all, as your kids get older, they believe that you do not know anything. And then one day when they become parents, they will discover how remarkably intelligent you must have been because they themselves are facing the same problem with their own kids.

Now you know a lot of things that they do not know. And sometimes you want them to understand that you do understand. Is everybody with me? And you can really drive them crazy, folks, trying to get them to think like you do. And they do not seem to think that way. The only hope we have is to sit back and say, “just wait.” Isn’t it wonderful, those of you who have kids who are married, isn’t it wonderful to listen to them now? You are becoming extremely intelligent now in their minds. And they are looking at you and they almost say, “Man, I can’t believe it. Was I really like that?” And don’t you love to repeat stories about what happened? “I remember when you were a little squirt and here is what you did...” You know, you just lay it out. What are you doing? You are recognizing, whether you know it or not, that kids are kids.

Aren’t you glad that God looks at you that way? He looks at you and says, “Man, you do not know the first thing about anything.” He says, “You are nothing but a clod of dirt.” This is my translation, but that is what it says. Look at it again. It says, “He remembers we are dust.” And He looks at you and He just loves you. Man! You talk about mercy. I want mercy from God. I do not want justice. I want mercy. I know if I got what I deserved I would be in hell. I want Him to be merciful. And the Bible says that when God looks at me, He looks at me like a father would look at his little kid. He just pities us. “I know all about it, David. I know what you are like. I know a lot more than you do.”

During one sermon when I was in the state of Iowa and I was preaching my heart out—it was one of those sermons where the pastor is enamored but the people are not—I had so much stuff in that message, I could not believe it. I was just thrilled to deliver it. A farmer came up to me afterwards and he said, “You ever fed hogs?” I said, “No, I never have.” He said, “Well, I didn’t think you had ‘cause we don’t dump the whole load on them at

once.” Obviously, I had not been merciful on that occasion to the crowd. They could barely turn their Bibles fast enough. Aren’t you glad that God is merciful to you? He does not dump the whole load on you at once. What a wonderful Lord we have.

It involves something else. Go back to Psalm 103 again. It not only involves His pity, it involves His plan. I like that mercy is behind the plan of God.

And in Psalm 103:15–19 it says,

15 *As for* man, his days *are* like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
And its place remembers it no more.
17 But the mercy of the Lord *is* from everlasting to
everlasting
On those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's children,
18 To such as keep His covenant,
And to those who remember His commandments to do
them.
19 The Lord has established His throne in heaven,
And His kingdom rules over all.

What a reminder of the plan of God. That man is like a flower of the field. He is passing away. His place is remembered no more. What significance is he in the overall plan of God? The answer comes through loud and clear. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. It is there, folks. That plan is eternal.

Psalm 105 says, “The Lord is good. His mercy is everlasting.” Psalm 138:8 says, “Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever.” Yes, it involves His plan. And that plan is eternal. And it never is without mercy in it. That plan is also faithful.

Please look back to Psalm 89:24, in order to connect the previous message on the faithfulness of God. The plan of God is bathed or saturated with mercy and it is faithful. In Psalm 89:24 and 28 the Lord is speaking about King David.

24 But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him,
and in My name his horn shall be exalted.
28 My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant
shall stand firm with him.

There have been, and still are, folks who question what God did for David. I have a long letter from a lady right now who is really ticked off. She has been studying the life of David. She said, “I cannot understand why God blessed that man. Look what he did! And to have eight wives and how he messed the whole thing up, I can’t believe God blessed him. He doesn’t deserve it. And here he is, the man committed adultery and murder,—set

up the murder of a woman's husband—and he is a man of bloodshed. He can't even build the temple! He has eight wives and he has all these kids' problems and they are not walking with the Lord. And God blesses him!"

And there are plenty of people today, after all we have been through in the last decades, who would say, "Why David?" Let me tell you something, according to the Bible it is to exalt the mercy and grace of our Lord. You would not have chosen him, but God did. He said, "David, I took you from the sheepfold to shepherd My people, Israel." You would not have chosen him after what happened to him. You would have asked for impeachment. The Lord's mercy and His compassion is fantastic!

God even had these words to say, which have troubled all of us, who have studied his life. "He is a man after My own heart." David—what was it about him? Did he blow it? Yes. Did he make mistakes? Indeed, but somehow he knew about God. And the Psalms are filled with a man who cries to God for His mercy and His forgiveness. He was a man who has a heart to repent to get right with the Lord. I tell you, when I look at all that, I say, "Hey, maybe there is hope for us, huh?" This is the wonderful mercy of God.

It is a faithful plan. It is also a sovereign plan. Turn to Romans 9. The plan of God, which is saturated with His mercy, is eternal, faithful and sovereign in all that it does and it is all backed up and strengthened by His wonderful mercy and compassion. And Romans 9:14–16 deals with the salvation of people who get chosen and those who do not. It says,

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

16 So then it is not of him who wills, [You say, "Hey, I made that decision," but God says, that it is not of him who wills] nor of him who runs, [Hey look, I've done a lot. I deserve that. No. It is not on willing or running] but of God who shows [what?] mercy.

The sovereignty of God is involved as He decides to show mercy to people who do not deserve it. After saying all this and in studying it, I began to ask myself, "Well, how should I respond to this?" And I want to tell you, you ought to respond in three ways.

Number one, you ought to praise the Lord. You ought to just sit there in your heart and flip out and go to glory if you can.

In Psalm 86:12–13, it says,

12 I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
and I will glorify Your name forevermore. [Why?]

13 For great is Your mercy toward me.

You want to know what your response should be to this message? It is to praise God with all of your heart because of how great His mercy is to you and to me.

In Psalm 89:1–2 it says,

1 I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.
2 For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever; your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.”

David is praising the Lord in Psalm 136, and there are many praises throughout the Psalms. He says, “O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.” And he repeats it after every line. “His mercy endures forever. His mercy endures forever.” All the way through the psalm it says, “Praise the Lord.”

Number two, if you want to know what your response should be to what you learned about the mercy of God; it is not only to praise the Lord, but it is to pray for the Lord’s help. Turn to Psalm 69:13–16, please. Do you believe God will help you?

13 But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, hear me in the truth of Your salvation.
14 Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters.
15 Let not the floodwater overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut its mouth on me.
16 Hear me, O LORD, for Your lovingkindness is good; turn to me according to the multitude of Your tender mercies.

Does it motivate you to pray?

In Psalm 86:1–3, I read,

1 Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; for I am poor and needy.
2 Preserve my life, for I am holy; you are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You!
3 Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long.

In Psalm 90:14 the psalmist says,

O satisfy us early with Your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Psalm 94:17–19 says,

17 Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence.

18 If I say, “My foot slips,” Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up.

19 In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.

Are you troubled? Understand that the Lord is merciful. Come to Him for help. It is all the way through the Bible. But turn to Hebrews 2 and look at verse 17, speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, it says:

17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, [That means He became flesh and dwelt among us. Why did He do it?] that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

He can help you because He is a merciful priest. Look over at Hebrews 4:15.

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What is my response to the mercy of God? It is not only to praise the Lord, it is to pray for the Lord’s help.

One last thing. What should my response be to the mercy of God? Turn to Romans 12. It is not only to praise the Lord and to pray for the Lord’s help, but according to the Bible, the proper response to God’s mercies is to present our bodies, our whole life to God. You can trust Him, people, because of His mercy. You do not need to worry anymore because of His mercy. A lot of us have never done this. Romans 12:1–2 says,

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the [what?] mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

[That's the reasonable thing to do in the light of it.]—
2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

A lot of us go that way and get badly messed up. We become so miserable. In the light of the mercies of God, what am I to do? Present my body to God. Cut the strings, people. Whatever it is that is tying you down, whatever the world is offering you, whatever dominion it has over you to be cool or accepted or wanted or whatever—cut the strings. And give yourself totally to a God who loves you more than you could ever dream, who is merciful even though He knows what you are like. He wants to bless you more than you want to receive it from Him. Cut the strings. Stop being conformed to the world and understand that God could change you from the inside out. Call upon Him. Come to the throne of grace and find mercy to help you in your time of need.

Let's close with prayer.

Father, You know how many of us need right now to run in our hearts to You. A lot of us are staying away from You, ignoring You, neglecting You, when You are the only One who can really minister to us. Father, I pray for those in our audience who are not sure if they died now, whether they would be in heaven. We pray, Lord, that You would open their hearts to Jesus Christ and they would know that He is a merciful high priest. One who cares about them like no one else does. Thank You that You do not punish us according to our iniquities. Thank You that You remove our sins as far as the east is from the west. Thank You that You pity us like a father does his child. O God, help us to come to Your heart and to stop running away.

Father, I pray for Christians here who know they have settled their relationship with You by faith in Christ and frankly have been enmeshed and bombarded and controlled by the world, its thinking, its processes, its goals, its dreams, and its ideas. And here You are, merciful God, waiting for us. Patient. Loving. May there be people here who say, "That is it. He loves me more than anybody in this world does. I give my life to Him. Use me whatever way You want." Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

The patience of God is our theme today. Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Peter 3 which reminds us of the patience of God. Now when we saw in the Bible that God is patient, because of our experience, we tend to think of it in a couple of ways. Let's take for instance, traffic. Now I do not know about you, but when the traffic is stalled on the freeway and there does not look like any way out, I sort of wonder about patience. Another time when I think about it is in a long line when I am trying to get some service. Amen? And then I feel convicted that I am not very patient.

I just want you to know that both illustrations are never true of God. God is never said to be patient about things or circumstances. Why? It is because He knows all things. He knows the beginning from the end. He does not have any need of that kind of patience. When we speak of the patience of God, we are not talking about enduring hard times; we are talking about being longsuffering toward people.

The Hebrew word is often translated, "slow to anger." The Hebrew word is *arek*. The word *arek* appears about fifteen times in the Old Testament and sometimes it says "longsuffering," sometimes "patience," or sometimes "slow to anger." It means "patient," as in "slow."

In the New Testament the word "patient," like a lot of our English translations, changes it into "longsuffering" or *makrothumeo*, which is used about twenty-five times. It means "taking a long time to boil." God is slow—the patience of God.

In 2 Peter 3, it is going to tell us about future events. It is going to tell us how the world order is going to be changed and how Jesus Christ is going to come back to earth and set up a new kingdom. The theme, however, is patience. It is longsuffering, which you will see as we read 2 Peter 3:1.

1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both
of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),
2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken
before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of
us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,
3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days,
walking according to their own lusts,
4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For
since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were
from the beginning of creation."
5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the
heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water
and in the water,

6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering [There's our word, the patience of God. He is longsuffering] toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

15 and account that the longsuffering [There it is again, the patience] of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;

18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Will you join me, please, in prayer?

Father, thank You, for the Bible that tells us about future things. Thank You that it tells us about who God is and what He means to our life and what He can do. I pray, dear Lord, that You will help us as we study the wonderful attribute of God called, “patience.” Will You help us to understand what it is and why it is such a blessing to us. May we also learn from His patience, so that we might have it in our own experience. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

There are five things I want to tell you about the patience of God. I have come to rejoice in this attribute of God and to be truthful, I have come to be quite thankful for it. I guess I could say in general terms to all of us right now, we should be thankful for His patience. Amen? Aren’t you glad that God takes a long time for His anger to boil toward you?

Now take your Bibles and turn to Romans 9 and let me tell you the first thing about the patience of God. According to the Bible, this attribute of God controls His sovereign plan and perfect timing. The patience of God is controlling His sovereign plan and His perfect timing.

Now, you and I do not always think that everything is happening the way we want it to happen. Have you ever thought about this concept: everything happens on time? You may say, “I was late to the meeting.” That is true, but everything did happen on time, including your being late. Did you ever think that your birth, according to the Bible, was known by God long before you were born? The exact day and time were known by Him. Did you know that all the days that you are going to live in your life are already in the mind and heart of God and in His plan? The Bible says that too. Did you also know that you are going to die on time? Isn’t that a thrilling thought to take home today? You are going to die right on time, no matter what the means or the method. God knows exactly when and where and under what circumstances. It is interesting, isn’t it? God knows exactly when people are going to turn to Him and repent and get right with the Lord. He knows the exact time.

It is the patience of God that is controlling this sovereign plan of God and all the perfect timing in it. And here is a classic example of that in Romans 9, beginning at verse 22, “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, [What if that was the only reason? Just to show you that He is a God of wrath. To let you know about His power] endured with much longsuffering [there it is] the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.”

Now the word “vessel” is referring to people. It is a whole illustration of a potter working with some pots. You can see that from verse 21. Now what if God, who is the Great Potter working with the clay, what if He endures with longsuffering some vessels that He made that are never going to believe in Him? They are going to wind up in hell. Perhaps

you would say along the way, “God, they are so rebellious, why don’t You get rid of them now? Why even let them continue to live?”

Maybe God wants to show you something about His wrath and His power. Suppose He decided to endure them with much longsuffering, these who will never be in heaven but who will actually be in hell?

You may say, “Well I don’t like that.”

“Well, tough. The text says, “What if He wanted to do that?”

You may say, “Well, I do not understand that.”

“Well, what if He wants to do something and He does not want you ever to know about it?”

“Well, that does not seem right.”

“Well who are you to even ask the question? If God wants to do it and does it, what if He wants to do all of it, then what are you going to say about it? You are not going to say anything. There is not anything you can do about it.”

Look back at Romans 9:20-24

20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?
Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why
have you made me like this?”

21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the
same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for
dishonor?

It is interesting that God’s longsuffering applies to those who will never believe in Him? It is also true that it applies to those who will. Look at verse 23.

23 and that He might make known [He endured with
longsuffering first the vessels of wrath.] the riches of His
glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared
beforehand for glory,

24 even us [Paul says] whom He called, not of the Jews
only, but also of the Gentiles?

Now, from the day of Pentecost which was recorded over 1900 years ago in the book of Acts (i.e., first century AD), until now, what God has been doing is pouring out His Spirit and bringing a vast host of Gentiles to Jesus Christ. And there have been millions of them. And you may say, “Well, what if God wants to do that?” “Well, He has a perfect right to do that.”

So He has endured with much longsuffering, first of all, the rebellion of the nation of Israel. But of course, it was all a part of a sovereign plan. And because of their fall, now the blessing came to the Gentile world; which interestingly so, fulfills His original promise to Abraham that in him all the Gentiles of the world will be blessed. They will

become like the sand of the seashore and the stars of the sky (Genesis 32:12, paraphrased). And He has been fulfilling that. What if He decides to, as the Bible says He will, go back to Israel again and work very powerfully with them in a brand new way in the future? What if He wants to do all of that? You may say, “Well, I guess He can do it.” You are right! That is exactly right.

Well what is controlling that plan? What is causing all the perfect timing of that plan to achieve God’s purposes? And He says that it is the longsuffering of God. He takes a long time to boil, first towards the unbelievers who will never believe in Him, and also to those who were unbelievers but have become believers. He has longsuffering toward both.

As a matter of fact, it says in 1 Peter 3:20, concerning the days of Noah that the longsuffering of God or the patience of God waited in the days of Noah. What is that talking about? Well, God gave them 120 years, according to Genesis 6:3. And Noah told them about a flood, but they had never even seen rain. Millions of people died in the flood. Only eight people were saved: Noah, his three sons, and their wives. But God was patient for 120 years getting the message out and warning that generation. God was patient and yet only eight people responded and millions were killed in the first civilization because they rejected God. And God’s commentary is, “The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20).

Has He been waiting for you?

Turn to James 5. Now if we understand this, then it ought to have an effect upon on us. If in fact, the patience of God is controlling His sovereign plan and His perfect timing and all things that are in it, then that should affect us. Look at James 5:7-11 to see some words about the second coming of Christ and how we should respond to that.

7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

10 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.

11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord--that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

Now let me stop right there and ask, “What are we learning here?” Well, God is talking about the second coming. It is coming. It is under a plan of God. It is under His perfect timing. The day and the hour is known to the Lord, even though we do not know. So we cannot set the date. But it is interesting that it is all known to the Lord. The day, the time, the circumstances; and as 2 Peter 3:8–9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness” (paraphrased). In other words, He is not delaying for any reason at all. You may say, “Wait a minute, it has been over 1900 years now and He has not come back.” Now remember, a day unto the Lord is as what?—a thousand years; and a thousand years is as a day. So the Lord is not delaying for any reason at all. He is longsuffering toward people that He wants to come to Him, out of every nation, tribe, tongue and people.

Now the interesting thing is that according to the Bible, knowing the wonderful patience and longsuffering of God, we have a specific responsibility while we wait for all these events to unfold. Now what is the specific responsibility that you and I have? Answer: stop complaining. Now you would think there would be some deeper, heavier theological deal to go out with. But that is what God says, “Stop complaining.” Literally He says, “Do not grumble” (cf. John 6:43). It means murmuring. It is doing it “under your breath” in the Greek. What it means is that while I am preaching, some of you do not like what I am saying, so you are saying, “Blah, blah, blah, what right does he have, blah, blah.” God says to stop all of that! It does not make any difference. He has a plan unfolding no matter what you say. “I don’t like this at all. And I don’t think I’m going to...” “Stop it,” He says. Why? The Judge is standing at the door. “I don’t like the way things are.” “Stop it!” Why? It is because it will not make any difference to anything. God is going to continue to unfold His plan.

A positive way to look at that is to relax and stop being so troubled all the time. You know, why pray when you can worry, right? God says because His patience is controlling His sovereign plan and perfect timing, so you do not need to complain or grumble anymore. You can just rest, relax, everything is working out on schedule. Everything is cool. Do not worry, just relax. Amen? Don’t you feel better? I suggest you enjoy it now because the message gets worse.

Number two. Turn to Exodus 34. The second thing we learn about the patience of God is that it not only controls His sovereign plan and perfect timing, but interestingly, it calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible. Did you hear that? The patience of God, what He is, calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible.

In Exodus 34:6–7 God tells Moses His name.

6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD is God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, [There’s our word, slow to anger, patient.] abounding in goodness and truth,
7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and sin.”

In Number 14:18–19 we find the same thing. It says that the Lord is longsuffering, forgiving iniquity.

Turn to the book of Joel 2, please. It is near the end of the Old Testament. Here is a very interesting thing about God's patience. It causes Him sometimes to keep back from destroying somebody, even though they deserve it. In Joel 2:12 is an example of God appealing to His children.

12 “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all
your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.
13 So rend [or tear] your heart, and not your garments.”

By the way, they still do this in the Middle East. It has been a long standing Middle Eastern custom in the culture, that when you are really upset in grief—for instance the death of a loved one—or just upset at a situation in life, you take your robe and you tear it, showing your grief outwardly. Well God is saying, “Hey, I do not want to see the outward garment torn. What I want to see is your heart torn apart. Come back to Me.”

13 Return to the LORD your God, [Why?]
For He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, [There's our word again for longsuffering
and patience. Slow to anger] and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.

In the book of Nehemiah 9, there is a prayer by Nehemiah to the Lord that reviews the history of Israel. Now Nehemiah has come back to the land of Israel from the Babylonian captivity. And they are going to try to rebuild the land, rebuild the temple, et cetera. Now he is praying to God and he is reminding God of how He dealt with Israel in the past. And in Nehemiah 9:16–17 says,

16 But they and our fathers acted proudly,
Hardened their necks,
And did not heed Your commandments.
17 They refused to obey,
And they were not mindful of Your wonders
That You did among them.
But they hardened their necks,
And in their rebellion
They appointed a leader to return to their bondage.

The children of Israel wanted to go back and get rid of Moses. Now listen to the next statement.

17 But You are God,
Ready to pardon,
Gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger,

Abundant in kindness,
And did not forsake them.

You know here these people deserved to die. I mean, God could have said, “If that is what you want, then that is what you get. Go on back to Egypt.” He could have said, “Hey, it is national wipe out Israel day.” He could have done anything He wanted to and it would have been righteous. But the Bible says that because He is slow to anger, He did not wipe them out. And instead He forgave them. So in Nehemiah’s time, after the Babylonian captivity, he is now appealing to God the same way. “God, I know what You are like. You did it before. You can do it again.”

Now turn to the book of Jonah chapter 4. What a great story this is. Here is a Hebrew prophet who has to go to Nineveh. He did not want to go there, but God told him a little fish story and he got there. Amen? No, that is not what happened. He got swallowed by a giant fish and got dumped out in Nineveh. That is what I call a jet-propelled fish, because Jonah got dumped out in the Mediterranean Sea and if you know your geography, there was no Suez Canal then. Is everybody listening? Then how did that whale get to the city of Nineveh, which is on the Tigris River, which dumps out in the Persian Gulf in the Indian Ocean? It means that what went through the straits out into the Atlantic Ocean, all the way down the coast of Africa, around southern Africa and up through the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, up the Tigris River and then it threw him up. That is what I call a moving whale, man! That is great. So it took a few days, I am sure.

But anyway, the Bible says in Jonah 4:1 that the city of Nineveh repents! One writer said, “Well if you saw a man come out of a whale, you might think about it, but this whole city? We are talking about a barbaric, torturous society. Do you know that historians today still tell us the most torturous people who have ever lived on the planet earth were the Assyrians. They flayed people alive. They did terrible things to villages and women and children. It is awful. This giant culture was at the height of its glory, with its majestic city of Nineveh where they could run chariot races on its walls. You can see the Assyrian glory in the Oriental Museum in Chicago in the Assyrian room. You get a picture of it with its tremendous power and glory. And here is a little Hebrew prophet saying, “Repent.” Jonah was a Hebrew prophet who hated those people at Nineveh.

Now the interesting thing is that they believe him. And they all repent. And now he is mad. He came to see God wipe them out. “Boy, this is going to be great.” He went up on the side of a hill waiting for it to happen. And it did not happen. The Bible says in Jonah 4:1,

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became
angry.
2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, “Ah, LORD, was
not this what I said when I was still in my country?”

Boy, I do not know if I would have the courage to do that. Jonah is basically saying to God, “I told You so.” It is a wonder that God did not hit him right then.

Jonah said,

2 Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that
You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger
[There's our word, patient, longsuffering.] and abundant in
lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm."

"God, I should have known that is what You would do! They deserve to be punished, these awful barbarian people, who took us all into captivity. They deserve to be judged. And here You are forgiving them!"

Aren't you glad God is patient with you? Huh? What a wonderful thing the patience of the Lord is. It calms His righteous anger and provides forgiveness for us. And I say, "Praise the Lord for that!" Were it not for His mercies, we would be consumed, says Lamentations 3:22 (paraphrased). It is the patience of God that calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 13. The third thing I want you to see about the patience of God, it not only controls His sovereign plan and timing, and calms His righteous anger, and makes forgiveness possible, but it also characterizes His wonderful love.

How do you know when somebody really loves you? The world looks for love. It is getting near Valentine's Day and people get all romantic. They get those vibes—buy those cards. More cards are sold on Valentine's Day than any other day but Christmas. They say they are going to do over 6 billion dollars worth of cards this year. It is hard to believe. That is a lot of cards. Everybody wants to know about love. God says in 1 Corinthians 13:4, "Love suffers long." The very first thing God says about love is that it is patient. It takes a long time to boil.

Now it is interesting the way these verses are organized. The first two statements of 1 Corinthians 13:4 in the Greek text say, "the love" is patient and "the love" is kind. Then it does not repeat the words "the love" again until verse 8 when it says, "the love never fails." What that means is there are two definitions of love: patience and kindness. The next eight are negatives. Did you see that? The negatives are organized in the Greek grammar to describe patience and kindness. For instance, if you are patient, you are not envying. You do not parade yourself, you are not puffed up. You do not behave rudely, you do not think about evil, and you are not provoked. All of those things are all negatives describing the two qualities of love which are patience and kindness. And the first one that God tells you is that love is the patience.

See, you do not know when some one says, "I love you," if that one really loves you or not in a moment of time. Did you know that? You do not know. See, it is always nice to hear the words. Somebody comes up and says, "Man, I really love you." In your heart you can say, "Well, I can think of several reasons why that is so." But you do not know why somebody says, "Oh, I really love you." You are not going to say, "Well, I can see

why you feel that way.” I mean, you do not know how to respond. But you will see whether it is true over a period of time, especially when you do not perform well, amen? Especially when you do not live up to the expectations of the person who said, “I love you.”

Now we will learn whether or not you have God’s love. The only kind of love that sustains, builds up and encourages, and causes you to go on another day, is the love that is always there. It is because “a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17). Amen? Love is patient. It takes a long time to boil.

That means that there is cause to get mad. There is cause to get mad. Do you realize that there are people who do not deserve your words, “I love you.” Amen? Do you understand that? The truth of the matter is that you do not deserve it either. And there is reason to get mad at people. There are plenty of reasons, but when the love of God controls you, you are patient and you take a long time to boil. Now we are talking about *love*.

Take your Bibles and turn to Romans 2. When we speak of the patience of God, we mean it controls His sovereign plan and His perfect timing. It calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible. And it characterizes His wonderful love. Number four, out of five is that it cares about people who need the Lord. The patience of God is longsuffering, and it cares about people who need the Lord.

Have you ever thought, parents, what brings your kids back when they rebel? Have you ever thought about that? When your kids are getting a little, you know, feisty or something, you may say, “Well, what should I do? And the answer may be, “Hey, we are going to lay the law down here, brother. We are going to set up new standards, I will tell you right now. They are not getting away with that. Hey, I am going to show you what being a parent is.” And before you know it, the kids have left. “Well, if that’s the way they feel, that’s the way they feel. I did everything I could for those kids.”

Is everybody with me? Now what brings them back? That is what I want to know. Assuming of course that you want them back because you really do love those kids. What brings them back? By the way, what brings you back to the Lord Himself? It is an interesting question.

In Romans 2:4 it says,

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance,
and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God
leads you to repentance?

There are two things that characterize that goodness. Forbearance is number one, which means: “to put up with people.” And longsuffering is number two, which means: “to take a long time to boil.” “Forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God [that is, forbearance and longsuffering] leads you to [what?] repentance?”

What brings people to repentance is the goodness of God. What is the goodness of God? It is forbearance, putting up with them because they are not performing like you want. And it is taking a long time to boil, because they really deserve to be zapped and judged and punished. But in fact, love and patience withholds it and the goodness of God brings them back.

Now does that mean that God will not judge sin? No. No, do not presume on the judgment of God or on the goodwill of your parents. We need to be careful. The Bible says in Psalm 19:13, “Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins.” But it is important for every one of us to understand that it is not even the message that if you reject Jesus Christ you will be in hell that draws people to Christ. Now in my case, I want to talk about it for a moment because I received Christ listening to a message on hell. Being a bright kid, I decided I was not going to go there. So, I asked my mother how to keep myself from going to hell. But it is not the fact that I was going to go to hell that led me to repentance; it was when my mother told me about Jesus and that He would forgive my sins—that He loved me.

It is the goodness of God that leads you to repentance. Sometimes it gets our attention to know that there are consequences to the gospel and you need to do something. Get right with God. We need to know we have to pay the consequences of our sinful actions. But my friends, what leads people to repent is the goodness of God, His forbearance, His patience. Wow! This is a good lesson for all of us.

In 2 Peter 3:9, we read earlier that “The Lord is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” In Paul’s own testimony in 1 Timothy 1, he said, “I didn’t deserve anything. I was a blasphemer, a murderer, an insolent man. But I obtained mercy that in me, Christ might show all longsuffering to others who will believe in Him.” Paul said, “My life is an example of how God is patient. For somebody who deserves hell, and He loved me so much He waited for me to come to Him” (1 Timothy 1:12–16, paraphrased).

Are you glad God waited for you? The patience of God, folks, cares about people. God does not have patience towards things. He does not need that. He controls all things. What He has is patience towards people.

Number five. When we look at the patience of God, we wonder, “Hey, I need that. How am I going to get it?” The fifth thing we give you about the patience of God is that it comes to the believer through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches that we do not have this patience naturally. Do you find yourself getting ticked off with people who disagree with you? Have you found that out? If somebody walked up to you today and you told them some neat little thing that you have just been thinking about, and they said, “That’s the dumbest thing I ever heard.” Now haven’t you felt, when that happens that there is a little bit of ill will in your heart toward that person? Just a slight bit maybe, huh?

And when somebody looks at you and says, “You know, you never say anything right.” Now that does not automatically cause you to say, “Oh, that was the most thrilling thing I have ever heard in my life. Can you tell me more of how I have failed?” You don’t do that, right? Now, what I am trying to tell you is that we all are operating naturally when we get mad. We are operating naturally. We may say, “Hey, you don’t have any right to say that to me.” And we are operating naturally.

What I want to know is how in the world can we possibly react to people that deserve to be zapped on the spot for what they have done or said? And how can we endure that? How can we be patient and longsuffering?

We are not born with patience—patience toward people. Listen carefully, patience toward people is not learned by human experience. Wow! Patience toward things is. The Bible says, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials because those trials will produce [what?] patience” (James 1:2–3, paraphrased). But that is not the same word. That is referring to patience toward things. So how do you learn patience toward circumstances? It is by actually having difficult circumstances. Trials produce the quality of that kind of patience. But patience toward people is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is not innate in human nature.

Turn to Galatians 5 and let me show you. How do we get the patience of God? It comes to the believer through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God. Galatians 5:22 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, [What’s the next one?] patience or longsuffering.” It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And I need it. And I need it in three ways.

Number one, I need patience in my relationships with other believers. Turn to Ephesians and look at chapter 4. I need the patience of God that comes only by the Holy Spirit in me. I need it in my relationships with other believers. Ephesians 4:1 says,

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk
worthy of the calling with which you were called,
2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering,
[patience. What is that?] bearing with one another
[forbearance].

Turn back to Romans 2:4. What is the goodness of God that leads you to repentance? It is forbearance, putting up with people in love. And longsuffering, here it is again. What God has toward us that leads us to repent is also what we need toward other people. That leads us to good relationships. Interesting, isn’t it?

I do not believe that it is easy to have good relationships with people who disagree. It is not easy. I do not believe it is easy to have relationships with people who like things that you do not like and people who do not like things that you do. I have very little sympathy for those who do not believe that watching Monday night football is definitely of the Lord. But I understand there are some people who believe that is downright carnal. I understand that there are people who actually do like ballet. My background has never

been tip-toeing through the tulips. You understand? Now, how in the world are we going to get along, people? Well, we need the power of the Holy Spirit controlling us. That is what we need.

Even in a family, every kid is different. And parents are all trying to make them act the same, do the same things, and follow the same instructions. Listen, everybody is different. How do we get along? We need the power of the Holy Spirit in our relationships with each other.

Proverbs is filled with the argument of slow to wrath or longsuffering. “He who is slow to wrath hath great understanding” (Proverbs 14:29). “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty” (Proverbs 16:32) “He who is slow to anger always allays contention,” that is, kills arguments. Interesting. We need patience in our relationships with each other.

Secondly, we need patience in our responsibility to teach God’s Word to this generation. Turn to 2 Timothy 4. I will show you something interesting. We not only need patience in our relationships with other believers, we need patience in our responsibility to teach God’s Word to this generation. In 2 Timothy 4:2-4, Paul warned us of a time that was going to come.

2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.

Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all [What?] longsuffering [patience] and teaching. [Why do we need patience?]

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; [What that means is they will want people who will say what they want to hear.]

4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

And our Christian culture is filled with it. There are multitudes of pulpits in America that have already done what Paul predicted would happen. They have turned to mythological and fable teaching, all because they thought the generation wanted to know it. They tried to stroke, so to speak, the wounded self-image of people. They thought perhaps that going to some sort of psychological approach to the gospel would somehow help. We pointed out the needs of people to the point we have lost sight of God and who He is. Salvation is interpreted incorrectly all across the country. It is in multitudes of pulpits, in supposedly Christian churches. Paul said, “Watch out. The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. They will want to be entertained. They don’t want to sit there and have to study. They don’t want to sit there and be like a Berean Christian who search the Scriptures daily to see whether those things are so” (2 Timothy 4, paraphrased) Has the time come, folks? You bet it has come.

Now understand that to reprove and rebuke and convince, we do not always need that. Sometimes we need softness. Amen? Now I have observed something. We have a little marketing firm that studies people and tries to help people, including me. And they study how people respond to certain people who are on the radio, whatever. It is kind of interesting. There is one particular speaker who people love to turn to if they want to be encouraged. And I understand that because I do not turn to me, I always turn to him. And I like to listen to him because he encourages my heart. You see, if I am in the hospital and I am sick, I would not call on me to call on me. I want somebody to come in and encourage me at that time who has compassion and mercy. You know what I mean? And so, different people are used for different things. I did not win the contest on being a soothing, quiet speaker on the radio.

Now everybody is different. I have noticed that people like certain things. You see, we like a person and that is what we want to hear, because that is what we like. We often do not like somebody else, who may be different, but who may be telling us what we need to hear.

You see, what the passage in 2 Timothy 4 is saying is that there will come a time when all that people want is to hear what they want to hear. I think that is a problem of the church. You see, sometimes you come and you want me to comfort the afflicted; when in reality, I may have to afflict the comfortable. Do you understand? You may say, “Well, you’ve got to feed the sheep.” That is right; you have to tell them the Word of God, but did you know in the feed there is a little flogging once in a while? There is some food that is hard to take, but you need to have. We have to warn people about sin, about hell, and all of that. It has to be there. We have to confront the culture and we have to tell them what the truth of God is.

What I am trying to say is, “Boy, do we ever need the patience of God! All of us!” Whether you are talking to one person, or talking to a Bible class of five people, or fifty or five thousand, we all need what?—longsuffering. And what time are we referring to? It is the time before the return of Christ. Why? It is because they will not endure sound doctrine.

I want to ask you, when people do not respond to what you are saying, and turn their back on you, when they do not like what you are saying or how you are saying it, will you still be faithful to God? Will you? Patience.

But there is one other thing. Turn to 2 Peter 2, since you are right there in 2 Timothy. We not only need patience or longsuffering in our relationships with other believers and in our responsibility to preach and teach God’s Word; but folks, we need it in our reactions toward nonbelievers. 2 Timothy 2:24 says, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel.”

Does the Bible tell us to argue? Yes, it uses the Greek word “dialogue.” We are to prove the points about who Jesus is, why He came, and how we become Christians. We are to argue with people. But if you mean argument, quarreling, like getting ticked off and mad,

bitter and resentful—no, never! The servant of the Lord has to hang in there and be gentle to all, able to teach, and patient.

This is not our word longsuffering, but it is one like it. It is a special Greek word that is highly unusual. It literally means, “to hold up under evil.” And it is similar to “slow to anger” only it is more powerful than ever. What God is saying is that if you are going to start sharing with nonbelievers, let me tell you something, you are going to get some hassles and some hostilities. What we need is patience and longsuffering and holding up under that evil. Why? “In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,” (2Timothy 2:25).

What leads people to repentance? It is forbearance and patience again. So when Christians lose their patience with people and get ticked off at the sinner rather than the sin, they are not being used at that moment by our wonderful Lord to draw people to Jesus. Are you following me?

So in our attitudes toward nonbelievers, we have to tell them the truth. We need patience no matter where it is, but especially with nonbelievers. I do not have the time, but it is amazing to me how, in the book of Acts the situations that the apostle Paul faced would have driven a lot of us into retreat. And in this culture, I have observed Christian people retreating from the secular society around them. Why? It’s because it is becoming more hostile. It is becoming more angry. It is becoming more difficult to reach them. And instead of hanging in there for Jesus’ sake, and using forbearance and patience and kindness and staying with the stuff, a lot of us are running away. When our feelings get hurt or somebody tells us they do not like our message, be careful!

I close with this illustration. Jesus told us a parable once, in Luke 18. It is an amazing parable in this sense—that an unbeliever was used to illustrate God. That is a little unusual. The story was of an unjust judge, a judge who was an unbeliever. And it says that a widow, who was being ripped off, came to him for a judgment. He got rid of her. He did not have time for that. She came back the next day and she just kept coming back. She drove him batty. And the Bible says that unjust judge, just to get her off his back, did what she wanted. He just made a decision and did what she wanted. He said, “All right, there! Now go!” Interesting. And then Jesus said that the unjust judge is like God. He said, “Will not God also avenge His elect, His believers, who cry unto Him day and night?” And then He took it a step further and said, “And will the Son of Man, [meaning Himself] when He comes again, find such faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:2–8).

What an interesting example of patience. Here is an unbeliever who just wants to get rid of this woman. She kept coming all the time and he finally just does what she wants, just because she kept at it. And then Jesus said, “How much more would a loving God, who loves you and is so patient towards you, hear you when you cry to Him?” And by the way, when Jesus comes back, would He find that kind of faith? Would there be the faith among us that trusts the patience of God and realizes that He has been enduring all of our junk for a long time? He loves you. The longsuffering of God, as Peter said, is salvation. Praise the Lord.

Let's close with prayer.

Father, we thank You so much for Your wonderful love. Sometimes, Lord, we are very aware of what we have done or said and we know we deserve Your judgment. But to think that because of Your patience, Your righteous anger is withheld and forgiveness is made possible, it overwhelms us. To think that You are patient, waiting for us to come to You, God we thank You. I know there are believers who are grateful for Your patience. And some are not walking with God. And some are presuming upon Your love and compassion. You will not always strive with us. But we thank You for Your patience. Some of us need to come home to the Lord. You love us and You are patient. You are giving us time to get right with God. We thank You for that. I pray, Lord, for those who are not sure if they died now whether they would be in heaven. They have no confidence of their personal relationship with You through Your Son Jesus Christ. God, help them to rejoice in Your patience and in knowing that You love them so much and You are leading them to salvation, waiting for them to come. You tell us in the Bible all day long that the Savior stands with outstretched arms to a people who have been disobedient, inviting us to come home. Help us, Lord, to make the decision we know we ought to make. In Jesus' name, amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Please turn to 1 John 4 beginning at verse 7. We are reading down to John 5:5 on the love of God. This is a subject so vast, it is as the songwriter penned the words, “Could we with ink the ocean fill—were every man a scribe by trade, it would be impossible to write the love of God above (from the Hymn, *The Love of God*, F.M. Lehman, paraphrased). It is so boundless. It is so measureless. His love has no limit. His grace has no measure. His power has no boundaries known to man. So when we attempt to discuss the love of God, we are on a subject that is just vast and immense and we can only hit the highlights. There are some wonderful words in 1 John 4 to direct us.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

CHAPTER 5

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.

5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Will you please join me in prayer?

Father, I would ask in these few moments together that You would show us the marvel of Your love. The world craves it, desires it, longs for it. God help us to see where it comes from and how we can experience it. Thank You, Lord, for Your wonderful love for us. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Perhaps the greatest evangelist from the past, outside of the current ones that are living, is Dwight L. Moody—that is in terms of American history. Dwight L. Moody was born in 1837, and he was born again in 1854 at the age of seventeen, through the instrumentality of a man named Edward Kimball. He was in business until age twenty-three and he entered the ministry, really, as a lay preacher. He was not well educated and yet he established schools that still stand to this day. He was successful, to a point, in his early years of ministry which began about 1860. And as you can well imagine from hearing the date, you know the turbulent times that were going on in America. This was during the Civil War.

Moody made a missions trip in 1867 to England when he was thirty-seven years old. He met a man named Henry Morehouse. Morehouse wanted to preach for Moody, but Moody kept putting him off. One day he invited himself, literally, saying that he was going to be in Chicago. Morehouse came and the year was 1867. Morehouse preached on John 3:16 while Moody was gone. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Moody came back from a trip and asked what Morehouse was preaching about. The congregants said, “John 3:16.” Moody thought it was rather elementary and he said, “Well what is he going to preach on next?”

They said, “John 3:16.”

“Well, is it a two-part message?”

“No. He said he is going to preach on John 3:16 until we learn it.”

Morehouse continued for weeks on John 3:16. I am now reading the words of Dwight L. Moody, who sat there and listened to this man who preached on John 3:16.

I never knew, up to that time, that God loved me so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out. I could not keep back the tears. I just drank it in. I tell you there is one thing that draws above everything else in the world and that is love. I took up that word love and I do not know how many weeks I spent in studying the passages in which it occurs, till at last I could not help loving people. I had been feeding on love so long that I was anxious to do everybody good I came in contact with. I got full of it. It ran out my fingers. You take up the subject of love in the Bible, you will get so full of it that all you have to do is open your lips and a flood of the love of God flows out. The churches would soon be filled if outsiders could find that people in them loved them when they came. This love draws sinners. We must win them to us first. Then we can win them to Christ. We must get people to love us and then turn them over to Christ. If you haven't got love in your heart, (Moody said), you should throw your hope to the four winds and go and get a better one. There is nothing greater than the love of God.”

Well, history records what happened from that moment on, as Moody described what his baptism of love was all about. His evangelistic endeavors were so incredible that over a million people came to know the Lord through the preaching of D. L. Moody, long before television and radio. And God used him mightily and people were overwhelmed with the simplicity of the man and the love of the man.

How we need the love of God! But I am asking today, “What is the love of God?” And then I want to ask, “What is required for us to experience it?” People want love. It is so obvious. There is a great need for love among married people today. Most of those who are not married are not too anxious to get married in light of what they have seen. Instead of love dominating, there has been a hostility and anger. As one sociologist says of the American home, “It is filled with hostility and anger.”

Families need love. Parents need to love their children as never before. There are so many children that are rejected. Older people need love. Go on one little trip to a convalescent hospital, that will tell you about love and the need for love.

I remember well the prison psychologist at a federal prison who told me that there was not a single man on death row who had known the love of both father and mother. We need to wake up to something. Our world is in desperate need of love. So they are trying all kinds of things. They have been heavy into the physical and found it pretty empty. That type of love is filled with many, many consequences which they never anticipated or dreamed of.

Some of you reading this right now wonder if anybody really loves and cares about you at all. It is easy to get in that mode; after all, we do live in a narcissistic culture that has said we are important. Please tell me how. Please tell me why. Show me that I am loved. We have been dominated by feelings of self-importance and self-esteem and self-worth. And all of it, I suppose has its place. But folks, we have missed the One who loves us more than anyone has ever loved us and that is God Almighty. God loves you. God *is* love.

Let me tell you about the love of God. I just want to give you five simple statements from 1 John to describe and answer the question: what is the love of God? According to the Bible it is a divine resource that human beings need but are not born with. Let me repeat it again. What is God's love? It is a divine resource that human beings need, but they are not born with it.

How many people in our world think that by just a little set of obligations or duties, or a little list of things to do, that somehow we can all of a sudden love with God's love. Yet the Bible tells us that "love is of God," (1 John 4:7). Love is of God. The Greek is more powerful. The preposition "out of" is dealing with the source. The source of the love that we desperately need is out of the heart of God. It does not come from anywhere else. It is not found anywhere else. The love that we really need, the only kind of love that truly satisfies and brings meaning and purpose and hope and strength and courage to our hearts, comes from God and God alone. It is a divine resource. It is out of God.

God is not merely love. When it says, "God is love" though, don't weaken that by saying that "it is merely love." God is not a force, although He is very forceful. God is not simply an influence in the world giving us vibes and fuzzies towards each other. No, God is more than that. God is a real person, as real as you are. But the truth is that His whole character, His nature, His attributes and all that He is—I like to say—is "baptized or bathed with love." He never operates without love. He is love. Everything that love is or should be, that is what God is. It is a divine resource.

And human beings need it desperately. We all want it and we search for it. We try to get it in several ways; yet we are not born with it, according to the Bible. It comes from the heart of God Himself.

Number two. I learn in this passage about the love of God that it is not only a divine resource, but it is a needed relationship which believers must have with each other. There is not one thing that should characterize us better, as believers in Jesus Christ, than our love for one another.

Please look again at verse 7. The passage begins, “Beloved ones.” You are loved of God. “Beloved, let us love one another.” I read down in verse 11, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought”—the Greek is a particular verb there for “obligation and duty” and it is in what we call the present tense. There is a continual obligation that we have because of God’s love for us: to love one another. It is not a creative alternative. Some of us have chosen to put people on our list that are like us, and those that we like, into the love category. People that we do not like and that are not like us are in the category where we say, “We will pray for you.” Amen? Do you understand me? I mean, we always naturally find in our hearts a tendency to love those that we like, or who love us and respond to it. But those in the category who are not like us, we are not able to say, with good Christian conscience, “Well, they don’t like me, so how can you expect me to like them?” No, love is an obligation. The Bible says we continue to have this obligation to love one another. That is not a creative suggestion for any of us. That is a command from God Almighty. We are to love one another.

In our generation, because it is so feeling oriented, you get this response: “Well, I can’t just make it up. I don’t feel like it.” “Hey, I don’t feel like getting up in the morning, but I have to.” Do you understand? A lot of us are operating on the basis of whether we feel it or not. God’s love comes from God. And though it creates wonderful feelings in our heart, it is in obedience to what God says. We are not having a suggestion here. We are commanded by God; therefore, to not obey is clear disobedience.

Turn please to 1 John 4:20. If someone says, “I love God”—let’s suppose you are a believer this morning—you may say, “Well I love God.” After all, it is dangerous not to say that. Amen? You have to say it, “I love God.” But if you hate your brother, the Bible says, you are a liar. Nobody likes to be called a liar. “He who does not love his brother [as a habit of life] whom he has seen, then how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

You know, the writings of John are what I call simple and profound at the same time. I remember the first time I was in Greek class, the very first semester. They were teaching us about Greek and I remember the first passage we ever could experiment in, in that first semester, was in 1 John. The reason is that it is probably the simplest Greek you can read in the New Testament. It contains very simple words.

As I was preparing this message, in going over the passage again, I could almost quote it verbatim, not for any other reason, except we translated this over and over again in Greek class. I taught Greek for many years. I made students translate 1 John. Well, it is easy Greek; but the problem is that this easy Greek, which also becomes very easy to read in English, is also profound. It is very profound.

The theologian of the early church was not the apostle Paul. If you read church history, you will find out that it was John. He was the only one who outlived the others. He was the one to whom Jesus entrusted the care of His mother after His death. John was the only one who died a natural death. It was John who lived clear through the first century and it was John, who was exiled on the island of Patmos by Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96,

AD. John lived into the nineties because he was released after that exile. He actually died at the church of Ephesus. His birthplace and Mary's are in the city of Ephesus. They called John the theologian.

His writings are heavy duty stuff, but never difficult to understand at first. It is like you've got to go into it. And what John says is so simple to hear. If you do not love your brother whom you see, then how can you love God whom you do not see? Rather simple statement, but the more you think about it, the deeper it sounds.

When I say in my heart, "God, I love You," maybe I am saying it because I want to make sure I am on my way to heaven. Maybe I want to make sure that nothing serious happens to me. But do I really love God? And God's Word says in such powerful and blunt and simple language, "Well, I'll tell you David. Do you love your brothers and sisters in the Lord? And if there is somebody that you do not love, then how in the world, if that's a person you see in your life, how can you love God whom you do not see?" Something is wrong.

Please look at 1 John 5:1. John takes it deeper when he said, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him" You say you love Jesus Christ? Do you love Him who is begot [because we're born of God] then you will also love him who is begotten of Him. How in the world can you say that there is somebody that you do not love who is a Christian?

I was talking with a believer down South several years ago when I was first exposed to the problem of racism. I tell you, I was a city kid from California, a beach bum who knew nothing about racism. Hey, I grew up with blacks, played with blacks and the whole thing—talking to blacks and staying at their homes. They were in my home too, so I did not understand racism. I went down South and all of a sudden I saw a problem. And I am not here to simplify a major problem, but I am here to tell you that God is not into skin color, folks. There is something wrong. And I went down South and I found people who said they loved God but they could not love somebody who had a different skin color. I did not understand that. Then as I got older and began to travel, I discovered people all over the world who supposedly love God, but because of cultural differences or language differences or whatever, all of a sudden instead of loving, they are hating. Something is wrong, God says. Something is wrong.

And in our own little world we have developed comfort zones of people who we like to hang around with and we like to talk to. It is kind of in our little system and we do not like those who are outside of the system. My dear friends, how can you say you love God and do not love somebody who is born of Him? This is the needed relationship which believers must have with each other.

Turn back to the Gospel of John, please, to chapter 13. What is the love of God? It is a divine resource that human beings need but we are not born with. And it is also a needed relationship which believers must have with each other. And I guess that is where the rub

is. It is frustrating. It is almost as though our relationships with each other show how much we need the Lord. Amen?

Is there somebody who comes to your mind by the sheer mention of this subject? Is there someone you do not like? Make that plural—are there people who come to your mind? You know, we all have those people, those little thorns in the flesh. When we think of people who we do not like, it is as though at that moment, we discover whether or not we know anything about the love of God. It is easy to love people who like you. But if there is somebody that rubs you the wrong way and you know they are Christians, you have no other excuse. They are born of God and you are supposed to love them. And you are finding out whether or not you really love when you are faced with that situation.

I read in John 13:34-35—this is the same writer who wrote 1 John—“A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.” It is not new from the standpoint of time, but it is fresh, a fresh commandment. This is because it was in the Old Testament where the Ten Commandments were given. “As I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another.”

Look at John 15:12-17

12 This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends. For all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

16 You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give it you.

17 These things I command you that you love one another.

Romans 13:8 says, “Owe no man anything except to love one another.” We are under a divine responsibility, an obligation, accountability to God, to love each other.

I was watching the unfolding of this with a couple kids on a school playground several years ago. And the teacher had just discussed the whole subject of loving one another. And as they went out to recess, the two kids were really arguing and fighting over the use of a tetherball. And the school, this Christian school was on the property of the church where I was pastoring. I happened to be standing there watching it and I love what this little kid said: “I love you, but I just don't like you!” And it seemed to me that that kind of summarizes what a lot of us want to feel.

“I love you. Okay God, I understand. I love you. I don’t like you though.” You know. Wait a minute! That is like telling your wife, “You know, I really love you honey. I just don’t like being with you.” What? Come on. Something is wrong and I think we need to learn, by our relationships with each other, that this love that comes from God can only be in our hearts through the Lord. That is why a lot of these conflicts happen, because it proves to us our need of the Lord. It helps us to see it.

Go back to 1 John again. What is the love of God? It is a divine resource that human beings need but are not born with. It is a needed relationship which believers must have with each other. But it is also a divine response to human depravity and need. And I like this. This probably helps me to understand it more than anything else. What is the love of God? It is a divine response to human depravity and need. Look at 1 John 4:9-10 again, in the light of this. What beautiful words of encouragement. “In this, the love of God was manifest.” You may say, “Show me the love of God.” Okay.

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.
10 In this is love, [here’s the explanation] not that we loved God, but that He loved [past tense, moment of time] us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

What is the love of God? It is a divine response to human depravity and need. He came to be a propitiation for our sins.

Turn back to John 2 and look at verses 1 and 2. There perhaps is no point about the love of God that explains it any more to us than that one truth that it is a divine response to human depravity and need. In 1 John 2:1 it says,

1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Now what is propitiation? It could also be translated mercy seat. It is a Greek word that would translate that item of the furniture in the temple and tabernacle, which originally appeared in Hebrew. It is a Greek word that is used for that to describe an actual place and a setting. It is the holy of holies in the temple, the tabernacle. A veil, called the “second veil,” is in front of it. Only the high priest can go behind the veil once a year. Whenever the tabernacle was even set up, there was a group of priests who would carry that veil and they would go backwards. They could not even look into it. The high priest

goes in once a year. Inside of that holy of holies is the Ark of the Covenant, a box overlaid with gold. There were two cherubim, angels in gold, looking down on the ark. Now the ark has a lid of gold. It is not an actual chair. When it says “mercy seat,” it’s a lid. And the angels are looking down on it. Once a year the high priest put blood there to emphasize propitiation.

Now folks, there is a difference between propitiation and redemption. If you are Jewish you understand it. If you are Gentile you struggle with it a little bit more. Propitiation means to satisfy the wrath of God. These angels, made out of solid gold on the lid of the ark, remind the children of Israel of the Passover. And when they left Egypt they had to put blood on the top of the door and on the side post. And when the death angel passed over the home, if he saw the blood he would pass over. If there was no blood there, then the first born son would die in that home. “When I see the blood I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). The Passover season represents propitiation.

Then on the Day of Atonement the high priest goes in once a year and puts the blood there. The angels are like angels of judgment. And because the blood is there, God’s wrath is appeased or satisfied.

Now folks, according to the Bible, propitiation is not only for our sins—we who are believers—but also for the whole world. If you ask me, did Jesus Christ die for the whole world? Yes, if you mean propitiation. Was His death sufficient to satisfy all the righteous wrath of God against sin? Yes. The Bible teaches that all the wrath of God was put on Jesus Christ when He died for our sins. That is propitiation. Does that mean that the unbeliever who winds up in hell has already had his sins propitiated? The answer is yes. That is why it is such a tragedy to reject the love of God. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for sins” (1 John 4:10). How interesting!

Now when it says “for our sins,” it uses a Greek preposition, not only in 1 John 4, but also in chapter two. The word “for” is a Greek preposition called *huper*, which means “in the behalf of.” And we would say in English a word like “sufficiency.” Stay with me. I know this sounds like, you know, where are we going here? Hang in there because fortunately, I know.

I want you to take your Bible and put your finger in two passages to compare them, Matthew 20:28 and 1 Timothy 2:5-6. And I want to show you something about God’s love that maybe you have not seen as it applies to both the unbeliever and the believer. The Bible says, “In this is love, not that we love God” and then we reap the benefits. That is not the point. The point is that God loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And as 1 John 2:2 says, it is not just for the sins of the believer, but for the whole world—even the unbeliever. He is the Savior of the world, even if they do not respond to Him.

Now I told you there was a difference between propitiation and redemption. Before we look at these two words, I want to explain something. When a Jew thinks of the Day of

Atonement, he thinks of the nation. The whole nation of Israel is being dealt with and God's wrath needs to be satisfied. Now if the high priest does that for the nation, does that mean that every single Jewish person would go to heaven? No. Does that mean that every Jewish person would be saved or redeemed? No, only propitiated. If an individual Jew sins during the course of the year and does not bring an individual sacrifice for his sin, the Bible says he is cut off forever. That is called sinning willfully, which is mentioned in Hebrews 10.

If we sin willfully, after we have a knowledge of the truth that the only way God will save us is through the sacrifice of His Son—if we sin willfully, the Bible says, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain anticipation of the fiery judgment of God. Every Jew understands that. He has to bring an individual sacrifice for his sin all during the year. Thousands of animals are killed, but once a year the high priest takes the blood of an animal and makes an atonement, a covering, for the sins of the whole nation. But that does not mean they are saved.

Listen folks because Jesus died on a cross for the whole world does not mean that everybody is going to be saved. Propitiation deals with satisfying God's wrath against sin. And Jesus' death was sufficient for that; but redemption, which means you are bought out from the slave market of sin, death and hell and set free—redemption applies only to those who believe. Did Christ die for only the believers? Yes, in the sense of redemption, but He also died for believers and unbelievers in the sense of propitiation. Is everybody with me?

People often ask me questions like: Do you believe in limited atonement. Yes, but I also believe in unlimited atonement. I always have something for everybody. Know what I mean?

You may say, "I believe in unlimited atonement."

"Well, I do too. God bless you."

And someone else may say, "I believe in limited atonement."

"Well, I do too. God bless you."

"You can't believe both."

"Yes, you can, if you know your Bible." Jesus died as a propitiation for the sins of the entire world, but redemption only refers to those who believe.

Now I want to show you from Matthew 20:28, Jesus says, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom" [What does it say?] "for many." It says, "a ransom for many."

Now turn to 1 Timothy 2:5-6, while keeping your finger in Matthew 20.

5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and
men, the Man Christ Jesus,
6 who gave Himself a ransom [what?] for all.

Now wait a minute! Matthew 20:28 says, “a ransom for many.” 1 Timothy 2:6 says, “a ransom for all.” Which is it, for all or for many? The little preposition “for” is different in the Greek in those two verses. In Matthew 20:28 it is the word *anti*, which means “in the stead of.” We would say “substitution.” In 1 Timothy 2:6, it is a preposition *huper*, meaning “in the behalf of.” We would say “sufficiency.” Watch this carefully. His ransom, His payment for our sin, is substitutionary payment for the many who believe in Him and it is only for them. But it is sufficient as a ransom for all, whether they believe or they do not.

When we read in 1 John 4 that this is the love of God, here is the way to understand that: when God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, it is not “in the stead of” them. It is “in the behalf of them.” The issue is sufficiency. Was His coming into the world a sufficient demonstration of God’s love for even those who would never believe in Him? The answer is absolutely, yes.

Now I understand something about God’s love. See, you may be listening to this and not buying a thing here. You have never really come to know Him as Savior. You have never been born again. You are just listening and you may think, “I don’t believe that.” I just want you to know He still loves you anyway. And that helps me to understand love. Love is a divine response to human depravity and need. God loves you even when you do not care about Him.

Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” You cared nothing about Him; He still loves you. You may say, “I don’t want anything to do with this.” I see kids that way, rebelling against the values of their parents and walking away from the things they might have learned. And they say, “I don’t want all that stuff. I got more friends out here who don’t believe that.” Hey listen, you just keep roaming around doing your thing. I just want you to know, God loves you. God loves you. He is never going to stop, even when you are rebellious. Even when you want to do your own thing and you want to go your own way, God loves you. He cannot do anything else because God is love. That is what He is.

I tell you I have never seen a more clear demonstration of what love is than the divine response to human depravity and need. When we do not care about Him, when we are filled with sinful junk in our lives, He still loves us. The greatest thing a sinner can hear is that God loves him. God loves you. I tell you there are some people you have to beat over the head to get them to understand that they are sinners. You know what I mean? They feel they are so good that they deserve heaven. They are looking forward to giving a personal testimony when they get there about how wonderful they are. But listen, God saves sinners. And the greatest thing a man who knows he is a sinner can hear, is that God loves him even though He knows how rotten that person is. Nothing is so strong in building my self-esteem or yours than the fact that God loves me and He knows what I am like. Isn’t that wonderful? God loves you right where you are. You may say, “You don’t know how I’ve blown it.” God loves you, whether you have sinned a thousand times or fifty. God loves you. Why are you trying to run away from the One who loves

you more than anybody else could ever love you in your life? Where do you think you are going? He loves you.

Now turn back to 1 John 4, please. What is the love of God? It is a divine resource that human beings need but are not born with. It is a needed relationship which believers must have with each other. Number three, it is a divine response to human depravity and need. And in that we see the love of God more than any other point. Number four, the love of God is also a divine reassurance that eliminates fear. It is a divine reassurance that eliminates fear.

Look at 1 John 4:17. “Love has been perfected [It has come to a mature point among us] in this, that we may have boldness, [confidence] in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.” By the way, that word “He” in Greek is a demonstrative pronoun. And it is John’s favorite title for Jesus. “You know who I am talking about—that One. As that One is, so are we in this world.”

We are in Christ, amen? His love for us takes away all fear. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). Let me tell you that a performance-oriented Christianity always fears.

The other day, up in Canada, I was talking with a pastor who, I think, leans towards performance orientation. At least he was constantly harping on how we need to be careful. “We need to be careful,” he said.

So I was listening to him. You know, and he said that there are no guarantees. I did not quite understand what he was talking about.

And I said, “Let me clear this up for a moment. Are we talking about heaven, or what?”

He said, “That’s a simplistic answer.”

I said, “I know, but I need it right now. What are we talking about?”

“Well,” he said, “we have no guarantee of heaven.”

“Man, I don’t see it that way.”

“We need to be careful.”

“We need to be careful?” I said, “I believe in walking with the Lord and having a lifestyle that pleases Him. But I am not sure you and I are on the same wavelength.” I said, “I just want to ask you, do you believe there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ?”

He didn’t answer me. He just looked stern.

I said, “Well let me give you another one. The Bible says that ‘nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’”

He said, “You’re a Calvinist aren’t you?”

“Calvinist, Arminian? I think maybe a *Calminian* would be better. I don’t know. I just want to believe the Bible.”

Are you insecure? Then you are not looking to the love of God, you are looking to yourself. You are not looking to the cross of Jesus Christ; you are trusting your own performance. I thank God He died and paid for all my sins. Amen? I could not pay for

one of them! There is nothing I can do to handle them. Only He can handle them. You talk about security! There is no fear in that love, it is completely cast out. And let me tell you that fear involves torment. You can live on the edge and be scared to death that you are going to make one false move and that God will hit you with a proverbial bat from heaven and you will never see heaven!

I watched a television show and I was so angry, I did not know whether to destroy the TV or call the station or what. It was a Christian television program. And I watched a guy discuss how, if you are not walking with the Lord when Jesus comes again, “You aren’t going,” he said. He described it. He even used the blackboard and put up more nonsense on the blackboard.

My dear friends, security is resting in the Lord’s love for you. And Paul said,

I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38)

I can go to sleep at night with real peace in my heart. Perfect love casts out fear. Fear has torment.

And number five, turn to 1 John 5. What is the love of God? It is also a personal resolve to keep the commandments of Jesus Christ. Talk about balance. We just really blasted into human performance and now we are back on it again. I read in 1 John 5:2—

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. [Now here’s a definition.]

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

We have already learned that it is tough to say that you love God if you cannot love the guy that you see. We are trying to love this invisible One who loves us and promises to take us to heaven. Well, how do we know when we do love Him? If He is invisible and we cannot see Him, we cannot relate to Him like we do people (person to person), then how in the world...? God’s answer is to keep His commandments.

Turn to the gospel of John, chapter 14. Now a lot of you are going to be frustrated with this because some of us approach this with a legalistic mind. “Do what I say,” parents tell their kids. “Just do it.” It is interesting, isn’t it, how we grow up thinking about how there are conditions for love. Every true child of God who really is in love with the Lord, has no hassle on this. The Bible says His commandments are not burdensome. And every child of God who tells me this is a hassle, is revealing that he is a little short on loving

God. What is the love of God? If you say you love God—great! Do what He says. It is simple. Or is it? Are you with me?

8 “If you love Me [Do what? What did Jesus say?] keep My commandments. [If you love Him then do what He says.]

9 As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

11 These things I have spoken to you.

So you may be unhappy the rest of your life and have a sour face like you were eating pickles—wait—that is not what it says. It says, “My joy will be in you.” Why are people not filled with joy? Why are they so unhappy? It is because they are not loving God in the sense of keeping His commandments. They are not doing what He says. If you did what He said, you would be happier. So why are you trying to be unhappy by not doing what He says? Also by the fact that you say you love God and you don't do what He says, something is wrong. Do what He says and you will be very happy. You will be filled with joy.

Turn to 1 John 2 again and look at what it says in verses 3-6.

3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

4 He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected [or made mature] in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

What is the love of God? It is a personal resolve to keep the commandments of Jesus Christ. And it is no heavy trip to anybody who loves Him. Never.

The second question I will deal with quickly is, what is required in order to experience the love of God? If I am reading 1 John 4:7 correctly, a spiritual birth is required. A spiritual birth. It says, “Everyone who loves is born of God”—literally, has been born. There is a point at which it happened and it never changes. Are you born again? If I understand my Bible correctly, it is not only a spiritual birth that is caused by God, but it is a personal knowledge of God. Look at 1 John 4:7-8 carefully.

7 Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
[Literally continues to know God]
8 He who does not love does not know God. [He never did
come to know Him.]

All true believers continue to know about God. It is an experiential knowledge, a spiritual birth, and a personal knowledge. What else is required? Well, according to this passage the presence of the Holy Spirit is required. Look at verse 13.

13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us,
because He has given us of His Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” Romans 5:5 says, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”

How in the world can I experience the love of God? You need the Holy Spirit. You never get the Holy Spirit until you are born again. And you cannot love anybody with God’s love until the Holy Spirit of God is in your life and beginning to control your life. That is why we have to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

What else is required? If I am reading this text carefully—I am just looking at what the Bible says—then I need a personal confession that Jesus is the Son of God. Look at John 15:4, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Look at John 5:5, “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

The Bible says “he that does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed that Jesus is the Son of God” (John 3:18).

A man born blind one day was trying to figure out who healed him. Jesus eventually found him after he had been interrogated by the Pharisees. And Jesus introduced him to Himself. “Do you know who it is who healed you?” “Tell me who it is, Lord, that I might worship Him.” Jesus introduced him to the fact that He was the Son of God. And he said, “I believe that You are the Son of God.” Is it necessary to believe that? You bet. You will never experience the love of God until you confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

And one other thing. Look at John 5:1. Again, if I am reading my Bible, taking in each statement, then a personal belief that Jesus is the Messiah is necessary. It says that whoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, is born of God. I have to believe Jesus is the Messiah.

Look back at 1 John 2:22 please. It says,

Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either. He who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

You must believe Jesus is the Messiah.

Flip back to the Gospel of John chapter 4. Is it necessary to believe that Jesus is the Messiah in order to experience the love of God? God's answer is "Yes." In John 4:25, Jesus met a Samaritan woman who had an immoral lifestyle. And I read at verse 25,

25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things."

26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

27 And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?"

28 The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,

29 "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did."

40 So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.

41 And many more believed because of His own word.

42 Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of [What?] the world."

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Praise God for His love!

Let's close with prayer.

Father, You know how easy it is for us to say the words but not to show it in our life. And there are a lot of us who struggle with the love of God for many reasons. You tell us You love us, no matter what—whatever we do, whoever we are, whatever we say—You love us. And Your love was

demonstrated when Jesus died on a cross for our sins. God, I pray for those right now who are not sure that if they died today they would be in heaven. They are not really sure they have ever been born of the Spirit of God. And life has been frustrating in terms of experiencing love. God help us to see Your wonderful love for us. Now I pray Lord, that those of us who say we know You, may once again understand that Your love needs to be shown, demonstrated one to another. We need to trust Your Holy Spirit to fill us and control us, in order for us to really show the love of God—to experience it. Help us, Lord, to see that. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

The subject is the glory of God. Take your Bibles and turn to Exodus 33. It is a wonderful theme, the glory of God. The glory of God refers to what He is, all of His attributes, His greatness—that is His glory. That is a glory that we need. And by the way, that is a glory that we can receive. The Bible speaks about the transference of the glory of God to the glory that we need. But the glory of God also refers to what He deserves. We are to glorify Him. That's something we give to God. We can give glory to Him.

The psalmist in Psalm 29:2 says, “Give unto the Lord the glory due His name.”

In 1 Chronicles 29:13, after David collected the money for the temple project that his son Solomon would build, he said, “Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name.”

Psalm 145:5 says, “I will meditate on the glorious splendor of your majesty.”

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be [Praise the Lord for that] but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Glory time is coming. The glory time can also be here, but only in measure.

Several years ago when we were in Argentina and seeing the blessing of God there and multitudes coming to Christ, the crowds would shout out, almost in utter abandonment and ecstasy, *Gloria Dios! Gloria Dios!* Everywhere you went everybody was saying it. Glory to God! Glory to God! This is the time to praise the Lord. All heaven breaks out in joy. The angels of God are rejoicing over one sinner who repents.

Some of you may not know, but our current western culture was really baptized in revival and evangelism. And as it came into the last part of the 1800s, something like the Great Awakening that brought this United States of America into existence, it seemed to happen all over again. God took an uneducated man named Dwight L. Moody and began to turn the nation upside down for God. Over a million people came to profess faith in Jesus Christ. Men followed him, like Billy Sunday and others. Sunday was a great song man for Dwight L. Moody who used to move audiences so much that Moody would not preach. He would just give the invitation after Billy sang. And there was a song that captured all those great days of evangelism and revival. It was called, “The Glory Song.” It was my privilege to hear Ira Sankey on a cylinder roll with his voice singing this song:

When all my labors and trials are o'er and I am safe on the
beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore, will through the ages
be glory for me.

O that will be glory for me. Glory for me. Glory for me.
When by His grace I shall look on His face, that will be
glory, be glory for me.

Charles Gabriel, who wrote that song also penned,

When by the gift of His infinite grace I am accorded in
heaven a place, just to be there, to look on His face, will
through the ages be glory for me. Friends will be there I
have loved long ago; joy like a river, around me will flow.
Yet just a smile from my Savior, I know, will through the
ages be glory for me. O that will be glory for me, glory for
me, glory for me. When by His grace I shall look on His
face, that will be glory, be glory for me.

It was a past generation that spoke of the glory that is coming. It seems to me the present
generation is interested only in our own glory.

Let's pray.

Father, we desire that You be glorified. We desire to
understand Your glory and the dimensions and extent of it.
Lord, we know one day, You have told us, that glory will
be a reality in our lives. Father, help us to focus on who
You are. Help us to focus on the wonderful hope that we
have in You. Help us, Lord, to be lifted out of the struggles
now. To see You in all Your glory. Remember King David
said, "I long to see Your glory as I once saw it in the
sanctuary." Remember Isaiah spoke of Your glory as the
posts of the temple were moved at the voice of Him who
cried and the place was filled with smoke. God, may we see
and understand Your glory. Thank You, Lord, for what
You are going to do. And it is in Jesus' name that we pray.
Amen.

The glory of God is revealed in several ways and understood and seen in several ways.
One of which is certainly in God's power. In the power of God you see glory, especially
in creation. Psalm 19:1 says,

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the expanse
shows the work of His hands.

Psalm 8:3-4 says,

When I consider the heavens and the work of Thy fingers,
and the sun and the moon and the stars, what is man that

Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou would visit him?

You see the glory in what God has made. Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 1 and we see an indictment against man who refuses to glorify God, for the glory that is seen in His power. In Romans 1 beginning at verse 18, the Bible tells us what happened to those who decided not to glorify God and wound up exchanging the glory of the Creator into the glory of something that that person had designed or made.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress [or hold down] the truth in unrighteousness,
19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.
20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,
21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,
23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man-- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.
24 Therefore God also gave them up.

What is the real answer to this particular passage when we read of God saying, “I am through with them?” Verse 32 says that those who practice such things are worthy of death and deserve the judgment of God. We look at all this and say, “What brings this indictment from God against man?” And the answer is because they refused to glorify God for what they had in creation.

The power of God displays, declares, reveals, the glory of God. Notice in verse 20 it mentions His eternal power. Whoever made this had to be in existence before it was made. This is eternal power. And whoever did it is obviously bigger than you and I. This is God’s eternal power and we are held accountable for those two facts no matter what else we know about God’s plan of salvation. The creation reveals a God of power. The heavens declare the glory of God.

The second way in which we see God’s power is actually in His presence. This is very fascinating to me. Turn to Exodus 40. The presence of God was displayed and reveals the power of God in it. And I kind of wish that something like what we are going to read about would happen today. If it did, some of us would call 9-1-1 rather than realize it was the power and glory of God. In Exodus 40, after the Israelites had all the instructions about how to build the tabernacle and all the instructions about how to manage the

worship of that facility, something interesting happens when they get all done with the project.

34 Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
35 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Wow! Imagine what that was like. It was a cloud, a visible demonstration of the presence of the Lord. And it is called, “the glory of the Lord filled the temple.”

Turn to Leviticus—the next book—just over to chapter 9. And look, please, at verse 22. The glory of God is revealed, not only in His power, but in His presence. And He demonstrated that presence in a visible manner to the children of Israel. In Leviticus 9:22-24,

22 Then Aaron lifted his hand toward his people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings.
23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.
24 And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

Can you imagine this? That giant bronze altar, which the priests had to climb up to and there are animals all over it. He has sacrificed them. They go for a moment into the tabernacle of meeting, stopping for a moment at the laver to wash their hands, then they go into the presence of the Lord. And they come back out and say a blessing for all of the people. And all of a sudden, God displays His glory and fire shoots out of heaven and burns up everything on the altar. And all the people fall on their faces. Maybe we should have that happen here today, amen? We lose sight of the glory of God in a generation filled with the glory of man.

Look at 2 Chronicles 7, please. It is interesting that it happened again when the temple was built. This was a temple far more beautiful, far more permanent it seemed, than the tabernacle. And yet it was not too long after this that it was destroyed. But Solomon had made a tremendous prayer of dedication, dedicating the temple for the worship of the Lord. And something happened when he finished praying. 2 Chronicles 7:1 says,

1 When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

2 And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD,
because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S
house.

Folks, the presence of the Lord is so awesome; it is like a thick cloud. Isaiah said it was like smoke. You cannot see and you cannot enter the building. And it is just filling the place. No wonder the people responded, “Gloria Dios! Glory to God!” God is visibly manifesting His presence among His people.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 3 and let me show you a third way in which the glory of God is revealed. Not only in His power, especially in creation. Not only in His presence as it was visibly demonstrated to the children of Israel, but also in those principles that we call the law of God. Those principles that a lot of people would just as soon not read today or pay any attention to, but instead they reevaluate or reinterpret. The Bible says the glory of the Lord was there. You learn something about God by finding out what He believes is right and wrong. The law was never intended to save us, folks. The Bible says the law was a school master to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

The Bible says, “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). The Bible says, “The law was added because of transgressions” (cf. Galatians 3:9). The Bible says that we did not receive the Spirit by the works of the law, but rather the hearing of the faith. And the Bible also says that we do not become mature or grow in the Lord by keeping the law, but rather by faith in what God says. I understand all of that. But in this generation we have decided the law has no purpose, no plan, no meaning, no significance to our life. Well, it certainly does. The law reveals what sin is from God’s point of view. And that is the only thing that makes sin be sin. It is not our view, it is what God says.

And in 2 Corinthians 3, we have an analysis of the glory that was in the law, compared to the glory that is coming in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:7 it says, “But if the ministry of death”—now what that means is that the law simply condemned us. If you offend in one point you are guilty of all of it. The Bible says the soul that sins, it shall die. So it was a ministry, a service that God gave to us that really wound up in death. It tells you what is wrong and why you are going to suffer the consequence.

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on
stones, [The Bible said God wrote it with His own finger,
right in the stone. Can you imagine being Moses and seeing
that? It says, if that] was glorious, so that the children of
Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because
of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing
away:

8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, [and it
did] the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in
glory.

10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.

11 For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech--

13 unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

15 But even to this day, when Moses is read [and he is every Shabbat] a veil lies on their heart.

16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory [presumably His] to glory [presumably ours] just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Now that may be a little difficult to comprehend if that is the first time you have ever heard it or gone over it. But let me explain what it is saying. In the law there is glory. In Christ there is glory. In the law, it is passing away. In Christ it is permanent. The glory that we receive because of faith in Christ, though we do not see the visible demonstration of it, we will one day. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be,” the Bible says. But one day you are going to look at each other and say, “Man, glory!” But today you look at them and say, “You need help!” But one day it will be glory. The Bible says our body will be fashioned like unto His glorious body, the body of glory. It is going to happen one day.

Now to illustrate that the glory of the law was there, it does reveal the character of God, but it is passing away. It does not achieve the purpose that we need to have done in our hearts. The glory of Christ does. To illustrate it, here is what God did. When He was talking to Moses and giving those Ten Commandments and other instructions on the tablets of stone, God caused the brilliant light of His own presence to reflect off of the face of Moses. Now it is very interesting. When he came down from the mount, it was shining so brightly it was like having a bright light right in your eyes. And the people could not look at him, so he had to put a veil over his face. The interesting thing is that would fade away after a while. And then they could look at him again. He could remove the veil.

The law had glory in it. Does the law tell us about Jesus Christ? Oh, yes. In the law is the sacrificial system. In the law we learn that without the shedding of blood there is no

forgiveness of sins. There was glory there in the law; but it is a glory that passes away because of the reality of what it was picturing has not come yet. And just like the fading face of Moses, that is what the glory of the law is. It does tell us about the Lord. But it does not give us the solution. It points to the solution. But the law itself does not save. Only Jesus Christ saves, who is the fulfillment of the law. All of the law pictured the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is fascinating, as Moses' face would glow, so the law glows. It glows with everything man needs to know about sin and about sacrifice, but it pointed to them. It was, as Paul said in Galatians, "a tutor, a school master," saying that it is over there that you need to go. It is Jesus Christ you need. He is the fulfillment. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to those who believe," says Romans 10:4.

The glory was there though. Turn back to Exodus 34. The glory was in the principles that God gave when He said, "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal." God's glory is there.

29 Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.

30 So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.

31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them.

32 Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai.

33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.

34 But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded.

35 And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.

What a fascinating analysis of the glory of God. If you think about it, if you really start thinking about it, it makes a lot of sense in a lot of areas. One thing that really struck me, is that Moses simply reflects the glory of God. That is true of us as well. But did you know that according to the Bible, when you become a believer in Jesus Christ, you are

not simply going to reflect the glory of God, which you do once in a while? Not always, but once in a while this happens and I call it “leaking out glory.” You dribble out something good and folks say, “That must have been the Lord.” But anyway, most of the time you look pretty much like everybody else and you do not look like you are shining in any way. But the truth is that God places within you the glory of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, and you have this treasure in you. And one day you are going to really shine. And it will not be a reflection anymore. It will be the glory of the Lord in your life forever. And I say, “May that day hurry because some of us are looking pretty crusty!” Amen? We look like we need help soon.

Now turn to John 1 please. Not only do you see God’s glory in His power and in His presence and His wonderful principles we call the law, but you see God’s glory in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. In John 1:1, John refers to it and he said, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Then in verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His [What?] glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John, when did you behold His glory? What do you mean you beheld His glory? A lot of folks who saw Him did not see what you saw. What are you saying?

Turn back to Matthew 17 please. The apostles went around in the early days of the church telling folks they had seen the glory of the Lord. John was a part of a special group of three men who were on the mountain of transfiguration with Jesus Christ. It says in Matthew 17:1-2,

1 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;
2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

By the way, if I were the devil and I wanted to counterfeit this, which the devil always does, then I would make you see lights. It is amazing to me how many experiences people have that talk about “near death” or “out of the body” or whatever, and they always see a light. And there is some tunnel and there is light at the end. Hey, it may be the lights of an oncoming train! You know, you may have had too much chili—that may have been your problem. Let me tell you the devil can deceive you. The Bible even says in 2 Corinthians 11 that his angels (his demons or his ministers) literally change themselves into angels of light. How interesting! The devil himself knows this light issue very well.

The light we need is the light of Jesus Christ. The Bible says He was transfigured in front of them. Now something else happens. Verse 3 says, “Behold Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with Him.”

I was talking one day with a Jewish friend and we were discussing the matter of the two witnesses in the book of Revelation. And I told him I thought it was Moses and Elijah. And I still remember his words, they were kind of cute. He said, “I will tell you what,

Dave, if Moses and Elijah come back, I think I will believe along with a lot of other Jewish people.” Moses was the greatest law giver and Elijah was the greatest prophet. Can you imagine the joy that is in Peter, James, and John’s heart? Peter speaks up—he usually did. In verse 4 it says, “Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here.’”

Now, is that unbelievable? I mean, that is like saying the obvious. “Boy, this is great! Let’s not go anywhere else. I will tell you what, we will build three tabernacles; one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for You.” And all of a sudden the visible manifestation of the glory of the Lord comes. I did not make it up. Look at verse 5. “While he was still speaking”—perhaps Peter said—“Let’s get it organized. John, James, you guys go into town and get the nails. We will build this thing right here.” And while he is still talking—[thunder sounded].

“Man, it is getting cloudy here. You guys better get into town and get that stuff quick. Let’s not lose what we got here.”

“Peter!”

“Who said that?”

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

I don’t know if he got the message or not, but it means—forget Moses and Elijah. You want to know what these guys thought of that event? Turn please to 2 Peter 1. Their lives were changed by what they had seen. John said, in John 1:14, “We beheld His glory.” And in 2 Peter 1:16-18 I read these words:

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.
[They saw it.]

17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory:
“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

“We were eyewitnesses. We saw it. We beheld His glory,” they must have said.

I do not know what happened during the transfiguration people. I really don’t. A lot of folks ask and I have studied it. I have preached sermons on it and I still do not think I know what I am talking about. I am serious. I know this: that God says one day we will not need the sun, the moon, and stars because the glory of the Father and the Lamb is all the light we will need. In some mysterious, powerful, and supernatural way, Jesus pulled back the curtain of His flesh (which made Him look like any other man) and all of a sudden the brilliant, glory of God appeared in terms of rays of light that came shooting out of His body. It literally was stunning to Peter, James, and John. When they finally opened their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only, and they never forgot the experience.

The glory of God is in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. You talk about glory—that is Jesus.

Now number five. Turn back to 2 Corinthians 3 again. The glory of God is revealed in His power, in His presence, His visible presence to the children of Israel, in His principles we call the law of God, and in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. But the glory of God, praise the Lord, is also revealed in His people, those who come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. I can look at you and you can look at me, and we can say, “There is glory in them bones.” There is glory there. Sometimes you look at somebody and say, “I do not know. Are you sure they are a Christian?” At other times you look at them and say, “There is glory there, man, there is glory in that believer.”

We read at the end of 2 Corinthians chapter 3 the words that, “We, with unveiled face beholding in a mirror—[the Word of God itself is that mirror]—the glory of the Lord.” You see who God is. The Bible says, while you are doing that and looking at who God, or who the Lord, is you are being transformed. That is the word “metamorphosis”—the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. “You are being transformed into the same image from glory (the glory that is the Lord’s) to glory, (the glory you now have) just as by the Holy Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18, paraphrased). The Spirit does it as you look into the Word.

How does one get transformed? How does one change? To put it in our vernacular, how does one go from what looks like a bombed out, “grossville-type” person, into somebody that can be used of the Lord? How does it happen? It happens by the Holy Spirit using the Word of God, changing a person on the inside. The problem is, you see, it is not always visible on the outside. “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Jump down into chapter 4 and I will show you what I mean. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-7 it says,

3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.

6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure [this glory of God in the person of Christ—we have this treasure] in earthen vessels, [that is clay pots, not worth much] that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

Now folks, in the ancient city of Corinth, as you head towards the judgement seat called the bema seat, still sitting there today, you walk down the main street on either side there are shops and a few little dwelling places. The remains are still there and in these shops we found clay pots from first century A.D. Corinth. And these clay pots were used in Corinth which was a very wealthy city—extremely wealthy—and in that city they would use clay pots to put their precious treasures in, of gold and silver and jewelry and so forth. They put it in a dumb-looking pot so that nobody would think to look there. If you put it in a very nice gold pot, then people would think that is where your treasures are kept. The point is then taken by the apostle Paul. He said, “That is a good idea; that is just like what God does.

Do you know what you look like? A clay pot. That is not exactly thrilling to your self-esteem, I know, but that is what you look like. God says you are a clay pot, but inside there is a wonderful treasure. It is the glory of God and you have not yet seen how glorious it is. But one day you are going to see what glory is all about. We are going to shine in His brightness. We are going to explode with the radiance of God’s life within us. It is like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. And some changes do take place. We are being changed. And every now and then a little wing sticks out of the shell. And then he pulls it back in.

Well, every now and then you do the same thing. You dribble out a little glory and somebody looks at you and says, “Boy, that must have been the Lord!” But then they look again and they say, “No, no. He is still a caterpillar.” They see the shell. That is all they see. And that is the game that we are in, isn’t it? It is a terrible way to live. I wish Christian people would live beyond that, but that is the game we are in. What we do, and what we say; we are into everything. We are into the outward appearance. That is what our whole life is all about and that is where we struggle. That is where we have hurts. That is where we have disappointments and frustrations. That is what it is all about. Listen folks, one day it will all be over, praise God! It will all be over and it will be glory day like you have never seen. But the truth is that the glory is there now, in the people of God.

I love to look into the eyes of a precious saint who is just falling apart physically and near death in terminal illness. I have seen that many times in my life and I love to look into their eyes because I can see glory. I can see people wracked with pain who long to be with the Savior and have a joy and have a peace that is unexplainable in human terms. I have seen glory in their eyes. Let me tell you, I have not seen anything compared to what we will one day be. All of the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared—and what are we doing? We are comparing them all the time. That is what is big to us—all the hassles of life. It is not what’s coming. We don’t even like to live that way.

We were programmed and taught—this generation more than any one in our culture—was taught to focus on itself. And you know that and I know that. We have been programmed constantly to think that. We are into appearances. We are into things. We are a materialistic generation and we have lost sight of heaven. We have lost sight of

glory and that is why we cannot endure when things do not go right for us. That is why when trouble comes, we fall apart. It is because we have never learned where the glory lies. The glory does not lie in the pragmatic business matters of our life that you and I have to deal with every day. That is not where the glory lies. The glory is inside every believer and one day will fly forth like the butterfly. And one day you will see what you cannot see now, that we are filled with glory. And the next time you are ready to rag on somebody and put them down and criticize them, you remember that James said, “You better be careful. You are doing it to the glory of God.”

There is glory in that person. Well did you see what they did? I know. Just wait. They are just caterpillars. But the DNA is not caterpillar. It is glory! It is a butterfly. And one day they are going to fly forth. One day.

We need to look at each other in the light of eternity not in the light of the present. Some of us are going to make a miserable mess even today. Amen? You can go home from church, you can be so fired up, get in the car and something happens and your whole day is blown. Everything you heard in church is blown. And you are grumpy and miserable and upset the rest of the day. You can go home and rip your family apart and say, “Hallelujah” to the Lord. Listen folks, “It does not yet appear what we shall be.” I am so glad that one day it is going to be glory time, aren’t you? It is coming. Be patient, my fellow, beloved pilgrims. The coming of the Lord is drawing near.

And that brings me to the sixth way in which God’s glory is revealed. Turn to Matthew 24. It is revealed in the promises of His coming. I do not know about you, but I am getting pretty excited over the Second Coming of Christ lately. I know this is not a series on prophecy, but I am going to slip it in wherever I can. I can remember sitting in a classroom in seminary, dreaming about what might happen in society that is happening right now. I pulled out a sermon I preached in 1963 when I was just a student preacher. And that sermon was on Revelation 13 on the mark of the beast. I told the audience—I remember it well because it is in there in my notes—that one day I could see a confederacy of nations in Europe who would have one common currency. I did not even know what I was saying. A lot of people responded, “Oh man, he is just a kid. He will learn.” And look at us. You know I can hardly keep from buying a newspaper every day. I do not know about you, but it is so exciting right now for me. You know it is almost like God’s writing the headlines. And that is something for me to say, knowing my attitudes toward the media. I mean, that is great. I mean it is like God is just putting it out there for us.

I few months ago I read on the front page of the Jerusalem Post that Israel wants to have a security agreement with the United States of Europe to guarantee the peace and security of their borders. I said, “Hey, pack your bags, folks. We are going home. It is not going to be long.” Listen, that is spoken of in Daniel 9. Eighty percent of the agricultural products of Europe are coming out of the little agricultural nation that we call Israel. And they have got to have a pact. Listen, God set that whole thing up long ago.

And look at the movement towards peace in our world. God told us, “When they say, ‘Peace and safety,’ then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child and they will not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3). “It is a false peace,” God said. When it comes from the leaders of this world, watch out. Oh, we all desire peace. I am just telling you, folks, we are getting near glory time, amen? Hey the Lord is going to come.

The other day a fellow told me, he said, “You are into escapist theology.”
I said, “You bet. I am out of here. You bet.”

Matthew 24:29-30, watch it says,

29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great [What? What does it say?] glory.

You want to know about the glory of God? You will see it when Jesus comes again. The whole sky will be filled with His glory. Man, what a day that is going to be!

Turn to Colossians 3:4, please. The exciting news is that something is going to happen to us too. Not only will there be a glory displayed in the actual event of His return, but there will be glory displayed in the lives of every believer. Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ, who is our life, appears then you also will appear with Him in [what?] in glory.”

Turn to Titus 2 and look at verse 13. You talk about glory! It says, “Looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing [the appearing of glory] of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” It is glory time coming.

I like Psalm 24:7-10 which says,

Lift up your heads O you gates. And be lifted up you everlasting doors and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads O you gates. And lift them up you everlasting doors and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory.

One day at a tour, for a little tour group we had on the temple mount, we were over by the eastern gate. And the eastern gate in Jerusalem is all walled up, as many of you know. And we were standing there with the tour group and the guide was, you know, talking to

us about different things. And I asked him about those gates. I said, “Hey, why don’t we knock down those gates and open them up.” He said, “Oh no. Only the Messiah can do that. Only the Messiah can do that.” I said, “Where is that found in the Bible?” One little older lady in our group mentioned, she said, “I think it is in the Bible somewhere about meeting Him at the eastern gate over there.” That is a song, but it was a nice thought. It is a song, but the idea was that the gate is toward the east.

When you build the tabernacle or the temple, you know, your gate is always toward the east. And the idea is that the Messiah will come. They are not going to build the temple there, they say, until Messiah comes. He is going to build the third temple. The first one, Solomon built. The second one, Herod built. The third one is going to be built by the Messiah. The dimensions of which are described in Ezekiel 40:4-8. And the glory of the Lord will come through the gates. We finally brought out the fact that it is in Psalm 24:7-10 where it says, “The King of glory is going to come through those gates. And who is the King of glory? He is the Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory.” One day the Lord is going to come and it is going to be glory.

Turn to Philippians chapter 3. Now when the Lord comes, here is what is going to happen to you and me. Philippians 3:20-21. Our “citizenship,” that is the English word “politics.” It comes from that Greek word, our politics is heaven. It is good to remember that when we go to vote on something, isn’t it? Our politics is in heaven and I like what one writer said. “May heavenly politics govern our voting on earth.”

20 For our citizenship [politics] is in heaven, from which we
also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;
21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be
conformed to His glorious body, [the body of His glory]
according to the working by which He is able even to
subdue all things to Himself.

God is going to change our body. He calls it now, lowly—literally, humiliation or body of humiliation. You are into your body and God says it is not worth a dime. God says it is just a clod of dirt. Amen? Does that thrill you? I mean, that is what I think about all the time. Our world is filled with emphasis on the body. It really is. It is just filled with it. You know that and I know that. You know, pumping iron, doing aerobics. You know, eating well and all that stuff. Which, you know, if you want to enjoy life you probably should do that. But let me tell you something, in reality, you are falling apart. Amen? You are going down the tubes. It will not be long now till it is over for you. You may say, “Man, how thrilling. I am glad I came to church.”

The good news is that one day God will take that body of humiliation that is in fact decaying, as we all know, and God will change it and it will never decay. One day there will be no more sin, no suffering, no sickness nor death. Our body will be fashioned like the glorious resurrection body of Jesus Christ and that day is coming.

Look at 1 Corinthians 15 and notice please, verse 39. Talk about glory in the body! In verses 39-40 it says,

39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, and another of birds.

40 There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

Listen to me folks, in the Greek there is a play on words here that is not immediately observable in English. There are two Greek words for “another.” One is our word which we would say, “another of the same kind.” You are just like me. You are another one like me. There is another word that is our word *heteros* which means “another of a different kind.” *Alos* means the same kind. *Heteros* means a different kind. *Heteros* is on many English words, like heterogeneous. A culture that is heterogeneous is different, very different, or very distinct—not the same kind.

Now I just thought it was kind of sweet of the Lord to show us that there are some kinds that are alike. But there are other kinds that are totally different. And when He said that the glory of the celestial is one kind and the glory of the terrestrial is another, He uses another of a different kind. I just want everybody in the audience to know that one day you are going to be different than what you are now. And I say, “Praise the Lord!” You are going to be different, totally different.

41 There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon,
[they are the same] and another glory of the stars [that is
the same]

But when you compare the heavenly body with the earthly body it is totally different. So the illustration here is not only using the planetary sun, moon and stars—that is one kind of glory. They are all kind of the same. But they are different from what we have on earth, verse 39, birds and flesh and beasts, et cetera. And the point of it is remarkable in dealing with the resurrection body. Keep reading.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown
in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in [What? What does
it say? It is raised in] glory.

My dear friends, one day you are going to have a body that will never again be sick. One day you are going to have a body and you will never again face death. One day you are going to have a body that will not have to worry about diet. Amen? You talk about being delivered from bondage. There it is. One day you are going to have a body that is glory. And guess what? Your faith in Jesus Christ has already planted the DNA of that body inside of you. Is that not something? You are looking at me saying, “I know that guy.”

What is he doing up there? I know exactly what he is like. I have known that guy from the past. And there are some ladies here that have known me since I was a little kid in Sunday school. And they know I am a miracle up here. They know that. And maybe you are thinking or saying, “Who do you think you are up there?” I don’t think anything, man. I just know there is glory coming.

And let me tell you something. When you look in the eyes of somebody who says they are a believer and they know Jesus Christ as Savior, the next time you look at them you be very careful what you say about them or to them. They are glory. “And it doth not yet appear what they shall be.” It is going to all change soon, everybody.

Turn to Revelation 15 for one last point. You see the glory of God revealed in a number of ways in the Bible. In His power, especially creation; in His presence, through a visible demonstration to the children of Israel; in His principles we call the law; and in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ; in His people who come to know Him; and in the promises of His Second Coming; but you also see it in the place where God dwells.

In Revelation chapter 15 the scene is heaven. Verse 7 says,

7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.

8 The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Obviously the visible demonstration of God’s glory in heaven was similar to what He had in the past in the tabernacle, in the temple. It was filled with smoke ushering out from His presence. Amazing!

Look at chapter 21. In that city we call the New Jerusalem, the holy city, we affectionately refer to it as heaven. It says in Revelation 21:10-11, 22-23,

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 having the [What? What does it say?] glory of God.

22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

Folks, the place where God dwells is nothing but glory.

I read in Psalm 23, the Shepherd's Psalm, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." There is nothing but glory there. We do not need the sun, moon, and the stars anymore. They are only a reflection of the power of God. They are only the finger play of God. We will have Almighty God and all the light we need is God and Jesus Christ. That is all we need. Talk about glory!

Well this message makes a couple of verses very interesting. Romans 3:23. "For all have sinned and come short of [what?] the glory of God." There is the problem right there. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That is why you need a Savior. There will be no glory in your life until you get Jesus—none.

The second verse I find very interesting for all Christians is this. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the [what?] the glory of God." Everything, means things that are as menial and common and everyday as eating and drinking, do everything to the glory of God. Have you done everything today to the glory of God?

Let's pray.

Father, You know how we come short of the glory of God. The psalmist said, "Not unto us but unto You give glory." It seems like we are doing the opposite all the time. You said, "He who glories let him glory in the Lord." And we keep boasting in ourselves and our own achievements. God, I pray for those in our audience that have never begun to experience the glory of God because they have yet to make a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God, help them to see that He is glory. And we will never begin to experience it until we know Him. God, I pray for those in our audience that are not sure if they died now whether they would be in heaven or not. God, help them to see the seriousness of this moment. You tell us, "If we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we would be saved." God, bring us to that place of commitment where we trust You and You alone, so that the glory of God in the person of Christ will now be in our lives, a treasure in earthen vessels.

And God I pray for believers who are here, how easily we stray from Your glory. How easy we glorify ourselves. How easily we concentrate on our own feelings and attitudes and opinions. O God, thank You for the hope we have. Thank You that one day it will be all over. We will be with You forever. God help us now to focus on Your

glory. As Paul said, “That the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us and that we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord.” That is the glory the whole world needs to see that has come to our lives, the joy, the peace, the love, everything He has brought, are all reflections of His wonderful glory and nature. It is all because of Him and our faith in what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. God, we do not always reflect it as we should. But one day, we will be revealed that we are truly sons of glory. And we thank You, in Jesus’ wonderful name we pray. Amen.

The EXISTENCE and ATTRIBUTES of GOD

General Outline:

1) THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

2) THE NATURE OF GOD

- a) His Greatness
- b) His Sovereignty
- c) His Power
- d) His Trinity

3) THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

- a) His Holiness
- b) His Righteousness
- c) His Faithfulness
- d) His Mercy
- e) His Patience
- f) His Love

4) THE WORSHIP OF GOD

- a) The Fear of God
- b) The Praise of God

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

THE POSSIBILITIES

ATHEIST - "there is no God."
(two issues)

AUTHORITY - "I don't want anyone telling me what to do, especially when it conflicts with what I think is right or permissible."

ACCOUNTABILITY - "I don't want to be responsible for my actions or have to face the consequences of them.,,"

AGNOSTIC - "If there is a god, it's impossible to prove it"
(two issues)

FRUSTRATION - After trying to discover if there is a god, you have come up with a dead-end street!

FAILURE - You don't want to take the time or trouble to examine all of the evidence; what you have seen has failed to convince you!

MATERIALIST - "I don't need God; I simply don't care".
(two issues)

BREVITY OF LIFE - "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"

BENEFITS OF LIFE - As long as you are enjoying the benefits, why bother!

RELIGIOUS - "there is a God,"

The ALTERNATIVES - Either God exists, but He is unknowable, or He exists, and is knowable.

The APPLICATIONS -

FEAR - you are afraid NOT to believe in Him!

FAILURE - you cannot cope with life or some personal problem - the "pitch" here is that God can help you out of your problem!

FACTS - you cannot explain these things:

COSMOLOGY - the existence, size, and dimensions of the universe/outer space

TELEOLOGY - the presence of order and design

ANTHROPOLOGY - the nature and rationale of humanity

ONTOLOGY - the universal idea of religion

FAITH - you accept the existence of God without all the facts (three kinds):

"WHISTLING IN THE DARK" - you hope it is so, though you have no evidence!

“BLIND FAITH” - you believe something when the facts are against you!

“TRUE FAITH” - you trust the facts that are available and knowable!

THE PROOFS (as to belief in a personal and knowable God)

The REVELATION of the universe - Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20

The RECORDS that are readable and available for study -II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:19-21

Consider its UNITY - 40 authors; 1588 years

Consider its HISTORICAL INFORMATION - nations, events, dates, persons, places, etc.

Consider its WISDOM AND MORAL VALUES

Consider its TRANSLATION AND DISTRIBUTION -before printing: 13,088 copies

Consider its FULFILLED PROPHECIES

THE REALITY of Jesus Christ and His claims

The REALIZATION of personal experience (prayer, work of Holy Spirit, miracles, new birth, etc.1

THE PROBLEMS in accepting this evidence

Regard it as “weird” or needing help quick! “Psychologically unbalanced” -

Refuse to accept any of the points and remain in intellectual darkness.

Retreat to another view and have “faith” that you are right!

Reject what you have heard because you do not want to accept the responsibility of it or do not feel a need to pursue it any further!

Receive the facts available and determine to pursue these things until you settle for yourself whether they are so! cf. John 7:17

THE NATURE OF GOD

THE GREATNESS OF GOD - Psalm 8:1, 9; 83:18; 96:1-6; 145:1-3,5-6; 150:2

HE IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE! - Judges 13:17-18, 22; Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 145:3

It refers to what He KNOWS - Job 42:3; Psa. 139:1-6; Isaiah 28:29

It refers to what He DOES - Isa. 25:1; Romans 11:33

It refers to who He IS - Psalm 145:1-3

HE IS INCORRUPTIBLE!

Because His name is HOLY - Psalm 38:4; 97:12; 99:3, 5, 9; 111:9; 145:21

Because His name is ETERNAL - Psalm 72:17; 182:11-12; 135:13

HE IS INCOMPARABLE!

Because of His POSITION - Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:1-4

Because of His POWER - Psalm 66:1-4; 68:32-35

To answer prayer - John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26

To save people - John 1:12; Acts 4:12; I Peter 1:3-5

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD - Romans 9:6-24; 11:33-36

HIS POWERFUL CONTROL OF ALL THINGS

Based on three things:

His POSITION - Psalm 97:1; 99:1-3; 163:19; 113:1-6; Daniel 4:17, 25, 34-35

His POWER - Isaiah 43:13; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3

His PLEASURE - Psalm 115:3; 135:5-6; Proverbs 16:4 cf. Ezekiel 18:23, 32

HIS PROVIDENTIAL CARE OF ALL THINGS

Involves four things:

His WAYS - Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33 cf. Genesis 58:19-21

His WISDOM - Daniel 2:20-23

His WORK - Philippians 1:6; 2:13 cf. Acts 15:18

His WILL - Ephesians 1:11

HIS PERSONAL CHOICE IN THE DESTINY OF ALL PEOPLE

Consider two things:

His RIGHT - ROMANS 9:14-24

His REASON - Acts 13:48; I Corinthians 1:26-29; Ephesians 1:4-6

HIS PREDICTED CLIMAX OF ALL HISTORY

Revelation 19:1-6 - involves four things:

The DEFEAT of all enemies - I Corinthians 15:20-28

The DOMINION of Jesus Christ - Ephesians 1:10, 22-23; Revelation 19:15-16

The DISAPPEARANCE of all former things - Rev. 21:1-4

The DESIGN of all things brand new - Rev. 21:5-8

THE POWER OF GOD – Psalm 111:1-10

TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES:

HIS POWER IS UNIQUE! (No one can do what God can do!) - Psalm 71:19; 77:13-14

Seen in His CREATION - Isaiah 44:24; 45:5-7, 18

Seen in His CONTROL of time and events - Isaiah 44:6-8; 46:5, 9-11

Seen in His CARE of His people - Isaiah 43:1-3

HIS POWER IS UNLIMITED! (There is nothing too hard for Him to do!) - Psalm 145:1-6, 18-13

Four ways in which that is seen:

EMPHASIZED in the miraculous birth of Isaac –Genesis 18:1-14

EXPLAINED in God's answer to Job - Job 48:9, 15, 19; 41:1, 18; 42:1-6 (BEHEMOTH G, LEVIATHAN)

EXERCISED in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead - Ephesians 1:19-21

EXPERIENCED in the life of the believer (in five ways)

In the SALVATION we receive - Matthew 19:23-26

In the SUFFERINGS we encounter - II Cor. 12:9-10

In the SUPPLY of our needs that we face –Philippians 4: 11-13, 19

In the STRENGTH we need in the inner man –Isaiah 40:28-31; Ephesians 3:14-21

In the SHARING of the gospel - Acts 1:8; 4:31-33

THE TRIUNITY OF GOD – Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 28:19-20

CONSIDER SEVEN FACTS:

The Triunity Of God Is Defined By The Use Of Plural Pronouns - Genesis 1:26-27; 11:5-9

The Triunity Of God Is Dependent Upon The Uniqueness And Unity Of Each Person Of The Godhead
- Deut. 6:4-5; Matt . 28:19; John 18:38

The Triunity Of God Is Declared when Each Person Is Called “God”

FATHER - John 6:27 (by Jesus in John 5:18)

SON -John 1:1,14; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; I John 5:28

HOLY SPIRIT - Acts 5:3-4.

The Triunity Of God Is Described When Divine Attributes Are Given To Each Person

God is eternal - Deut. 33:27; Psa. 90:1-2; John 8:56-59; 17:5; Heb. 9:14

God knows all things - Psalm 139:1-6; Mark 2:6-8; John 2:23-25; I Cor. 2:10-11; I John 3:28

God is everywhere present - Deut. 31:6; Psa. 139:7-10; Matt. 28:20; John 14:16

The Triunity Of God Is Demonstrated By The Exercise Of Their Power

In CREATION - Genesis 1:1; Job 26:13; 33:4; John 1:3

In RESURRECTION -John 10:17-18; Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:19-28

The Triunity Of God Is Displayed By Their Presence In The Believer -John 14:16-18, 28, 23; 15:26; I Cor. 6:19

The Triunity Of God Is Designed To Reveal The Spiritual Unity Of Believers - John 13:34-35; 17:20-23

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

THE HOLINESS OF GOD - Psalm 99

THE NATURE OF GOD'S HOLINESS - Isa. 6:1-5; Rev. 4:8

It refers to His unique PERSON - Ex. 15:11; I Sam. 2:2

It refers to His exalted POSITION - Psa. 99:2-3, 5; Isa. 57:15

It refers to the specific PLACE where God dwells:

“holy hill” - Psa. 99:9

“holy dwelling place, . . .heaven” - II Chron. 38:27

“holy temple” Psa. 5:7; 11:4; 138:2 cf. Eph. 2:21

“holy mountain” - Isa. 56:7; 66:28

“holy place” - Psa. 24:3

“holy Jerusalem” - Rev. 21:18

“holy city” - Rev. 22:19

It refers to His special PEOPLE - Exodus 19:6 - “holy nation” cf. Lev. 1 1:44-45; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:19; I Pet. 2:9; 3:5

It refers to His designated PRIESTS - Lev. 21:1, 6, 7, 8 cf. I Peter 2:5

It refers to His remarkable POWER - Psa. 98:l; Rev. 15:3-4

It refers to His faithful PROMISES - Psa. 68:6; 89:33-35

It refers to His absolute PURITY - Lev. 19:2; 20:7, 26 cf. I Peter 1:13-16

OUR NEED FOR GOD'S HOLINESS

In our CONCERN to see the Lord - Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14

In our CONVERSION to Jesus Christ - I Cor. 6:11
“sanctified”

Jesus Christ Himself - I Cor. 1:38

The Holy Spirit - I Pet. 1:2

Blood of Jesus Christ - Heb. 9:13-14; IW18, 14; 13:12

Word of God - John 17:17, 19; Eph. 5:26

In our COMMITMENT to service and worship - Psa. 29:2; 96:7-9; Romans 12:1-2

In our COMMUNICATION of love and affection to other believers - Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:28; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26 (“holy kiss”) cf. I Thess. 3:l I-l 3; 4:3, 7-8

In our CONDUCT before God and others - II Cor. 7:1; I Peter 1:13-16

At the second COMING of Jesus Christ - Eph. 5:27; I Thess. 5:23-24; Jude 24-25

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD - Romans 3:21-26

“righteous” - 238 times; 43 times in NT

“righteousness” - 306 times; 99 times in NT

“righteously” - 8 times; 2 in NT

“just” - 94 times; 35 times

“justice” - 28 times; 0 times in NT

dikaio - 86 times in NT

dikaioo - 40 times in NT

dikaiois - 93 times in NT

dikaiois - 10 times in NT

dikaiosis - 2 times in NT

WHAT IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD?

its grammatical meaning:

Hebrew - tsaddiyq - “straight” (207 times)

Greek - dikaioo - “to declare righteous”

It never means “to make righteous” - cf. Prov 17:15; Luke 7:29; I Tim. 3:16

Its moral understanding - Psalm 92:15
(absolutely free from any sin or unrighteousness_

its practical application - Psalm 145:17
(every act of God is just and fair)

Its theological usage:

It refers to WHO GOD IS - His righteous character
(non-transferable) - I John 2:29

It refers to WHAT GOD HAS DONE - specifically, the act of God which declares us to be righteous on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ for our sins and the satisfaction of the law's demands.

Psalm 145:17 - “The Lord is righteous in all his ways”
cf. Isa. 53:1; Jer. 23:5-6; Rom. 3:21-26

WHY IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD SO IMPORTANT?
(seven reasons)

It ESTABLISHES the validity of all God has said –Isaiah 45:22-25

It EXPLAINS the justice of God in judging believers as well as non-believers - Psalm 50:4-6; Acts 17:31; Rev. 16:4-7

It ENCOURAGES us in knowing that God will never forget what we have done in ministering to others - Heb. 6:10

It ELIMINATES any need for self-righteousness – Romans 3:27-28; 10: 1-4; Titus 3:5-7

It ENABLES us to practice righteousness in our personal lives - I Thess. 2:10; Titus 2:1 1-14; James 1:19-20; I Peter 2:24; I John 2:29; 3:7, 10

It EXALTS God in making our salvation possible.

It exalts His GRACE - Rom. 3:24; 5:18-21

It exalts His SON - Rom. 10:4, 9-10; I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 5:21

It EXPRESSES the reason why no one can condemn us or separate us from the love of Christ - Rom. 8:31-39

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD – Psalm 89:1-2, 8, 20, 24-27
cf. Proverbs 20:6; 25:19

Nehemiah 7:2 refers to Hananiah: “for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many”
It refers to:

(1) The COMMANDMENTS of God - Psalm 119:86, 138

(2) The CHARACTER of God Himself - I Corinthians 10:3; I John 1:9 cf. Psalm 36:5; 119:98

Consider the faithfulness of Jesus Christ: Isaiah 11:5; Hebrews 2:17; 3:2; Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 19:11

“faithful” - appears 82 times; 54 times in NT

“faithfulness” - 19 times; 0 times in NT

“faithfully” - 8 times; 1 time in NT

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD INVOLVES AT LEAST SEVEN THINGS:

HE WILL KEEP HIS WORD - Deut. 7:6-9; Heb. 6:13-20; 10:23; 11:11

cf. Proverbs 11:13

HE WILL EXTEND HIS COMPASSION - Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33,40-41; 5: 19-22

HE WILL RESTORE HIS PEOPLE THROUGH HIS CHOSEN SERVANT - Isaiah 49:5-13 (v. 7)

HE WILL PROTECT US FROM THE ENEMY - II Thess. 3:1-3

HE WILL HELP US IN TIMES OF TEMPTATION AND SUFFERING - I Cor. 10:11-13; I Peter 4:12-19

HE WILL FORGIVE OUR SINS - I John 1:9

HE WILL PRESERVE US BLAMELESS AT THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST - I Cor. 1:4-9;
I Thess. 5:23-24; II Tim. 2: 11-13

THE MERCY OF GOD – Psalm 103:1-22

“mercy” - 276 times; 59 in NT

“mercies” - 44 times; 5 in NT

“merciful” - 40 times; 5 in NT

“tender mercies” - 11 times; 0 in NT

“compassion” - 41 times; 21 in NT

“lovingkindness” - 26 times; 0 in NT

cheded - 250 times in OT

racham - 92 times in OT

eleos - 28 times in NT

eleeo - 43 times in NT

eleemosune - 14 times in NT

eleemon - 2 times in NT

eleeinos - 2 times in NT

oiktirmos - 5 times in NT

oikteiro - 2 times in NT

II Corinthians 1:3 calls God “the Father of mercies; the God of all comfort”

THE MERCY OF GOD INVOLVES THE FOLLOWING SEVEN THINGS:

IT INVOLVES HIS PERSON (WHO HE IS) - Psalm 103:1, 8 - “The Lord is merciful”
cf. Psalm 111:4; 116:5; 119:64, 156; 145:8; Ephesians 2:4

IT INVOLVES HIS PROVISION - Psalm 103:2-5 - “all His benefits”

IT INVOLVES HIS PATIENCE - Psalm 183:8-9

IT INVOLVES HIS PUNISHMENT - Psalm 103:8-9; 106:44-46; Lamentations 3:22

IT INVOLVES HIS PARDON - Psalm 103: 11-12 cf. Psalm 86:5; 130:7-8; Numbers 14:18-19

IT INVOLVES HIS PITY - Psalm 103:13-14; 109:21-27

IT INVOLVES HIS PLAN - Psalm 103:15-19

It is ETERNAL - Psalm 100:5; 138:8

It is FAITHFUL - Psalm 89:24, 28

It is SOVEREIGN - Romans 9:14-23

OUR RESPONSE:

TO PRAISE THE LORD - Psalm 86:12-13; 89: 1-2; 103:20-22; 106:1; 107:1; 115:1; 117:1-2; 118:1, 29; 136:1-3

TO PRAY FOR THE LORD'S HELP - Psalm 69:13-16; 86:1-3; 90:14; 94:17-19; 119:41, 58, 76-77, 124; 123:3-4; Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16

TO PRESENT OUR BODIES TO GOD FOR HIS USE - Romans 12:1-2

THE PATIENCE OF GOD – II Peter 3:1-18

Hebrew: 'arek - used 15 times (slow to anger)

Greek: makrothumeo - used 14 times (longsuffering)

makrothumia - used 14 times

makrothumos - used once
hupomeno - used 18 times

hupomone - used 33 times

FIVE THINGS ABOUT THE PATIENCE OF GOD:

It Controls His Sovereign Plan And Perfect Timing - Romans 9:22-24; James 5:7-11; I Peter 3:28

It Calms His Righteous Anger And Makes His Forgiveness Possible - Psalm 103:8-9 cf. Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18-19; Nehemiah 9:17; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:1-3

It Characterizes His Wonderful Love - I Cor. 13:4-8

It Cares About People Who Need The Lord – Psa. 86:15-17; Rom. 2:4; I Tim. 1:12-17; II Peter 3:9

It Comes To The Believer Through The Presence And Power Of The Holy Spirit – Gal. 5:22-23

We need it in our RELATIONSHIPS with other believers –Ephesians 4: 1-3; Colossians 3:12-13
cf. Proverbs 14:29; 15:18; 16:32

We need it in our RESPONSIBILITY to preach and teach God's Word - II Timothy 4:2-4

We need it in our REACTIONS toward unbelievers –II Timothy 2:24-26
(Greek - anexikakos - "holding up under evil" – similar to "slow to anger")

CLOSING ILLUSTRATION (of how God's patience works in contrast to our patience) - Luke 18:1-8

THE LOVE OF GOD – I John 4:7-5:5

HEBREW:

chashaq - used 11 times

'ahab - used 210 times

'ahabah - used 41 times

dowd - used 57 times

GREEK:

agapao - used 142 times

agape - used 116 times

agapetos - used 62 times

phileo - used 26 times

philia - used once

WHAT IS THE LOUE OF GOD?

It is a Divine RESOURCE that human beings need but are not born with - I John 4:7-8

It is a needed RELATIONSHIP which believers must have with each other - John 13:34-35; 15:12-17; I John 4:7, 11, 20-21; 5:1

“ought” - Romans 13:8

It is a Divine RESPONSE to human depravity and need – John 3:16-18; I John 2:1-2; 4:9-10

It is a Divine REASSURANCE that eliminates fear – I John 3:14-15, 19-21; 4:17-18
(u. 17 - “as He (that one) is”)

It is a personal RESOLVE to keep the commandments of Jesus Christ - John 14:15; 15:9-11; I John 2:3-6; 5:2-3

WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR US TO EXPERIENCE THE LOVE OF GOD?

A spiritual birth caused by God - I John 4:7

A personal knowledge of God - I John 4:7-8

The presence and work of the Holy Spirit – Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22; I John 3:24; 4:13

A personal confession that Jesus is the Son of God –John 3:18, 36; 9:35-38; I John 4:15; 5:5

A personal belief that Jesus is the Messiah - John 4:25-29, 39-42; I John 2:22-23; 5:1

THE WORSHIP OF GOD

THE FEAR OF GOD - Proverbs 1:1-7; 2:1-5; 3:1-8

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK:

What is the "fear of God"?

Why should we fear God?

How do we fear God?

WHAT IS THE FEAR OF GOD?

It is the key to knowledge and wisdom – Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 15:33

It is the knowledge of God Himself - Proverbs 2:5; 9:10

It is respect for the power of God's Word - Psalm 33:8-9

It is the hatred of sin - Proverbs 8:13

It is a fountain of life - Proverbs 14:27

It is hope in the Lord - Proverbs 23:17-18

WHY SHOULD WE FEAR GOD?

It PROLONGS days - Proverbs 10:27

It PROTECTS us - Proverbs 14:26-27; 19:23

It PROVIDES for our needs - Psalm 33:18-19; 34:8-10

It PLEASES the Lord - Psalm 147:10-11

It PROCLAIMS special blessings from the Lord – Psalm 25:12-14; 31:19; 85:9; 103:11, 13, 17; 115:13-15; 128:1,4; 145:19

It PROMISES future salvation - Malachi 3:16; 4:2

HOW DO WE FEAR GOD?

By keeping His commandments - Deuteronomy 6:2, 24; 8:6; 13:4; 17:19-20; 28:58; 31:12-13

By staying away from sin - Exodus 2:20; Proverbs 3:7; 16:6

By serving the Lord - Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:12, 20; 13:4; Joshua 24:14-15

By giving to the Lord - Deuteronomy 14:22-23

By praising the Lord - Psalm 22:23; 135:20

By trusting in the Lord - Psalm 115: 11; 119:74

THE PRAISE OF GOD – Psalm 150

“praise” - occurs 248 times (24 times in NT) .

“praises” - occurs 29 times (2 times in NT)

“praise the Lord” - occurs 33 times (once in NT)

IT MEANS AT LEAST SEVEN THINGS:

It Means We Exalt Him! - Psalm 34:1-3; 108:5; 118:28; Isaiah 25:1

It Means We Worship Him! - Psalm 66:1-4; 99:3, 5, 9; 138:2

It Means We Rejoice In Him! - Psalm 5:11; 9:1-2; 33:21; 68:4; 149:1-3

It Means We Boast In Him! - Psalm 34:1-3; 44:8

IT MEANS WE GIVE THANKS TO HIM! - Psalm 18:49; 30:4; 92:1-2; Hebrews 13:15

IT MEANS WE PLEASE HIM! - Psalm 69:30-31; 135:1-3

IT MEANS WE BLESS HIS NAME! - Psalm 34:1

For His LOVINGKINONESS - Psalm 63:3-4

For His WONDROUS THINGS - Psalm 72:18-19

For His SALVATION - Psalm 96:1-2

For His GOODNESS - Psalm 100:4-5

For His BENEFITS - Psalm 103: 1-2

For His exalted POSITION - Psalm 113:1-6

For His GREATNESS - Psalm 145:1-3, 21