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BIBLICAL STUDIES

Truth and the Interpretation of Scripture

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



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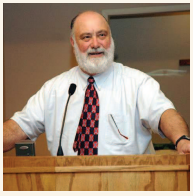
The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

PSALM 119:130

Interpreting Scripture involves faith, understanding, and a willingness to be corrected. This collection brings together John Weaver's messages on truth, humanism, providential wisdom, and repentance. Readers are invited to examine the assumptions they bring to the text and the responsibilities that follow from its teaching.

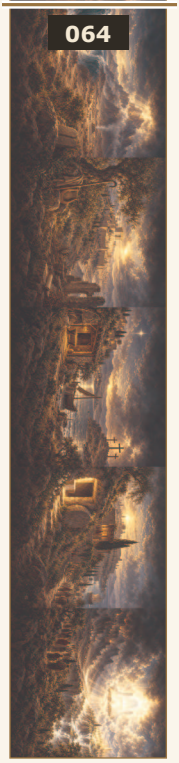
"These two verses simply mean that they were to bring forth fruit which evidenced and manifested true, genuine, biblical repentance."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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CHAPTER 1

How Deep is Your Faith

Introduction and Review of the Wayside Hearer

Mark chapter 4, verses 5 and 6, and then verses 16 and 17. The title of the message is, "How Deep Is Your Faith?" Our Lord says, "And some fell on stony ground where it had not much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up, it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away." Now skip down to verse 16, where our Lord interprets this parable: "...and these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time. Afterward, when affliction or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they are offended."

The parable of the sower, as I pointed out last week, is also sometimes known as the parable of the soils. It's all about hearing the Word of God. There are four distinct types of hearers in this parable, each present in our Lord's time and in our time as well. Notice how our Lord began this parable. Look in Mark 4 and verse 3: "Hearken. Behold, there went out a sower to sow." He begins with

the word "Hearken," and if you'll skip down to verse 23, he ends the parable: "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." So you begin with "Hearken," and then "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

Now let me remind you of last week's message and the main points. The title was, "Did You Lose Something?" It was all about the wayside hearer. I told you that there was another name for the wayside hearer: sometimes he is called the hard-hearted hearer. The main points I covered last week were this: first of all, whenever the Word of God is preached, there's a present activity of Satan to hinder and destroy and disturb. So mark it down, whenever the Word of God is preached, there is always Satan, according to this parable, attempting to steal the Word of God.

The Stony Ground Hearer Described

The second point I made is this: unless our hearts are prepared, we will never benefit from the Word of God. The wayside hearer's heart was never prepared, for the seed fell upon the wayside, was trod upon, and he could care less about it; the ground was not tilled, and there was nothing concerning preparation. The third point was that the wayside hearer was a negligent hearer. The seed was in plain sight; he could have picked it up, but he did not, caring absolutely nothing about it. It is our responsibility to make sure that we hear the word of God. Scripture says, "Take heed what you hear," and in Luke 8:18, "Take heed how you hear." So it is our responsibility not only to hear the Word of God, but to make sure it does not slip from our mind. Today I want to consider the second type of hearer, known not only as the stony ground hearer, but also as a shallow-hearted hearer. Look at Mark 4:5: "And some fell on stony ground where it had not much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up, it was scorched because it had no root, it withered away." Connect the words "stony" and "shallow." Many gardens and fields with stones in them bear quite well. When we hear of stony ground, we tend to think of ground with an awful lot of rocks. If you go up north, you will find plenty of fields with lots of stones. We do not have that problem down south; there are a few fields with little red rocks and pebbles, sometimes a

quarter-sized or 50-cent-sized red rock, but that is about it. Up north, there are simply rocks everywhere.

But you can have an excellent crop in a rocky field like that. Years ago, while preaching at a camp in Pennsylvania, I stayed in a cabin with a creek running by. I tried to explain that a creek is what you have in your neck, and a creek is something in which water runs, but they didn't quite understand. One morning I walked down by the creek, and several hundred yards from the cabin I came upon a sight that amazed me. Right in front of me was a rock at least as big around as half the size of this room, probably 12 to 15 feet high—double my height and then some. Sitting right on top of that rock was a full-grown pine tree, 15 to 20 inches in diameter, its roots going down around the rock into the ground and into the creek. It was a healthy, live pine tree right on top of that rock. So a rock will not necessarily stop a plant from growing. If you've ever been to Yosemite, you look up and see a solid sheet of rock, a mountain that is a solid sheet of rock, and right in a crevice somewhere you see a big tree growing out of that solid rock. There's a little split in that rock, and the seed was able to penetrate into the ground in that split, and you have a tree growing up there. It's unbelievable. So when you and I think of stony ground, we normally think of ground that just has a lot of rocks in it, but that's not true. When our Lord speaks of stony ground, He's talking about a ground or a field in which there's only a few inches of topsoil and under it is a solid layer of stone or solid layer of rock. In such a field, plants really cannot find much depth. They cannot really take root and therefore they spring up very quickly.

Illustration of Stony Ground vs. Good Ground

Let me give you a comparison before I get started. If you had two gardens, one with good soil that has been tilled and plowed deeply, and another with very shallow soil over a solid layer of rock, tilled as deep as possible, you would soon make a clear observation. You would admire your stony ground garden because those plants shoot up quickly, looking green and great, and you would wish your good ground garden did as well. In fact, you would be amazed at how good the stony ground garden does and become concerned that your good ground garden is not doing any good at all. Over on the stony ground

you already have plants up, looking green and great, while on the good ground nothing has even protruded from the soil, and you think, "Man, I wish this garden would do as well as this garden." What's the difference? Why does the stony ground garden look so great so quickly? The answer is that the stony ground garden looks great simply because those seeds cannot produce a solid root structure. They have some roots, but they are very shallow, and consequently all the energy of the plant goes to producing the stalk, shooting it up above ground. When you look at the good ground garden and say it is doing poorly because nothing is up, that is because the seed is developing a root system first. Once it has a stable root system, it begins to send energy to the plant to send the stalk up above ground. So you have these two gardens, and the stony ground garden appears fine, great, and healthy, promising great results until the heat comes, or the wind comes, or a rainstorm like we had recently with seven or eight inches of rain. Then all of a sudden, all of those plants on the stony ground fall over and die, because they cannot take the pressure or the tribulation. Now, the stony ground hearer, according to our Lord, is much like this. The stony ground hearer, or the shallow ground hearer, is one who immediately rejoices at the Word of God.

The Shallow-Hearted Hearer's Response

He receives the word quickly, joyfully, readily, and easily. He is exuberant, responsive, and excited about the Word of God, and he excites all those around him, who marvel at how easily and quickly he was converted. There are peers in his life, a promise of real fruit. But appearances fade away very quickly, because he fades away and falls away very quickly. The shallow ground hearer cannot take persecution, prosecution, tests, trials, and tribulations. In such problems, his attitude quickly becomes, "Well, if I have to go through this to be a Christian, I don't want any part of it," or "I did not sign up for all of this," or "The cost is too high." He jumps out as quickly as he jumped in, not wanting to suffer or face any difficulties for the truth's sake.

Each of us has seen and known individuals like this. They respond so quickly, readily, and easily to the word of God, beginning with a burst of energy and great motivation. You look at that individual and

think, "This man is going to set the world on fire." A year later, you cannot find him. Sometimes it does not even take a year—just months, weeks, or sometimes just a few days. Our Lord is talking about the man who hears with a shallow heart. The seed fell on stony ground.

Lesson 1: There Is Such a Thing as a Temporary Believer

What are the lessons we are to learn from the stony ground hearer? First, we must learn that there is such a thing as a temporary believer. I did not say there is such a thing as a temporary Christian. If you define a Christian as someone who is Christ-like, then yes, there are temporary Christians as well, because there are times in our lives that none of us act like Christ consistently and constantly. But I am not using the word Christian like that. I am using it to refer to true, genuine believers who have been regenerated and converted, have repented of their sins, and believe savingly upon Jesus Christ. In that sense, there is no such thing as a temporary Christian. A real, genuine Christian does not apostatize and does not leave the faith. But the Scripture is teaching us there is such a thing as a temporary believer.

You say, how do you know that? Well, because the Bible tells us. I want you to look in your Bibles, first of all, to Matthew 13 and verse 21. I want you to see what the Scripture says. Matthew chapter 13 and verse 21. Look at what our Lord says now he's talking about the stony ground hearer or the shallow-hearted hearer and he says this. Matthew 13 verse 21, "Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while. For when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." Now look, if you would, at Mark 4, verse 17. Our Lord, once again, is interpreting this parable for us. Mark 4, verse 17, he says this, talking about the stony ground hearer, "...and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time. Afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended." Now, if you look in the book of Luke chapter 8 and verse 13, again, our Lord is talking about the shallow-hearted or the stony ground hearer. And he says this. This is his interpretation, not mine. In Luke 8 and verse 13, he says, "They on the rock are they which when they hear receive the word with joy,

and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in the time of temptation fall away."

I have given you three phrases from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew says he "dureth for a while." Mark says he "endures for a time." And in Luke he says, "which for a while believe." So the only conclusion you can come to is there is such a thing as a temporary believer. They are not saved. They have never been saved, but they temporarily believe. They may have joined the church. They may have gotten baptized. They may sing in the choir. They may even teach a Sunday school class temporarily, but they are not saved.

And how do we know? Because the Word of God specifically tells us. Look at Mark chapter 4 again, and begin reading at verse 14, in light of the context. Remember the message I preached last week, "Did You Lose Something?" on the wayside hearer. Mark chapter 4 and verse 14: "The sower soweth the word." Now watch. Our Lord says, "And these are they by the wayside where the word is sown. But when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts."

Is the wayside hearer saved? It could not possibly be, because the word of God is stolen from him. Now watch verse 16. Our Lord is talking about the stony ground hearer. He says, "And these are they likewise." In other words, they are just like the wayside hearer. "These are they likewise, which are sown on stony ground, who when they have heard the word immediately receive it with gladness." Clearly, the stony ground hearer is in the same predicament as the wayside hearer. The wayside hearer had the word of God stolen from him. He was negligent. He had no concern for the Word of God. And now our Lord says these that fall on stony ground are likewise. Just as the wayside hearer is lost, so the stony ground hearer is lost as well.

Have you ever asked yourself, why do professing believers leave the church? Leave the faith? And walk away from everything that has to do with Christianity? The truth of the matter is, we are given the answer to that question. The reason they leave the faith and leave the church and leave any and everything to do with Christianity is just because they were never Christians to begin with.

Look at 1 John 2:19. The Apostle John teaches, "They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." John says, "They went out." That is, they left and forsook the true believers, the church, and the work of God, that it might be made manifest that they were not genuinely converted to begin with. John clearly states, "For if they had been of us," that is, if they had really, genuinely been one of us, "no doubt," he said, "they would have continued with us." True believers always persevere in faith and repentance and obedience, and they hold steadfast to the Word of God. Those who are truly regenerate, born of incorruptible seed, trust Christ, and continue in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship of the church as true believers, will not and cannot ever apostatize. You say, but true believers have trials, tribulations, and problems. Yes, they do. And yes, we do. And yes, I do. And yes, you do. But tests and trials and persecution will always drive a true believer closer to the Lord Jesus Christ, closer to His Word. It will drive him to claim His promises and to seek divine help and mercy. Those who have real faith will never defect and never apostatize. Those who do not have real genuine faith will always defect and will always apostatize. I want you to understand one simple truth: the Lord knows who belongs to him. Turn to John 10. I'm sure many of you can quote this passage, but I want you to turn there because I'm going to show you the opposite truth in just a moment. Look at John 10:14. Our Lord said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and am known of mine." What does he say? "I know my sheep." Now let me just quote a verse and then we're going to look at another verse here in John chapter 10.

In 2 Timothy 2:19, the Bible says, "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." When our Lord says, "I know my sheep," and when Scripture tells us that He knows His own people, there is an opposite truth: He also knows who does not belong to Him. In John 10:26, He told the Pharisees, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,

and they follow me." So our Lord knows not only who His sheep are, but also who does not belong to Him.

John Gill wrote of the stony ground hearer: "He is one that not only constantly attends upon it, but he receives it, he gives an assent to it, he believes in it historically, makes a profession of his faith in it, holds it for a while, being under some convictions of the truth of it, and having some speculative notions of it, and lightened his understanding and judgment in it, he has some flashes of natural affection for it, and delivers some outward expressions of pleasure and delight in it, like Herod and the hearers of John the Baptist, but has no heart work, and so is like the rock in stony ground. The natural hardness of his heart continues. It remains unbroken by the word, without any true sense of sin and repentance for it, and destitute of spiritual life, of true faith, love, joy, hence, and his profession is taken up in haste, immediately upon a flash of affection and a little head knowledge, he does not last long, nor prove honorable."

So Scripture is telling us there is such a thing as a temporary believer. When you see people fall away from the faith, leave the church, leave other believers, and want nothing to do with Christianity, mark it down: they were a temporary believer. And they went out from us that it might be made manifest they were not of us, for had they been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us.

Lesson 2: Not All Joyful Response Is Saving

Now, here's a second truth we've got to learn from the stony ground hearer. We must understand that not all joyful response to the word of God is a saving response. All true Christians are happy to see people respond positively to the Word of God. We're especially thrilled when we see someone readily and eagerly and quickly and joyfully respond to the Word of God. In fact, we see so little positive response, at times, we're gratified just to see any response. Well, we have an old saying, and everyone in this room has heard it, in fact, you've probably recited it from your youth. Here it is. "Don't count your chickens before they hatch." OK, we could expand upon that. "Don't count your Christians until they prove true." Because you never know what a man is until he gets under persecution, until he

gets in tribulations and trials and affliction. Just because someone gives a joyful response to the Word of God does not mean that he's a genuine Christian. I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 8. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Acts chapter 8. And I want to show you someone who joyfully responded to this truth along with a whole lot of others. And yet this one was definitely lost. He was never converted, never saved, never regenerated. Let's begin reading in verse 5. Acts chapter 8 verse 5. I want you to watch carefully now. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many that were possessed with them, and many taken with palsies that were lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city." Watch this joyful response. "And there was great joy in that city." "But there was a certain man called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one, to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of a long time he bewitched them with sorceries." Now watch.

"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also." Did you see that? Simon believed also. You've got to remember now, there is such a thing as a temporary believer. "Then Simon himself believed also. And when he was baptized," wow. "He continued with Philip." He not only was baptized, he stayed with Philip "and wondered, beholding the miracles and sights which were done."

"Now, when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. For as yet he was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money," watch, "saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay

hands he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money, for thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thine heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

"For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Now, I want you to note something. Here's a man who evidently, joyfully, happily, easily, quickly and readily received the Word of God. He was not only receptive of the Word of God, he was baptized. He was not only baptized, he continued with Philip. Yet when Peter caught up with Simon, he had some strong words for him. Because when Simon offered the money to buy the gift of the Holy Ghost, look in verse 20. I want you to see this. Here's what Peter said to Simon. "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." Now I want you to watch carefully. He said, "Thy money perish with thee." Can I tell you what Peter literally said? Here's what Peter said. "Your money go to hell with you." The Greek word "perish" is "apoleia" in the Greek. It's a very strong word, and it literally means to go to hell or to go to the destruction which consists of eternal punishment.

So he told Simon very clearly, "Your money and you are on your way to hell." Then Peter said to Simon, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter." In other words, you have nothing to do with Christianity. You're not a Christian. You're not regenerated. You're not saved. And then he says in verse 23, "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." Here's a man that professed faith, was baptized, and continued with Philip, yet he was as lost as he could be. So not all joyful response to the Word of God is a saving response. Simon joyfully responded, but he had nothing to do with Christ or Christianity. In fact, the immediate reception of the Word of God with joy tends to prove that the heart will not retain the seed, for it means the conscience was probably never really penetrated. When you genuinely get convicted of your sins, it's a serious matter. You consider that you are in the presence of God, your sins are great and plentiful, the punishment they deserve, and that God is infinitely holy and righteous. Conviction of sin makes you a serious person. If the conscience has never been penetrated, the

seed can take no root. The word received for the joy it imparted, when tribulation comes and there is no joy, then the faith is given up. Such a faith is nothing more than a flash in the pan.

You know where we get the expression "flash in the pan"? From those old muzzle loaders, flintlocks, because that powder in the pan should set off the powder in the barrel, but sometimes the pan just flashes and no spark goes in, so the weapon is never really fired. It's just a flash in the pan—worthless, useless. That's what our Lord is saying about this individual: such temporary faith and joyful response with no root is just a flash in the pan. Why? Because immediate joy without conviction of sin is absolutely worthless. And remember, there is no grace that has not been counterfeited by the wicked one; for every real grace, there's always a counterfeit. Immediate joy by itself is no indication of a real, genuine conversion.

Lesson 3: Time Is the Great Test of Faith

So two things we've learned so far: there is a temporary believer, and not all joyful response to the word of God is a saving response. Thirdly, time is the great test of faith. Enduring for a while, believing for a time, and professing and possessing a temporary faith will not suffice. The one that is ever savingly believed evidences that faith by continuing to believe; the one who is ever savingly repented evidences that repentance by continuance in repentance.

Look back to John chapter 8 at what our Lord said in verses 30 and 31. "And as he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed," or "then are ye my true disciples." What did our Lord say? "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed," or "my true disciples."

Perseverance is always demonstrated by preservation. Turn to the book of Jude, right before Revelation, and notice verse 1: "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James." I have always thought that was interesting. James was the brother of Christ, and so was Jude, but he says, "I'm the brother of James," not "I'm the brother of Christ." "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ and called." So we are preserved. There is no two ways about

that. We are not pickled; we are preserved. You are preserved with sweet stuff, you are pickled with sour stuff.

Turn back to John chapter 10, beginning in verse 27. Our Lord says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father which gave them Me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." So Jude says that we are preserved in Jesus Christ, and our Lord said He gives us eternal life, and we shall never perish.

Now I want to ask you some questions. How do I know that I have eternal life? How do I know that I am preserved in Jesus Christ? Here is the answer. Our preservation comes to light in our perseverance. Those who have been preserved are enabled to persevere by the grace of God. That is why our Lord said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." The proof that we have ever savingly believed is that we continue to believe. The proof that we have ever savingly repented is that we continue in repentance.

Now turn to several other passages you might not be aware of. First, Colossians 1:23: "If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached unto every creature which is under heaven, whereof I, Paul, am made a minister." What did he say? "If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." So God preserves us, but His preserving power and grace come to light in the fact that He enables us to continue and not move away from the faith or repentance. We continue in those things.

Look in Hebrews 3:14: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." We are made partakers of Christ if we hold fast. How can any man in his own strength hold fast? We cannot even keep our minds clean and clear by ourselves for one second. The answer is very clear in Scripture: it is God's preserving power that enables us to persevere. So we've learned there is such a thing as a temporary believer, not all joyful response to the Word of God is a saving response, and time is

a great tester of the faith. In other words, you tell me "I used to believe"—well, do you now? "I used to be a Christian"—are you one now? Time is the great tester of the faith.

Lesson 4: Trials and Temptations Manifest Real Faith

The fourth thing we're to learn today is this: trials and temptations manifest real faith. Fair-weather Christians abound everywhere. But the question must be asked, where are the Christians when the storms of life and the persecution and the trials and the tribulations abound? Anyone who forsakes the faith due to trials and tribulations is just revealing the fact that he was never, ever a Christian to begin with. The Apostle Paul in Acts 14:22 said, "Confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." Paul encouraged those believers to continue in the faith and understand that only through much tribulation would we enter the kingdom of God. Our Lord never promised an easy life.

He never promised us that as a Christian, everything would be rosy. He never said that we would not have trials and tribulations and persecutions. I want to show you what He did say. I want you to look in John 15. I'm sure that you already know what I'm about to point out. Here's what our Lord did say, and we can put this down for truth. John chapter 15, look in verse 18. Look what our Lord said. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own. But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my saying, they'll keep yours also." He said, "But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." So our Lord said, look, you're going to have trials. You're going to be hated. You're going to be despised. You're going to be persecuted. So just mark it down.

You remember that passage I read it earlier in 1 John chapter 2 and verse 19, where John said "they went out from us." Why? "That it might be made manifest they were none of us." If you flee in a test,

in a trial, in a tribulation, in persecution, our Lord says it's evident, it's evidence that you were never, ever genuinely saved to begin with.

Now, I want to tell you something. One of the reasons our Lord allows persecution and tests and trials is it's absolutely necessary for the church. And we should never ever be disturbed and upset or perturbed by what happens to us or what happens to other Christians. Or what happens to a lot of people in general. You remember in the Old Testament, when they were cleaning the wheat, they would usually go up on the top of a hill or a mountain where you had a good wind. They'd throw the wheat up in there on a sheet. And as the chaff hit in the air, the wind took the chaff and blew it away. And all you had basically was a real genuine grain left. You know what persecution, tribulation does? It separates the wheat from the chaff. I have known individuals who really seem to be gung-ho Christians and "boy this" and "we'll do this" and "we'll do that" and you let trouble come, you let persecution come and they flee like rats from a sinking ship. They can't take the pressure. Persecutions.

Trials and afflictions are a great way to purge the flock, because only real, genuine, committed Christians will remain and stay true. Four things we are to learn. First, we must remember the old Puritan saying: "The sharp needle of the law must precede the scarlet thread of the gospel." Anyone who has not been thoroughly convicted of his sins, even if he gives a joyful response to the Word of God, will not remain. It is impossible for the seed to penetrate a stony heart. So if that sharp needle of the law has not broken that stony heart and produced real, genuine conviction and real, genuine repentance, the response given will not stand.

Applications and Conclusion

Secondly, many are much affected with the word for the immediate present, yet they receive no real or abiding benefit from it. It is much like the crackling of thorns under a pot: dried grass ignites instantly, burns brightly and beautifully, but oh so shortly, and it is gone. Likewise, the stony ground hearer burns and shines temporarily only because they are temporary believers. Even King Herod heard John and heard him gladly, but he still cut his head off and was still

unrepentant. This same King Herod was glad to see Jesus Christ; Luke 23:8 says he was exceedingly glad, for he hoped to see some miracle done by Him, not that he wanted to believe in Him or trust in Him.

So just because someone is affected immediately does not mean that it is permanently, because time is the great test of faith. There are those that rejoice at the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, but their rejoicing is shallow and superficial. It is much like in Ezekiel 33:32, where God told Ezekiel, "Son of man, all you are to these people is a very lovely song. They come to you as my people. They sit before you as my people, but they don't listen. And they don't receive."

And all you are to them is entertainment. That's it. Just entertainment. So the question is, how deep is your faith? Does it produce fruit? Is it evident? And does it manifest itself in perseverance? The depth of your faith does matter. Because if it has not penetrated the heart, the conscience, the mind, then it's only a temporary faith. And time and persecution will reveal it. What we want is real, genuine conversions, real genuine conversions that are evidenced and manifested by our continuance in truth and in the Word of God. Without it, there are no real Christians. Real Christians are made by God, not by circumstances, not by situations, not by responses. They're made by the grace and the power of God. The wayside hearer was lost. The stony ground hearer is lost. It does matter how deep our faith really is. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your love, for your grace, for your mercy, for your truth. And we ask, Heavenly Father, that you would be pleased to make us understand these principles to bring our lives into greater conformity in Your Word and give us grace, Lord, to persevere and continue in those graces and mercies in our lives. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Three Reasons to Interpret and Six Things Needed

Part Four

2 Timothy 2:7 has been the theme verse for what we have been studying: “Consider what I say. And the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” Today we are on the fourth message concerning three reasons we need to consider truth and interpret Scripture, and six things needed to do so.

Review of Previous Messages

I want to review the last three messages in order that we might keep those principles fresh in our minds. In the first message, I pointed out that one of the first rules of hermeneutics is that, in order to interpret Scripture, we must compare Scripture with Scripture. In other words, Scripture basically interprets itself. If your interpretation of a passage of Scripture contradicts another plain passage, then your interpretation is wrong, and not the Scripture.

The first reason we need to interpret Scripture is to explain seeming contradictions. The word "seeming" is important. Context is everything. There is indeed an immediate context, which may include the chapter, the paragraph, or even a chapter before it. When you come to Romans 8, for example, Paul's argument actually began back in Romans 5. There is also a remote context, and sometimes that remote context may reach back to the beginning of the book.

Psalm 111:2 says, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." From that verse I deduce this simple principle: if we do not have pleasure in the truth and seek it out, we will remain childish and ignorant. The first reason we interpret Scripture, then, is to explain seeming contradictions—for instance, where the Bible says very clearly one thing on the one hand and another thing in another area.

These statements are not contradictory. You simply have to take them into context, and then you can see very easily how they agree. In the second message, I pointed out that we need to interpret Scripture in order to prevent ourselves from being misled by the sound of mere words. It is true that words have meanings, but meanings change. Oftentimes we try to put meanings on words of Scripture that are prevalent in our minds today. That is not necessarily the way things work in the Bible. That is not even the way things work in our world today.

For instance, when Alice and I were young, if someone was gay, that meant they were happy, joyful, and carefree. You cannot use that word today in that sense, because now it simply refers basically to sodomites and that kind of thing. I have also pointed out that the word flesh, the Greek word sarx, is used four different ways in Scripture. Every time you see the word flesh, it does not mean the flesh hanging from the arm or the flesh of an animal. I also pointed out the use of the word world, and how the same word, cosmos, is used in seven or eight distinctive ways in Scripture. Then we looked at John 1:10, where the word cosmos, for world, occurs three times in one simple verse. Each time the word world occurs in that verse, it has a totally different meaning.

You have to understand that we must interpret in order not to be misled by the sound of mere words. The third reason was that

sometimes we need to insert an explanatory word in order to understand the passage. That is not adding to Scripture. One illustration was found in Habakkuk 1:13, where the Bible says that God is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity. Yet Proverbs 15:3 says that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Clearly, God does see evil. God does indeed judge evil. How, then, do you explain Habakkuk 1:13? You would have to add a word in the sense of explaining it: God is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity condoningly or approvingly. He never approves of evil. He never condones sin. He does see it and He does judge it, but He certainly does not condone it.

I also pointed out that if you are really serious about learning the Word of God, you need the proper tools. One of them is a good Bible—one that you can use, read, and become familiar with, and that is very, very usable. You might also need a good Strong's Exhaustive Concordance or Young's Analytical Concordance. I distinguished between those two and explained how they are used. You could also get an excellent Bible for your computer, the Online Bible, probably for less than fifty dollars. It has thousands upon thousands of dollars' worth of commentaries and all kinds of other things in it as well.

The second truth in the third message was this: we need not only the proper tools to interpret and understand Scripture, but also a mind illuminated by the Holy Spirit of God. Illuminated simply means to turn the lights on, where God enlightens us. There are three definitions: inspiration, revelation, and illumination.

Inspiration is a strong, conscious in-breathing of God into men, qualifying them to give utterance to the truth, so that the words they wrote and spoke were and are indeed the very words of God Himself. When you look at the Bible, the Bible is indeed the Word of God, just as if God spoke every single word of it. That is inspiration.

Revelation is the act of God whereby He reveals truth never known before to the human mind. For instance, Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. How did Moses know what happened in creation? He was not there. How did he know what happened in the fall? He was not there. How did he know what happened during the

flood? He was not there. How did he know what happened at the Tower of Babel? He was not there. The answer is that God revealed those things to him. Revelation is the act of God whereby He reveals truth never known before to the human mind.

Inspiration superintends that truth so that the very truth of God, the very words of God, are spoken, written, and recorded by man. Then, of course, the third definition is illumination. Illumination is the act of God, the Holy Spirit, whereby He illuminates our minds to God's revealed truth so that we may understand and comprehend.

When you are reading the Bible and all of a sudden see something, most people say very excitedly, “Let me just show you or tell you what God just revealed to me.” God did not reveal anything to you. Revelation is an act of God whereby He reveals truth never known before in the human mind. What God did was illuminate your mind to understand His already previously revealed truth. God just turned the lights on for you. He enlightened you; He illuminated you.

When people say that there is revelation over and above and beyond the Word of God, they are denying, number one, Hebrews 1:1–3, where the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God. They are also denying that the Bible is the completed Word of God. There is no new revelation going on today, because we have the completed Word of God, and Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God. The Scripture says, “God has spoken to us in these last days by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things.” Jesus Christ, therefore, is our full and final revelation.

An Impartial Spirit

The two things I have mentioned so far that are needed to interpret Scripture are the tools and, number two, an illuminated mind. Number three, you need an impartial spirit. In Luke 8, our Lord speaks on the parable of the sower. You will also find that same parable in Mark 4 and Matthew 13. Notice how our Lord explains the good-ground hearer. He says, “But that on the good ground.” Remember, the sower was sowing seed. The seed represents people who hear the Word of God. He says, “But that on the good ground are they.”

The seed is also the hearer. The seed is the Word of God. The ground is the hearer. The passage continues: “But that on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” When Matthew 13, Luke 8, and Mark 4 are compared, the good-ground hearer is the only one that ever produced any fruit. Our Lord says the reason is that he had an honest and good heart. Therefore, it is only an individual who has an honest and good heart who can interpret Scripture rightly.

Only an individual with an impartial spirit is going to truly learn the Word of God. Why is an impartial spirit needed? Practically everyone comes to the Bible with preconceived ideas. From childhood, we have heard preachers, parents, and friends share what they thought, believed, and interpreted. By nature, we tend to trust our preacher, our parents, and our friends. Consequently, we rely upon and believe what they said simply because we trust them.

Error, heresy, and deception are easily handed down from generation to generation. Consider how the Roman Catholic Church for years forbade the reading of the Scriptures. No Scriptures were to be read because they did not want people to think for themselves or contradict what they were teaching. Stop and think about all the isms and all the cults. They either have their own Bible, quote unquote, or books that they use to replace the Bible. They certainly do not want anyone reading the Bible because it would contradict what they are teaching.

It is very easy to control an ignorant man, and more difficult to control someone with knowledge and understanding. The more ignorant a person is, the easier he is to control. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative that when you and I approach the Word of God, we do so with a good and honest heart, or with an impartial spirit.

We must grasp the fact that what we have heard and been taught all our lives may not be true. Our parents may have been wrong. The preachers we heard as children may have been wrong. Our friends may have been wrong. When you begin studying the Scripture and see that it contradicts what you have been taught all your life, it is not the Scripture that is wrong. It is you who are wrong.

Let me give you an illustration. As a young man, and certainly as a young preacher, I had several pastors who took me under their wing and tried to teach me many things. They did so, and these men, whom I respected and loved, were a great help to me. Yet many of the things they taught me were wrong.

I did not realize that until I began studying and reading Scripture. But I loved them, respected them, and believed them. When I went to the university—and, in fact, the reason I went to that particular university was that they had gone there—I was taught Pauline Epistles by a teacher I will never forget. He was teaching the doctrines of grace. My friends were Arminians.

By the way, everybody is an Arminian by nature. You believe the doctrines of grace only by grace. My teacher was teaching those doctrines, and what he said struck me between the eyes. If it was true, then not only was I wrong, but my friends were wrong—men I loved and respected. It struck me so hard that I was incensed.

I was angry. I stood up, called his name, and said, "Sir, you know that what you're teaching is not true. You're just saying those things because you want to be intellectually accepted by the elite." The class became completely silent. He looked at me and said, "Mr. Weaver, sit down and shut up. I'll see you after class."

After the class left, I eagerly went to his desk. This was almost April, since we were out of school in May. He said, "John, you do know that I could have you turned over to the discipline committee or have you kicked out of this university." I said, "Yes, sir, I know that." And I did. What he had just said was true; he could have done that.

He said, "But I'm not going to do that. I do know that you study and I do know that you read. Here's what I'm going to propose: We will not discuss this subject anymore until you come back in the fall. Before you go, here's one thing I want you to understand, and listen to this. You always allow the Bible to interpret your experiences. You never allow your experiences to interpret the Bible."

I said, "Thank you," and walked out. That summer, God opened my eyes to truth. When I came back, the first thing I did was look him up and profusely apologize. He was right, and I was wrong. But

what really struck me was not merely that I was wrong. I did not want my friends to be wrong. Yet when I read the Scripture, I had to confess that not only was I wrong, but they were wrong as well. I was incensed and insulted by the thought that everything I had been taught was wrong. That is a hard pill to swallow.

Martin Luther said it like this: "We must not make God's Word mean what we wish. We must not bend it, but allow it to bend us and give it the honor of being better than we can make it." That is true. We must not bend the Scripture; we must allow the Scripture to bend us. When we approach the Word of God to read, study, and interpret, we must also discern the difference between exegesis and eisegesis.

Ex, the preposition means "out of." And eis means "into," so in exegesis you draw out of the Scripture what is there. In eisegesis you read into the Scripture your preconceived ideas, or what you think, or what you've been taught, or what you've heard all of your life. Exegesis will make you honest and submissive. Eisegesis will confirm you in your preconceived ideas, in your errors, and in your beliefs.

That is the difference between them. Exegesis is to draw out; eisegesis is when you read into. Let me give you another illustration, because I am talking about a good and honest heart and an impartial spirit. Years ago, when I was pastoring another church, we had a Bible Institute, and I trained many believers, including young men studying for the ministry. I preached twice on Sunday, taught four hours on Tuesday, and taught again on Wednesday and Thursday.

Because churches in the area knew that I had young preacher boys in the church, they would call when they did not have a preacher and ask for someone to fill their pulpit. I would usually send one of the young men. One church about thirty miles away called, and I said, "Sure, I've got someone. I'll be glad to ask him, and I'm sure he'll come and preach for you this coming Sunday."

He went, and their pastor had resigned, so they had no one but him there. However, a visiting pastor who was looking for a church was also present. Since they had already asked my man to preach, they asked the visiting pastor to teach Sunday school. It was an

independent church. They did not use quarterlies or anything like that; they used the Bible and went through it book by book, chapter by chapter.

That Sunday, the Sunday school lesson was on 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. There are only ten verses in the chapter. Verse 4 says, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." The young man I was teaching sat through the Sunday school lesson.

He preached that morning and that night, and the next morning he came to see me. He said, "Pastor, you will never believe what happened." I asked, "What?" He said, "That visiting pastor"—and he called his name—"read verse 1 and commented on it. He read verse 2 and commented on it. He read verse 3 and commented on it. He read verse 5 and commented on it, all the way down to verse 10. He not only would not comment on verse 4; he would not even read it."

May I point out something? That is dishonesty. You may not understand something, be able to explain it, or like it, but if it is there, at least be honest with the Scripture.

Some of you have probably known or heard Dr. Lester Roloff. Lester Roloff was a friend of mine. I listened to him preach a number of times and drove him back and forth from the motel to the church where he was preaching. I loved to hear him preach. But Lester Roloff was not a scholar or a real theologian; he was, however, a man who believed the Bible. Moreover, he was not a professional singer, but he could sing. Many times while preaching, he would break out singing. He could not sing professionally, but the way he sang would really bless your heart.

One day, as I was traveling, I listened to Lester Roloff's Family Altar program on the radio. He was preaching from Ephesians chapter 1, and I was excited to hear what he would say about verse 4, where the Bible says, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

When Lester Roloff reached verse 4, he said, "Folks, I do not understand the doctrine of election. I don't think I'm capable of explaining the doctrine of election. But here it is in the Bible, and I believe it and I bow to it."

That was simple, but he was honest. He said, "It's here." He did not ignore it.

This happened to me years ago. I was preaching in Alabama from 1 Thessalonians 1. There are only ten verses, and verse 4 says, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." My message that morning was on verse 3 and then verses 7 through 10 as they explained verse 3. My message was not on election, but since there are only ten verses, I read the entire chapter.

After the Sunday morning service, an older man came up to me and told me that I should not have read verse 4. I said, "What do you mean I should not have read verse 4? It's in the Bible." He said, "The reason you shouldn't read verse 4 is because a lot of people don't understand the doctrine of election and it upsets them."

I looked at him and said, "What you're telling me is that you don't understand the doctrine of election and you are upset." He said, "That's right." I said, "Well, I'll tell you something, sir. The word elect or its equivalent occurs 73 times in the New Testament. If you'll meet me at my motel room at two o'clock this afternoon, I will sit down with you and take you through all 73 passages in the New Testament, not counting the Old Testament. I'll try to give you an understanding of the doctrine of election, just so you will not be upset the next time you read it in the Bible or hear someone say it."

He said, "OK." I hurried through my meal, rushed to the motel room, and sat there making sure I had all 73 passages written down when the phone rang. It was this elderly man. I have never forgotten the conversation, or his exact words. He said, "Pastor Weaver, I will not be coming to your room for our discussion."

This was about fifteen minutes before he was supposed to arrive. I asked, "May I ask why you're not going to come to this room?" Here were his exact words: "Because my mind is made up and I do not want you confusing me with a bunch of scriptures."

I said, "Sir, why don't you stay where you are? I'll stay where I am and I'll take a nap, and we'll both be better off."

A Humble Mind

That is just plain dishonest. How can you expect God to teach you anything if you are not willing to say, "I'm wrong"? The truth of the matter is, each of us must be willing to say that, usually on a daily basis as we read the Scripture. As God gives us more and more light, we should see where we have been wrong in a lot of places and a lot of times. I am not talking about major doctrines or major principles. But as we grow in grace and knowledge, we need to confess that there have been many times when we were wrong.

I have the original message that I first preached fifty-seven years ago. Any time I get to thinking proudly, I go back and look at that message and say, "Oh God, don't tell me I've said that. Don't tell me I've preached that." It is a good, humbling experience to think, Lord, look what I have said and believed all these years; then, all of a sudden, You turn the lights on, and I see something differently where I was wrong.

We need an impartial spirit and a good and honest heart if we are going to study the Scripture. The fourth thing we need is a humble mind. In Matthew 11:25, our Lord says, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Isn't that interesting? He has hidden some things from the wise and prudent, but revealed them unto babes.

Why? First Corinthians 8:1–2 says, "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge." But look what knowledge does: "Knowledge puffeth up." It makes you arrogant, proud, haughty, heady, and high-minded, "but charity edifieth." Verse 2 says, "And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." When you think you have arrived and have a handle on everything, you know absolutely nothing. Knowledge by itself just puffeth up, and pride is a root sin. Conceit, arrogance, pride, self-confidence, and reliance upon the armor of the flesh are all opposed to God.

You remember he said he had hidden those things from the wise and prudent, but he showed them unto babes. Have you ever noticed

how believing and how receptive little children are? I've teased little children ever since I've had little children, I guess. I'd see a pretty little girl four or five years old, and I would say, "My, you're pretty." I said that to one little girl. She said, "I'm not pretty. I'm beautiful." Arrogant, too. But anyhow, I would say, "Boy, you're a pretty little girl."

I said, "You'll probably get married soon, won't you?" "Yes." She shook her head. Yeah, right.

But I remember years ago, when our girls were small, we were invited to a meal at the home of a professional fisherman. That's what he did all of his life. He lived in Gulf Shores, Alabama. I knew we were going to have smoked mullet for supper—smoked fish. I told the girls, and my girls asked, "Daddy, how do you smoke mullet?"

I said, "Well, girls, you have to get a sharp knife and chop them up in teeny tiny little pieces. Then they have to be dry so you can put them in your pipe, light them, and smoke them."

They just sat there silently, like, “Wow.” When we got to the house, they saw the smoker and saw the man taking the fish out of the smoker. “Daddy, you were teasing us.” “Yeah, I guess so.” But do you understand how children are? You can tell a little child that the moon is made of green cheese, and he will believe you until he learns better. They are so trusting, believing, and receptive.

A humble mind is like the mind Lester Roloff had when he came to the doctrine of election. A humble mind is willing to submit to truth even though you do not understand the truth. You may not be able to explain it, but you are willing to say, “It is here in the Scripture, and I bow to it. I believe it. God said it.” That is a humble mind.

Pride will never make us obedient; humility will. Let me give you some Scriptures, and I want you to think about these. In order to learn the truth and interpret Scripture, you need a humble mind. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate, saith the Lord.” So the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride, and arrogancy.

Most of us can quote Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” Along with that, I like to quote 1 Corinthians 10:12: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Pride will always precede a downfall. Proverbs 29:23 says, “A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.”

That is why one qualification for a pastor in 1 Timothy 3:6 is “not a novice”—that is, a newbie, a newly planted one, a neophyte—“not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” It is easy for young men to be lifted up in pride. It is easy for anyone to be lifted up in pride, but pride is indeed a root sin. Therefore 1 John 2:16 says, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

I want you to look at two passages with me. I want you to turn to Isaiah 57 and then to James chapter 4. Look in Isaiah 57. Isaiah 57. Look in Isaiah 57 and verse 15, a very important verse. Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place. With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." What did he say? "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." God is not going to be anywhere around pride, arrogancy, haughtiness, headiness, or high-mindedness.

Now, if you look in the book of James, chapter 4 and verse 6, James 4 and verse 6, note, if you would, what the Scripture says there. James 4:6 says, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The word resisted actually means fights against. Wherefore, God fights against the proud, but he gives more grace to the humble.

Have you ever stopped to think about this? If God wanted to destroy us, all he has to do is leave us to ourselves, and we'll destroy ourselves. But can you imagine how awful it must be for the man whom God appears up in arms against, whom God actually fights against? He gives more grace to the humble, but he resists the proud.

I'm afraid that the average professing Christian scholar has so much knowledge and yet such a small heart. Pride inflames him, knowledge puffs him up, and arrogance motivates him. When you reach the place of a humble mind, you have come to the right place. When you're willing to bow and accept what the Scripture tells you, whether you understand it or not, you've reached the place where God can teach you. There's a fifth thing that you need, and that is you need a praying heart.

A Praying Heart

We need a heart that prays, a heart that seeks, a heart that asks, and a heart that knocks. We need a heart that cries for truth, understanding, and righteousness. If you truly want to understand the Word of God, you must seek Him with a very prayerful heart.

Look in Proverbs chapter 2, beginning with verse 1: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words.” Underline that word receive. Think about this: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”

“For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.” Notice the words describing reception: hiding, inclining, applying, crying, lifting up your voice, seeking as silver, and searching as for hidden treasures. Then he says, “shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord.”

Suppose Steve knew that in his yard was a chest full of treasure buried by pirates 150 or 200 years ago. It was full of silver, gold, and jewels. He knew it was there; he simply did not know exactly where. Would he take a shovel, dig a few spades of dirt, and say, “Well, it’s kind of hot today and this ground’s kind of hard. I think I’ll wait until a better day”? He knows there are millions and millions of dollars’ worth of gold, silver, and precious things buried there. What is he going to do?

He is going to be out there twelve hours digging. When he gets tired, he is going to have Lorraine dig for another twelve hours. If he offers any of us a portion of it, we are going to come over and dig too. We are not going to give up until we find that chest full of treasure. That is what he is talking about: seeking it as silver and searching for it as treasure.

If you are seeking and searching, if you are digging, that is work, and work requires time. What he is telling us is this: if we really want knowledge, if we really want understanding, we must put in the work and we must put in the time. Priorities do matter. I know how busy everybody is. I understand that. But not one of us has more than twenty-four hours in each day. Not one. It all has to do with priorities.

David's prayer requests in Psalm 119 are prayers we should pray. God told us in Proverbs 2 that we need to incline our hearts. In Psalm 119:36, David says, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness." In other words, let me have Your truth more than anything else in the world. In verse 73 he says, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments." Give me understanding. Incline thine heart to thy testimonies. Then, in verse 133, he says, "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." Order my steps in thy word.

You remember that passage in James 1:5, where the Bible says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." God said, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask."

We need to grasp the fact that all of our studying, all of our praying, all of our reading, and all of our research is in vain unless He grants us understanding. That is why Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:7, "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." Our Lord gives to those who ask, gives to those who seek, and gives to those who knock.

When is the last time you asked God for understanding? When is the last time you asked God to incline your heart to His Word? When is the last time you asked the Lord to order your steps in His Word? When is the last time you asked the Lord to lead you, guide you, and direct you, and give you a seeking and praying heart?

A Holy Design

I think we can make a reasonable deduction from what I've just said. If Christians are not seeking, knocking, asking, praying, and searching for wisdom and understanding, it is probably because they really do not want it. They do not see the need for it; they have no interest in it. It is not their silver and hidden treasure. So, if we are really going to understand Scripture, we need a praying heart.

Sixthly, here is the last one I want to share with you today: you need a holy design.

Let me urge you to ask yourself several questions. Do I desire to learn the Word of God? Why do I desire to learn the Word of God? What is my motive in reading and studying? Is my motive simply to increase knowledge, to be able to argue, or to defend my position, put other people down, and destroy those who oppose my views?

Motives are important. The answer to each of those questions can be rooted in pride, arrogance, and even humanistic and spiritual haughtiness. I know people who read and study seemingly just for those purposes. They love to argue and demonstrate their knowledge. They delight in elevating themselves and putting others down. They delight in their Pharisaical pride and in thinking that they have a corner on truth. If you do not agree with them or see what they see, you are castigated, despised, and ridiculed. None of these attitudes are biblical, and certainly none are Christian in any sense of the word.

I can give you a good illustration. Within the last two weeks, I was called on the phone while I was busy shopping for Alice in the grocery store. Someone I did not know, had never known, and had never met began to question me. This man was ugly, hateful, haughty, arrogant, demanding, obnoxious, and disrespectful.

He had embraced the position of a friend of mine. My friend and I disagree, but we are still civil, respect each other, and can talk with each other. But this man—I hung up on him. He called back, and I refused to answer. I am not going to listen to somebody who has no desire to listen to what Scripture says. He had no desire to listen. All he wanted to do was pontificate. And here was the conclusion I came up with.

Here is the conclusion I came to: If this is the kind of Christian or believer his position produces, I do not want any part of his position. I think his position is wrong. I think it is unscriptural. But this man was a very horrible representative of it. In fact, I do not know that my friend even believes what this man believed. How in the world do you expect God to teach you if you do not have a holy desire for it? If you just want to argue, if you just want to pontificate, if you want to just show off your knowledge, if you want to put others down, or if you want to win a debate, all of that is pride and arrogance. God is not going to teach you anything.

The reason that we must study, read, search the Scripture, and seek for understanding is so that we may become more humble, obedient, and submissive, bringing our lives into greater conformity to the Word of God. Our motives and desires are important, especially when it comes to the Word of God. We must seek a holy design in all our studies. Dwight L. Moody said it like this, and I agree with him: the Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives. They were given so that we may bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God.

Applications and Conclusion

So let me give you a couple of applications. We may have all the proper tools for study. I could have the latest commentaries, every online Bible program available, and every concordance and dictionary available. But having the proper tools alone will not make me a biblical scholar any more than having the proper carpentry tools will make me a carpenter. I can have all the tools of a mechanic, but if I do not have the ability to fix things, the tools are absolutely worthless.

When it comes to having proper tools, we should have them, but we must also have the other five things that go along with those tools: an illuminated mind, an impartial spirit, a humble mind, a praying heart, and a holy design. Without those things, you are never going to be a heavenly scholar. You might be a worldly scholar, but you are not going to be a heavenly scholar.

There is a vast difference between the wisdom of this world and heavenly wisdom, or the wisdom of God. Let me bring your attention back to another truth that I have already shared with you from Isaiah 57 and verse 15: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." If we want God to teach us, we must have a humble spirit. God is not going to feed our pride or build us up in arrogance and haughtiness, because those are sins.

We have to come to Scripture with this attitude: "Lord, wherever I am wrong, straighten me out. Show me. Give me light, truth, and understanding. I am willing to turn, repent, and change. I am willing, Lord. Just open mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Teach me, and I shall be taught." We need these six things if we are ever going to study, interpret, and learn the Word of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth. We pray, Lord, that You would give us these things that we need. We desperately need an illuminated mind, a praying heart, a humble mind, and a holy desire. We need everything in our lives that Your Word demands. Help us. Make us holy, godly, and obedient. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

So, you got all you Wanted, is That all That Matters?

So You Got What You Wanted—Is That All That Matters?

When the morning was come and all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And when they had bound him, they led him away and delivered him to Pontius Pilate, the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed him when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.

And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priest took the silver pieces and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel and brought with them the potter's field to bury strangers in. Wherefore, that field was called the field of blood unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty

pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Introduction: The Selfish Attitude

I have actually heard people say, “I have gotten that which I wanted, and that is all that matters.” There could not be a clearer attitude expressing, “I am number one, I am all that counts, and nothing else matters.” Such a statement not only evidences an attitude of absolute selfishness, but it also demonstrates a lack of concern for others and a lack of concern for principles of righteousness.

You have to stop and ask yourself: Are your desires, are your wishes, really all that count? Does the universe really revolve around you, and do you expect everything to revolve around you?

The message today involves the betrayal of our Lord by Judas and the connivance and conspiracy of the religious leaders to falsely accuse, condemn, and murder the Lord Jesus Christ. And yes, it was a murder on the part of the religious leaders.

The Conspiracy to Murder Christ

Peter condemns what the religious leaders did, saying, “Him, referring to Christ, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” It was wicked hands that were placed upon our Lord.

Acts 4 says, “The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

It was indeed a murder, because Acts 13:28 says, “And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.” They found no cause of death in Him. There was no reason for Christ to be put to death. It is evident, then, that there was indeed a conspiracy to kill the Lord Jesus Christ.

You have to remember that they had repeatedly tried to murder Christ, over and over, as you read through the Bible. In Luke 4:28-30, we read, “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way.” They took Him out of the synagogue and tried to push Him over a cliff.

In John 8:59, we read, “Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” They tried to stone Him to death. John 7:30 says, “But they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.” Here was another incident when they tried to kill the Lord Jesus. In John 8:20, we have another incident: “These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him.”

They wanted to, for His hour has not yet come. I want to show you from the Scripture how the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees were so frustrated with Christ that they actually conspired to destroy Him. This was not simply a disagreement with His teaching; their frustration became a determined purpose to destroy Him.

In Mark 11:18 we read: “And the scribes and the chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him. For they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.” Note this carefully: all the scribes and chief priests heard it, and they sought how they might destroy Him. They were not merely questioning Him or opposing Him publicly; they were considering how He might be destroyed.

John 11:47 says: “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council and said, What do we?” In other words, what are we going to do? “For this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him. And the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation. And one of them named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, You know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for

us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should perish not."

Here he is advocating, basically, that they kill the Lord Jesus Christ. It is better for one to die than for the whole nation to die; that is his argument. But note what he said, because I think this is very, very revealing: "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place, and our nation." They would lose their power and authority if they let Him alone. They would lose their place, their influence, and their standing among the people. Therefore, they needed to kill Him. So their counsel was driven by fear of losing both their power and their nation.

The Charge of Blasphemy and the Roman Dilemma

Now look at Matthew 27:1, where we began. Here is indisputable proof of a conspiracy. I want you to watch carefully and tie these Scriptures together: "When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death." Note that they took counsel to put Christ to death. Why would they need to take counsel to put Christ to death?

Consider what they initially charged Him with. In Matthew 26:63, Jesus stood before them. The high priest said, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus answered, "Thou hast said." That is equivalent to our expression, "You said it, buddy. You said it right." What you said is right. I am the Son of the living God. He continued, "Nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, "He hath spoken blaspheming."

"What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?" They answered and said, "He is guilty of death." Note, if you would please, that in Matthew 26 they charged Christ with blasphemy. They said He was guilty of death. Why, then, in Matthew 27:1, when morning came, did all the chief priests, councils, and elders of the people take counsel against Jesus to put Him to death? Why take counsel? They had already charged Him with blasphemy. They had already said He was worthy of death.

Why were they now sitting in a council, conspiring to put Him to death?

Here is why: a charge of blasphemy would not induce Pilate to put Christ to death. Blasphemy was not against Roman law. It was not against Roman rules. Therefore, they wanted the Romans to put Christ to death. Why did they not put Christ to death themselves? Some people say that, technically speaking, since they were under Roman rule, they no longer had the power of the death penalty. In other words, they could no longer execute the death penalty. That may have been technically true, but it certainly did not stop them from stoning Stephen to death for blasphemy.

Stephen was innocent as well, and they set him up. Acts 6:11 says, "Then they suborned men." They suborned men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against his place." They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, came upon him, caught him, brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, "This man seeth not to speak blasphemous words against his holy place in the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us."

All who sat in the council, looking steadfastly on Stephen, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens open and the Son of Man standing on the right hand." Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, ran upon him with one accord, cast him out of the city, and stoned him.

The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. They stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this into their charge." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

If they did not have the power to execute anyone, how did they execute Stephen? They executed him on a charge of blasphemy—the same charge that they lodged against the Lord Jesus Christ. Why, then, did they not stone Christ? There are many answers to that. One, of course, is that it was prophesied that Christ should be hanged on a tree. But there is also an immediate human answer.

Mark 11:18 says that the scribes and Pharisees sought how they might destroy Him, for they feared Him, and because all the people were astonished at His doctrine. They were not only afraid of Christ; they were afraid of the people. Mark 14:1–2 says that the chief priests and scribes sought how they might take Him by craft and put Him to death, but said, "Not on a feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people." They wanted to do this, but they did not want the people upset with them. They feared Christ and the people, did not want a backlash, and thought that if they could get the Romans to put Him to death, it would make them look guiltless.

The chief priests therefore took counsel. They agreed that Christ deserved to die on a charge of blasphemy, yet they did not dare stone Him as they had stoned Stephen, for they feared the people. They consulted together about how they might place a charge upon Christ that would cause the Roman Empire to put Him to death.

If you go back to Matthew 26 and look at verse 66, notice: "What think ye?" They answered and said, "He is guilty of death." They said He was guilty; He deserved to die. But when they brought Him to Pilate, what charges did they lay? They said He was guilty of perverting the nation and forbidding tribute to Caesar. Isn't that interesting?

No blasphemies were mentioned, so they had to get these false charges to induce Pilate to put Him to death, because Pilate would have no jurisdiction over the charge of blasphemy. But Pilate was going to release Christ. Three times Pilate declared that Jesus Christ was innocent: "I find no fault in Him."

In John chapter 19, verses 6 and 7, they finally reveal why they really wanted Him dead. "When the chief priest there for an officer saw him, they cried out saying, Crucify him! Crucify him! Pilate said unto them, Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him." He was innocent. "The Jews answered, we have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." There is the charge of blasphemy finally coming to light according to their interpretation: He made Himself the Son of God, and by their law He ought to die.

Three times Pilate found Christ innocent. The reason was that, in Mark 15 and verse 10, “he knew that the chief priest had delivered Him for envy.” They were fearful of Christ and envious of Christ, envious that people were responding to Him.

Judas Got What He Wanted

Throughout this entire episode, I want to make one simple point. It involves two parts, and then the application. Here is the first part: initially Judas got what he wanted, and that was all that mattered. We think we know what we want, and we are willing to move heaven and earth to get it. We often take the attitude, “I want what I want, and that’s all that matters.” Sometimes—indeed, many times—when we get what we wanted, we are horrified because it did not turn out to be what we wanted. I have known men and women who thought they wanted another person’s spouse. They worked it out and got them. It was pure horror, a total nightmare, and absolute confusion.

Judas got what he wanted. What did Judas want? He wanted money. He was a thief, and he betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver. So, in Matthew 26, beginning with verse 14: “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me?”

“And I will deliver him unto you. And they covenanted with him for 30 pieces of silver. And from that time, he sought opportunity to betray him.”

Notice that Judas initiated the betrayal. He sought out the chief priest, asked for the best price they could give him, and agreed to betray the Son of God. The Scripture tells us that from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him. Judas probably had many opportunities, yet he wanted one in which he would not reveal himself as a betrayer. Do you not remember that he betrayed our Lord with a kiss, which is a token of love and friendship? Matthew 26:48 says, “Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he: hold him fast.”

Have you ever wondered about the 30 pieces of silver? They were part of prophecy, for in Zechariah 11:13 we read: “And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of

them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." Thus Judas betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver.

Let us suppose that those 30 pieces were 30 ounces of silver. In our day, 30 ounces would probably be worth $900, $1,000, or $1,100—something like that. That does not sound like much to us. But according to the Professional Coin Grading Service, the value of the 30 coins was significant at the time. Such a sum would likely have purchased a small farm, quite a bribe in that day. Today, a small farm in our country averages around $240,000, including a farmhouse, barn, equipment, and approximately 120 acres on which to plant and harvest crops. The 30 pieces of silver, at that particular time, could therefore have purchased a great deal.

Judas wanted the money, and he got it. Why did he want the money? The answer Scripture gives is because he was a thief. He was covetous. Scripture does not tell us that Judas wanted to buy a farm or a new chariot. But it does tell us what happened. In John 12, after Mary had poured a pound of spikenard, a very costly ointment, on our Lord, we read: "Then said one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."

Judas was a thief, a covetous individual. Unhappily, he thought that he wanted the money and that nothing else mattered. He got the money and thought that was it. Some individuals tend to think that Judas somehow believed Christ would work a miracle and deliver Himself, as perhaps He had done on other occasions, when we read that He went through the midst of them and so passed by. Then Judas would have his money, while Christ would be free and not be condemned.

In Mark 14 there is an interesting word. Judas betrayed Him with a kiss, but notice what else he said: "And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he; take him, and lead him away safely." Safety was not exactly what the high priest had in mind.

When Judas saw that Jesus Christ was condemned in Matthew 27, whether by the Sanhedrin, by Pilate, or by both, his conscience was smitten. Somewhere in the midst of all the treachery, Judas repented himself. He changed his mind. He did not repent toward God, exercise faith toward Jesus Christ, or ask Christ for forgiveness. He was merely conscience-stricken that he had betrayed an innocent man. Judas knew that Christ was innocent.

This undoubtedly threw a wrench temporarily in the plans of the priest. They could no longer imply that Christ was an imposter and that Christ had been betrayed by one of His own. The traitor had recanted and had confirmed that they were murdering an innocent man. Judas knew Christ. Judas was competent to testify. Had he known of any wickedness in Christ, he could have stated it. He would have endeavored to vindicate himself had he known of any wickedness.

You need to consider these facts concerning Judas. First of all, he was chosen to be an apostle by Christ. Secondly, he did forsake all to follow the Lord. Thirdly, he spent three and a half years traveling the length and the breadth of the land with Christ. Fourthly, he saw all the miracles of Christ. Fifthly, he heard Christ give all of His sermons and discourses. Sixthly, he watched as Christ healed the sick and raised the dead and cast out demons. Seventhly, he, along with the other apostles, was sent out to preach the gospel. Eighthly, he was one of the leaders of the apostolic band, for he was the treasurer. And ninthly, no one ever suspected that he was the traitor.

Consider Matthew 26:20-22: “Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” “And they, that is all of them, they were exceedingly sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?” No one suspected Judas, but everyone suspected themselves.

In John 18:4-5, Judas finally reveals himself for actually what he was. “Jesus, therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said unto them, I am He. And Judas also, which betrayed Him, stood with them.” Judas finally took his

place with those who hated Christ and with those who wanted to destroy Him.

He may have covered his design and his thievery; however, his cover never made it to his conscience. We read how Judas returned the blood money in Matthew 27:5: "and he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed and went and hanged himself." Isn't that amazing? Stop and think with me. All Judas wanted initially was money. He got what he wanted.

That was all that mattered until his conscience smote him and he threw the money down in the temple. All of a sudden, he no longer wanted the money. He realized what he had done, and he went out and hanged himself. I want to cover this point next, but note what the religious leaders said. When Judas returned to them, he said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood."

"And they said, What is that to us? See thou to it." You got what you wanted. You asked for what you wanted, and we gave it to you. You got it. We do not care. Judas cast the money down and went out and hanged himself. All he wanted was money, and when he got it, he did not want it.

The Priests Got What They Wanted

The priests got what they wanted, and that was all that mattered. We need to understand something. Judas came and said, "I have betrayed the innocent blood," and cast the money down into the temple. The wicked have no use for truth or for those who speak the truth. When Judas, as wicked as he was, said, "I have sinned, and I have betrayed the innocent blood. I know He is innocent. I know that for a fact," they answered, "What is that to us? See thou to it."

The wicked will use us if we will compromise and fit into their plans. But if we will not compromise and fit into their plan, we are expendable and worthless. Notice how easy and simple it is for the wicked to cast off the worth and value of a soul or a person.

When Judas said, "I have sinned in that I betrayed the innocent blood," they replied, "What is that to us? See thou to it." We do not care about you, Judas. We do not care about what you said or what you know. Just go take care of it. Do whatever you want to do. Judas

made the priests his confessors, and instead of giving him absolution, they threw him under the truck. They did not care for truth, Judas, or Christ. They wanted Christ dead and out of the way.

Now let me ask you a question. These priests who made this covenant with Judas were supposed to know the Scriptures. Why would they not even examine the claims of Christ in light of the Scriptures? These were religious leaders. In John 5:39, our Lord challenged them: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life.”

"They are they which testify of me." You search the Scriptures. They should have at least searched. But here's the problem: they did not want verification of the truth. They wanted the condemnation of Christ. And thus they carelessly and wickedly condemned Christ. He was not worth anything to them. His claims, His works, His ministry, His good deeds, His benevolence meant absolutely nothing to them. When these priests said to Judas, "What is that to us? See thou to it," they were also saying concerning Christ, "If He's innocent, see thou to it." We could care less. We want Him condemned. We want Him out of the way. We have gotten that which we wanted, and that's all that matters. We've got Him right where we want Him. True, they did have Christ, and they did to Him exactly that which they wanted.

Look in Luke chapter 24 and verse 7: “Saying the Son of Man must be delivered in the hands of sinful men and be crucified and the third day rise again.” He was delivered into their hands.

Now look back to Luke 23, beginning with verse 24: “And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition, that is Barabbas, and murder was cast into the prison whom they had desired.” Watch carefully: “but he delivered Jesus to their will.”

What does that mean? They got that which they wanted, and to them that was all that mattered. They wanted their will. They wanted Christ crucified. They wanted Christ out of the way. The high priest, the chief priests, the Pharisees, and the scribes wanted Christ dead, and to them that was all that mattered.

You can get that which you want. And if it is contrary to God and God's will, once you get it, you will wish a million times you had never had it. Listen as I make the applications to this message. Judas got what he wanted, and to him that was all that mattered. The priests got what they wanted, and to them that was all that mattered. Judas covenanted for thirty pieces of silver. Judas is long gone, and so is the silver.

Applications: The Cost of Getting What You Want

However, our Lord said this in Matthew 26:24: "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It had been good for that man had he never been born."

When the apostles were choosing the successor of Judas in Acts 1, they said that he might take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas, by transgression, fell, that he might go to his own place. Where is his own place? It was a place of death, judgment, torment, and fire.

Have you stopped to think about this? Judas got that which he wanted. If Judas could go back and change the direction of his life, he would. But it is too late. He got that which he wanted. What is it worth to have your own way and lose your own soul? What is it worth to get what you want and die unconverted?

Secondly, let me point this out. The scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the chief priests got what they wanted. They wanted Christ condemned and crucified. He was delivered into their hands and to their will.

I want you to turn to Acts chapter 2 and notice what Peter says as he preaches on the day of Pentecost to those gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. Beginning at verse 32, Peter says, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he had shed forth this which you now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens, but he said to himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou in my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

Now watch verse 36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "men and brethren, what shall we do?" Look at that question. They heard that this Jesus whom they crucified had been raised from the dead, had ascended into heaven, and was seated at the right hand of God with all power and authority. Now they ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

The Scripture says Pilate delivered Christ to their will. They did whatever they wanted to do to Jesus Christ. They mocked Him, railed upon Him, spat upon Him, smote Him, and crucified Him. He was scourged with a cat of nine tails and delivered into their hands. They did to Christ exactly what they wanted to do.

But Peter is preaching that the same One to whom they did what they wanted is now the resurrected, glorified, sovereign God of heaven and earth. Suddenly, they realize what they did to Him when He was in their hands, and now they realize that they are in His hands, and He may do to them what He wants to do. "Men and brethren, What shall we do?" They had crucified Christ, and now Peter was preaching a sovereign, exalted, omnipotent, glorified Christ.

Now they realize He is in control. Is it worth facing the Judge of all the earth and the sovereign God of heaven and earth to get what you want and have your will? Those who play footloose and fancy-free with Christ will one day wish that they had listened, obeyed, and submitted to the Lord of Glory. You may get what you want now, but I can assure you it will cost you an eternity. Getting what you want is not all that matters.

Sinners are miserable comforters. They only know how to sin and act selfishly. Even when they try to do well, they do it for their own sakes, glory, conscience, and reputation. It is not for Christ or for His glory. It is impossible to please and satisfy the ungodly; likewise, it is impossible to be spiritually comforted by the ungodly. When Judas, in the depth of the torment of his conscience, stated, "I betrayed the

innocent blood," and threw down the blood money, they said, "Oh, how does that see about to it?" Sinners are miserable comforters.

Judas got what he wanted at the expense of Christ. The scribes, Pharisees, and priests got what they wanted at the expense of Christ. Jesus Christ suffered for the sins of His people. When we want to sin, when we want to go contrary to the Word of God—and we can do that—we will get what we want, but only at the expense of Christ, for Christ suffered for our sins.

I do not want, and you should not want, anything at the expense of the person, work, honor, glory, and worship of Jesus Christ. Whenever we sin, it is at Christ's expense.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and Your mercy. We ask, Father, for Your help, that we might be holy and godly, that we might live for Thee and glorify the sovereign, sinless Son of God. Make us more holy, more godly, more obedient. Help us not to do anything at the expense of Christ, but for His honor and glory. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

A Holy Determination

A Holy Determination to Love the Lord

What is the one thing that will include all these other answers as to how not to sin against our God? If you look in Psalm 18:1, first of all, there must be a holy determination. Look what David says: “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” David is expressing a truth needed in each of our lives: his determination to love the Lord. Note carefully what David says. He did not say, “I want to love the Lord.” He did not say, “I hope to love the Lord.” David said, “I will love the Lord.” Here is a dedicated determination to love the Lord. There are no maybes, doubts, or questions. He is determined to love the Lord. He has made a verbal and volitional commitment by saying, “I will love thee, O Lord.”

The Hebrew word for love is rakam, which means to love deeply and have tender feelings for. Here is what David is saying: “I’m determined to love the Lord the way He deserves to be loved.” It is a holy determination. Anything that involves our Lord has to be holy,

for He is holy. Revelation 15:4 says, “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy.” Whatever we do in reference to our God has to be holy.

Everyone in this room can probably quote 1 John 4:19: “We love him, because he first loved us.” Our love is a reflection of His love. We cannot love Him first; He loved us first. Therefore, we are to love Him. But what did our Lord say in John 15:5? “Without Me, you can do nothing.” Is loving the Lord something? Surely it is. But you cannot do it without Christ, for without Him, we can do nothing.

David said, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” There is a truth that we must remember and constantly rehearse in our minds: love is an act of the will. It is true in relationship to our God and to others. When God commands us to love, He commands our will. We must have understanding, and emotions are oftentimes involved; however, you cannot command emotions. I could not look at Rod and say, “I command you to be happy right now.” He could feign a smile, but that does not mean he is happy. I could say, “I command you to be miserable,” but that does not mean he will be miserable. You cannot command emotions. But I could say, “I command you to get up and go get me a glass of water.” That is commanding his will. Whether he feels like it or not is immaterial. He could obey that command.

CHAPTER 4

The Best Illustration of Humanism

Introduction: Defining Humanism

Humanism is rampant in our lives. Most professing Christians are humanists and do not even realize their departure from God and His Word. Humanism, at the maximum, is to be an atheist. At the minimum, it is to walk totally independent of God. Humanism is a denier of truth, and it is a death wish at the same time. Humanism has a balance. I want to give you two definitions of humanism to set the stage for what I am going to share with you today.

Two Definitions of Humanism

The first definition comes from Webster's New World Dictionary: “Any system of thought or action based on the nature, dignity, interests, and ideals of man; specifically, a modern, non-theistic, rationalistic movement that holds that man is capable of self-fulfillment, ethical conduct, without recourse to supernaturalism.” To put it simply, humanism has absolutely no

reference to God whatsoever. This definition demonstrates that a humanist does not believe that he needs God at all.

The second definition is from the American Humanist Association: “Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism”—which would be without God, because theos is the Greek word for God—“or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good.” Humanism therefore teaches and believes that man is self-sufficient in and of himself. Man, according to humanism, is the measure of all things. Humanism does not need God. Humanism does not need prayer. Humanism does not need anything outside of itself. It refuses the truth of God's Word, neglects the instruction of God's Word, and lives as if God does not exist—as if God had never, ever spoken. In other words, humanism is nothing more than practical atheism.

And that certainly is true. Look at the state of our churches and the condition of the lives of professing Christians today. You will see humanism on every hand. R. J. Rushdoony, in his book on Christianity and the State, said: “The churches represent the great area of freedom from state controls in many countries. This is a condition which the modern state finds intolerable and is determined to alter.”

“The state’s greatest ally in the struggle is all too often the church itself. The humanism of so many churchmen makes them dedicated allies of statist objectives.” When you stop and think about the last several years, all the churches that voluntarily closed down simply because the state said they should close down—this is exactly what he is talking about. In preparing for this message, I ran across a strange term. We laugh many times at oxymorons.

The Oxymoron of 'Christian Humanism'

An oxymoron is a figure of speech that juxtaposes concepts with opposite meanings, either in a word or phrase. These words are usually, and always, self-contradictory. For instance, we might talk about a sober drunk, an honest thief, or a faithful adulterer. In other words, those are contradictions in and of themselves. The term I found would be absolutely hilarious if it were not so deceptive. I was

looking, and I ran across this term: “Christian Humanism.” It was defined as a philosophy advocating the self-fulfillment of humanity within the framework of Christian principles.

That sounds pretty good. We may be human, but we are not humanists. It is impossible to be a Christian and a humanist at the same time, just as it is impossible to be an honest thief or a sober drunk. It is totally impossible. If you are doing anything within the framework of Christianity, you are a Christian. If you are not living within the framework of Christianity, you are not a Christian; you are simply a humanist. There is no such thing as a Christian humanist.

Biblical Distinction: Christianity vs. Judaism

We confuse terms all the time. Christian humanism is a term much like the phrase that is often used: “Judeo-Christianity.” There is no such animal. Judaism is contrary to Christianity, and Christianity is contrary to Judaism. If you follow Judaism, you are not a Christian. If you follow Christianity, you do not follow Judaism.

The Apostle Paul himself made this distinction for us. Paul was raised a Pharisee; in fact, he claimed to be a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He said in Galatians 1:13, “For you have heard of my conversation in times past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it.”

Judaism and Christianity were opposite. In Judaism, Paul was persecuting Christians. He said in verse 14, "And profited in the Jews' religion above many of my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of the fathers." Judaism contains all kinds of traditions, and that was what Paul was following. But verse 15 says, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen." He continued, "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."

It was Paul's regeneration and conversion to Jesus Christ that separated him from the Jews' religion. One is either Jewish or Christian. It is that simple. It is the person and work of Jesus Christ that separates you to the Lord Jesus Christ. If a Jewish person,

quote-unquote, converted to Christianity, he would not be a Jewish Christian; he would just be a Christian.

If a Mormon converted to Christianity, he would not be a Mormon Christian; he would just be a Christian. If a Hindu converted, he would not be a Hindu Christian; he would just be a Christian. The same is true if a Buddhist converted. He would not be a Buddhist Christian; he would simply be a Christian. Clearly, when you talk about a Christian humanist, there is no such animal. We are either humanists or Christians. There is no in-between, because the philosophy of humanism is totally and completely contrary to Christianity.

By default, then, a humanist is an evolutionist. A humanist believes in the perfection of man, does not believe in any afterlife, and does not believe in judgment. If you do not believe in God, listen to His Word, or believe that you have any need of Him, obviously you will not adhere to a final judgment as it is taught in the Bible.

The American Humanist Association defines it this way: "Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good." Translated, this means: We do not need God, the Bible, prayer, or anything supernatural.

Humanism declares that we are sufficient in and of ourselves. We know what is best for us. We know what is good for us. We even know what is best and good for others as well. We are able to live a moral, ethical life that is well-pleasing and fulfilling without any reference to God whatsoever, and we are able to accomplish our goals.

The only problem with that—of course, there are many—but the one major problem with this is a Bible doctrine that humanists deny: the doctrine of total depravity. The Bible teaches that man is absolutely, totally depraved. In fact, Isaiah chapter 1 describes it from the top of the head to the sole of the foot. Not only are our wills perverted and depraved; so are our minds, our thinking, and our affections—everything about us. That is why the Bible says, “There’s none good, no, not one. There’s none that doeth good. There’s none

that seeketh after God. No, not one." Humanists therefore do not need God. They do not need anything with reference to God or His Word.

Humanism's False Assumptions

Humanists declare themselves free to fulfill themselves and also to know what is good for themselves and others because of their rationality, because of their thinking, and, as will be shown later, because of their experience. In order for this to be true, four things have to be absolutely necessary. Four things are absolutely mandatory. First, if I am sufficient in and of myself and know what is good for me and what is good for others, there must be an understanding of the alternatives that are to be chosen.

Let me put it to you like this. If, for instance, I had, on the one hand, a choice to be hit on one finger by a hammer, and, on the other hand, a choice to have one finger cut open with a knife, I have two choices to make—or one choice: which one I think would be best for me, although neither one of them actually would be best for me. There must be an understanding of the alternatives before I can claim to know what is best or good.

But here is the problem with this. If I use an illustration—here is morality, here is what I am going to define as righteousness, and I am going to choose between two things which are good—you have to understand there is a difference between a renewed mind and a sinful mind. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14, "For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." How then can a humanist who does not believe in God, does not want the Word of God, and does not believe in the Word of God have a true and accurate choice of the alternatives? He does not even understand the alternatives. In order for a humanist to accomplish what he wants, he has to know the alternatives before him. It is impossible for him to understand spiritual things without a renewed mind.

Here is the second requirement: there must be a reliable criterion to distinguish between the two alternatives or to choose the best alternative. The Bible tells you in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 18

that they are alienated from God through the ignorance that is in them. What kind of criterion, then, does a humanist use to determine what is best for him? It is his own perverted, corrupt, and depraved mind, alienated from God through the ignorance of God that is in him.

But there is a third necessity: men must have the will to choose and seek the best alternative if they are truly free and able to do what humanists claim. The truth is that our wills are slaves to our lusts, desires, and thinking. You could offer a drunk a Bible or a fifth of whiskey. Which one will he choose? He will take the whiskey because he is a drunk, a slave to his sin and desires. You can offer a humanist a Bible, but he will not take it because he does not believe he needs it. In other words, he is a Pharisee. He has his own righteousness and morality. He does not need a Bible to tell him what is right or wrong; he has his own.

Fourthly, if you are going to be free, as the humanists claim, and have the ability to achieve what you want, you would actually have to possess the power to achieve that which you have chosen. But the truth is, man is like Jethro Bodine, who wanted to be a brain surgeon with a fourth-grade education. That is impossible; it is not going to happen.

The point is simple. If my family were in a fire, I might have the desire and will to save them. But if I did not have the strength, ability, wisdom, and discernment, it would be impossible. The same thing applies to a flood. I do not have the strength or ability; I simply cannot do it.

In order for a man to achieve what the humanist says man is capable of achieving, these four things must necessarily be true. Of course, they are not true, because humanism is based upon rationalism, which is nothing more than human thinking. It is also based upon human experience. You and I cannot trust our own thinking, in one sense of the word, because we are not omniscient. We do not know everything, and we cannot do everything because we are not omnipotent. We are not God, not by any stretch of the imagination.

None of us possess all knowledge or all power. Humanists say that we are capable of doing whatever we want to do, and that we can fulfill every desire we have by our own abilities, which is certainly not true.

Historical Context: Jeremiah 42–43

This sets the stage for Jeremiah 44, but to understand that chapter, we must look at chapters 42 and 43 and see what they are about and why they are important. In the book of Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, came over and conquered Judah and Jerusalem. He killed many of the Judahites and took about 5,000 into captivity in Babylon. He left the poor of the land there so that they might tend the land for him. A few people escaped and got away from him, but not many.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah to be governor for him. Later, a man named Ishmael came and murdered Gedaliah. He also murdered the Babylonian soldiers Nebuchadnezzar had left there. Ishmael had men with him as well. The people who remained, this little remnant, were sincerely and genuinely frightened. They knew that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed everything, killed countless numbers of people, and taken some into captivity. They were afraid of Nebuchadnezzar, the sword, the pestilence, and the famine that awaited them.

In Jeremiah chapter 42, they came to Jeremiah and begged him to intercede with God for them. Jeremiah 42, beginning with verse 1: "Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even to the greatest, came near and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, 'Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant.'"

"For we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us. Now the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, "I have heard you. Behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words, and it shall come to pass that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you."

"I will keep nothing back from you." Then they said to Jeremiah, "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

Now, here is the interesting thing. They come to Jeremiah and say, "Jeremiah, we want you to pray for us. We want the will of God in our lives. We are going to accept whatever God tells us, whether it be good or whether it be evil." The word evil does not mean sinful. In this section, it means whether or not we like it, or whether or not we agree with it. In other words, they just want God's will. They want what is best for them. God knows what is best for them. They may not like what He says, but that is all right, too. They are going to do exactly what God has determined and what God decrees.

The truth is that they feared Nebuchadnezzar. They also feared the famine and the pestilence. So Jeremiah said, "Okay, I'm going to pray for you." He did so for ten days. After ten days, the word of God came to Jeremiah. Look at it beginning in verse 7 of Jeremiah 42: "And it came to pass after ten days that the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah. Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces which were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest, and said unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto whom ye sent me to present your supplications before Him: If ye'"

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 42:7-22 (KJV)

> “will still abide in this land”—that is, stay in Judah—“then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up: for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the Lord: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you out of his hand. And I will show mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land. But if ye say, ‘We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the Lord your God,’ saying, ‘No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread;

> and there will we dwell': Now therefore hear the word of the Lord, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury have been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more. The Lord hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day."

God's will could not have been plainer for them. He said, "Do not go down into Egypt." He promised, "You just stay in the land, I'll build you, I'll plant you. Don't fear Nebuchadnezzar; I can control Nebuchadnezzar. You just obey Me and stay in the land."

The problem was that the people were hypocritical when they came to Jeremiah. They truly did not want the will of God in their lives. In Jeremiah chapter 42, beginning with verse 20, he tells them: "For ye dissembled in your hearts"—that is, you played the hypocrite—"in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, 'Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.' And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor any thing for the which He hath sent me unto you."

"Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn." He was saying, "You are hypocrites. You did not

truly want God's will. I have told you what God's will is, and you refuse and reject it."

To demonstrate the truth of their hypocrisy, look in Jeremiah chapter 43, and read the first six verses: "And it came to pass, that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, even all these words, then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, 'Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there.'"

"But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon." So Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces, and all the people obeyed not the voice of the Lord, to dwell in the land of Judah. "But Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah, that were returned from all nations, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah; even men, and women, and children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah. So they came into the land of Egypt."

They kidnapped Jeremiah and Baruch and carried everyone down into Egypt. When Jeremiah came back and said, "Here's what God said," they answered, "You're lying to us. God didn't say that. He didn't say, 'Go not down into Egypt.'" Why did they say God did not say to go down into Egypt? Because that was where they wanted to go. They had already determined that going down into Egypt was best for them. They had already determined that they could escape the sword, famine, and pestilence if they simply went down into Egypt.

What they did not understand was that they were jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. God had already determined to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, and He was going to punish the Egyptians for their idolatry as well.

The Remnant's Humanist Reasoning (Jeremiah 44)

Now listen to me. We are about to come to Jeremiah chapter 44. The reason God destroyed Judah and Jerusalem was their idolatry. They were worshiping and pouring out offerings to the queen of heaven. They were sacrificing their children to Baal and to Molech in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, or Tophet, as it is sometimes called. God destroyed Judah and Jerusalem because of their idolatry.

I want you to understand the thinking of humanism and how prevalent it is in our lives today. Look in Jeremiah chapter 44, beginning with verse 1: “The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews which dwell in the land of Egypt, which dwell at Migdol, and at Tahpanhes, and at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, ‘Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah.’”

"And, behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwelleth therein, because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, and to serve other gods, whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers. Howbeit I sent unto you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, 'Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate'"—talking about idolatry—"but they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore My fury and Mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day."

Note that God tells them specifically that the reason He judged them was their idolatry. The sad thing is that they would not listen, hear, heed, or repent. God said, "I tried to warn you. You would not turn." So God sends judgment.

God is saying, "You're not just destroying your souls, you're destroying the souls and lives of others as well." We do not think about that. "Therefore now thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls, to cut off from you man and woman, child and suckling, out of Judah, and to leave you none to remain; in that ye provoke Me unto

wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be gone to dwell, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? They are not humbled even unto this day."

"Neither have they feared, nor walked in My law, nor in My statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set My face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed, and fall in the land of Egypt; they shall even be consumed by the sword and by the famine: they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword and by the famine: and they shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach." God had already told Jeremiah to take great stones and put them in a brick kiln. Then He said, "Nebuchadnezzar is going to come and set his throne upon these very stones."

I want to make something exceedingly clear. When you reject and refuse the Word of God, the only thing left for you is dependence upon your own corrupt and depraved human thinking and human experience, which, of course, is always misinterpreted. Listen to me because of your corrupt and perverted thinking.

God had already judged these people because they were pouring out drink offerings to the queen of heaven and worshiping false gods. They would not listen to God or obey Him; they had fled into Egypt, and God said, "I'm going to destroy you because you won't listen." Look at Jeremiah chapter 44, beginning in verse 15: "Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, 'As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee.'"

They said, "We're not going to listen to you. We're not going to obey you." Then they continued: "But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the"

They were saying, "You don't understand, Jeremiah. When we were worshiping the queen of heaven and pouring out our drink offerings, we had plenty. We did not have the sword or the famine. But since we left off doing all this, everything destructive has come to pass. You don't understand." What they did not understand was that the only reason they prospered as long as they did was the mercy and patience of God. God did not instantly smite them and kill them.

Their perverted thinking interpreted their experience this way: "We need to worship the queen of heaven because that's where the blessings are. That's when we were not hungry or threatened with the sword. We did this. Yes, we did this." Thus they refused to hear God and His Word, basing everything upon their own mental, rational interpretation of experience. In essence, they were saying, "We have no need for God. We don't want Him. We don't need Him at all."

We know what is best for us. We know what we went through, what works, and what does not work. I have talked with Christian people many times who say, "Well, I know what happened to me. I know what I went through." They base everything upon their experience and their own interpretation of it. We never stop to think that our minds are corrupted by nature. Unless our minds are renewed through the Word of God, our thinking is wrong. The misinterpretation of our experiences should be evident, because we interpret everything through our own perverted thinking.

Now look, if you would, to verse 20, Jeremiah 44: "Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, and to the women, and to all the people which had given him that answer, saying, 'All right.'"

God's Response and Challenge

Watch it: "The incense that ye burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, ye, and your fathers, your kings, and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them, and came it not into His mind? So that the Lord could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day. Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in His law, nor in His statutes, nor in His testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you."

"As at this day." In other words, you've got everything turned around, folks. The reason you went through the judgment that you went through was because of what you were doing. You were pouring out drink offerings and making cakes to the queen of heaven instead of worshiping the one true and living God. You were doing what you wanted to do instead of obeying God's law. You interpreted that little time when God was patient with you and did not judge you as the norm—as what you should be doing.

That's exactly where you are now. Take note of verse 25 of Jeremiah 44: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying; Ye and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and fulfilled with your hand, saying, 'We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her': ye will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows." God says, "I know what you've already determined in your heart. You've already said this is what we're going to do. We are not going to stop. We have determined that this is the best route for us to go, for our good and the good of our children and neighbors. This is exactly what we're going to do. I know," said God, "you are going to accomplish your will." Humanists believe they know what is best for themselves.

Humanists believe that they have the ability to guide and direct their lives into that which is the absolute best for them and for others as well. Thus, they reject God and God's Word. They do not need God, His directives, or His salvation. They have spoken, and so be it.

A humanist is much like a witch in one sense, because witches always say something like this: "As my will is, so mote it be," or "so must it be." In other words, I am the one who determines what is good and what is bad, what should be done and what should not be done. These people were, in essence, challenging God.

God said in verse 25: "The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying; Ye and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and fulfilled with your hand, saying, 'We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her': ye will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows." God says, "I know you're going to do exactly that."

In Jeremiah 44:29-30, God says: "And this shall be a sign unto you, saith the Lord, that I will punish you in this place, that ye may know that My words shall surely stand against you for evil. Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies"—that would be Nebuchadnezzar—"and into the hand of them that seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life."

You said with your mouth, "We will perform our vows." God said, "I said, you will surely die. Now let's see whose word is going to stand, yours or Mine." If you desire to challenge God, you better be prepared to lose and to be destroyed, because God is not only omniscient, He is omnipotent. He is the eternal, immutable, sovereign God of heaven and earth. The whole point is that humanists base everything upon their own rational thinking and interpret their experiences according to their own rational thinking. They do not understand that "the natural man receiveth not

Applications for Today

The things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. And they end up like these people, challenging God.

One of the major problems we have in our church today is not what is called Christian humanism. Our problem is that we have

professing Christians who are living as humanists. If they are not denying God personally and literally, they are living as if God does not exist. They are living as if they do not need God's Word, His directives, or His counsel. This is revealed in the ignorance of the average professing Christian—in their ignorance of His precepts and principles, and in their immorality, unethical conduct, and behavior.

So I would tell you, just as Jeremiah told these people, you need to make up your minds. You need to determine whether or not you are going to be a Christian or a humanist, because you cannot be both at the same time.

Here is a principle that you and I should master, one that will enable us to avoid the problem these people got into: You always allow the Bible to interpret your experience. You never allow your experience to interpret the Bible. I can show you church after church and Christian after Christian who always allow their experience to interpret the Bible: "I know it's gotta be true because it happened to me." Your experience is not the norm or the standard. The Word of God is our standard. When you allow your experience to interpret the Word of God, you have real problems.

You have to remember that humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms one's ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment for the greater good. And the greater good is determined by the humanist.

If you are not a humanist, then you need to demonstrate and manifest it by reading and studying the Word of God and bringing your life into conformity to it. You are not going to learn anything by reading a verse or two every now and then. If you do not seriously study the Word of God and read it faithfully, you are not going to obey our Lord. You remember what He said in Luke 6:46? Our Lord said, "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not those things which I say unto you?"

I've told you a hundred times the word Lord is kurios, means boss, owner, master, sovereign. So our Lord says, "Why are you calling Me boss? Why are you calling Me master? Why are you

calling Me sovereign, if you're not going to obey everything that I say unto you?"

Here's what we try to do. We try to compartmentalize certain areas of our lives. We will say, "Well, I want to obey God in this area, but over here, wait a minute. I know what I like and what I need. I don't need the Bible over here because that would interfere with what I determined is best for me." That is humanism. To the degree that you do not submit to the Word of God, to the degree that you do not obey the Lord Jesus Christ, to that degree, you're a humanist. You're saying, "I know what is sufficient for me. I know what is best for me. I do not need the Word of God." And that's why the Bible tells you over and over, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart,

"And lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil." We cannot have our lives compartmentalized. We have to say, "Lord, You are our Lord and Master."

In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, the apostle said, "What? Know ye not that..." No, you're not. You're bought with a price. "Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." We belong to Him. Our bodies and spirits belong to God, and therefore He is to be glorified in every part of our lives.

Conclusion: Christ's Word Will Judge

Humanists do not need God. They do not need His Word. They do not need His counsel. That is what they think. Their minds are corrupted, perverted, and depraved. In John 12:48, in light of this truth, our Lord said: "He that rejecteth Me"—that is Jesus Christ, the living Word—"and receiveth not My words"—that is His written Word—"hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." This book is going to judge in the last day the words that He has spoken. He is a judge.

God said in Jeremiah 44, "We will see whose words shall stand, theirs or Mine." I have news for you: God's Word shall stand forever. "O Lord, Thy Word is settled in the heavens." He has sanctified His Word above His name. If God's Word ever fails, then God is not God.

We cannot be Christian humanists. We are either Christian or humanist. There is no in-between and no compatibility. We must, we must be Christian in every area of our lives.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. Lord, we pray that You would make us wholly, completely, totally Christian in every area, every aspect, and every compartment of our lives. May we submit to Thee, be obedient to Thee, and honor Thee; desire Your will, Your Word, and Your truth; and conform our lives to it. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Providential Wisdom and Understanding

Introduction to Psalm 107 and God's Providence

The psalmist said, “Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” When you look at that verse and see “and will observe these things,” you have to immediately ask, “What things?” Of course, the answer is that those things are what he has revealed in this particular psalm. So this psalm deals with God’s sovereign providence.

I’ve often said that there is no such thing as luck, chance, fate, or fortune in a world that is ruled by God. There are only acts of God’s sovereign providence. I’ve also said this same truth in a different way: nothing less than God’s eternal decrees coming to pass in time. That truth emphasizes that God’s providential acts in time, in history, are exceedingly important because they reveal His attributes and they also reveal His purpose.

So Psalm 107 is a special treatise on God’s providence. It shows not only the distresses that are brought about upon individuals by

God's providence, but it also shows the comforts that we are deriving from those acts of providence as well.

The Command to Praise and the Repeated Refrain

Therefore, in this psalm, we are commanded to praise the Lord. Notice verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 107. We are going to look at the entire psalm, but look at verses 1 and 2 right now: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."

How often have you been blessed, delivered, healed, and saved from miseries and death? Then you must ask yourself, how often have you given the Lord praise and thanks for His gracious acts of providence? If you have been delivered, the Bible says in verse 2, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Psalm 50:23, which I will quote again before I end this message, simply says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God." Note that first part: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." If you genuinely want to glorify God, you must praise Him for as many blessings—life, health, and all of His sinner mercies—as you have received. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. You say so secretly, privately, and publicly as well.

There is one very important verse in this psalm that occurs four times. There is also one very important word in this psalm that occurs four times in relationship to those four verses. The verse is this: "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" You will find it in verses 8, 15, 21, and 31. In verse 8, it says, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

John Trapp, the old Puritan, said, "They that would confess it to the Lord, both in secret and in society, this is all the rent that God requireth. He is content that we have the comfort of his blessings, so he may have the honor of them. This was all the fee that Christ looked for, for his cures. Go and tell what God hath done for thee. Words seem to be a poor and slight recompense, but Christ himself

is called the Word." When he gives this quote, he says, "This is all the rent that God requireth."

One of the funny things that happened to me years ago was reading a lot of the Puritans, and I came across this phrase quite frequently. At that time, we were living in Pensacola, Florida, and were members of Smyrna Baptist Church. Roy Julian was the pastor, but I was traveling and preaching and was very seldom home on a Sunday.

One Sunday night, however, I happened to be there. Alice and I went to church, and Pastor Julian preached. Before he started the service, he said, "It's good to have John Weaver in the congregation. He's hardly ever gets to be with us because he's always off preaching." Then he said, "I'm going to ask him to lead us in prayer." One of the phrases and requests I used in that prayer was this: "Lord, help us to pay up our past due rent of thanksgiving."

In other words, that was what the old Puritan meant: Let us thank God for what He has already done before we ask Him for something else. When church was over, I tarried behind so I could speak to Pastor Julian. As I shook his hand, I felt something in my hand and looked down. It was a hundred-dollar bill.

I said, "What's this for?" He said, "Some man gave it to me and told me to give it to you to help you pay up your past due rent." The truth of the matter is, I did not even pay rent where we lived; we were living rent free. I said, "Oh Lord, I need to use that phrase more often."

So when John Trapp says, "This is all the rent that God requireth," that was the way they spoke back then. John Gill said it like this: "For his providential goodness in providing food and drink for them and when fainting, in directing them to their right way when they had lost it, and in bringing them safe to the place that they were bound for, and particularly for a special grace and goodness in redemption and effectual calling, for bringing out of a wilderness state and condition, and supplying them with all the spiritual provisions, and putting them in the right way to eternal glory and happiness."

And this is why he is saying we should be praising the Lord. The truth of the matter is, God is indeed our chief good. His goodness abounds to all the earth, both to the saved and to the unsaved, both to the just and the unjust.

There is a passage in Acts 14:17 that is very specific: "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." He left himself not without witness in that he did good, and that goodness goes to both saved and unsaved alike. Then you remember Matthew 5:45: "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." The goodness of God is not only upon the saved and the unsaved.

It is also something for which we should completely, hourly, and daily give thanks. Turn back in your Bibles to Psalm 103 and look at the first five verses. When you get home today, this would be a good opportunity to meditate upon these verses and think about them. David begins in Psalm 103:1: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Watch the next phrase: "And all that is within me, bless his holy name." This is not just some casual thanking of God; it is the entirety of his being involved in thanking Him. He says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul." Then: "And forget not all his benefits."

He names some of them: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." When you stop and think about these things, they should be sufficient to make us begin praising the Lord and thanking Him for His goodness as well. Since you are in Psalm 103, turn over to Psalm 104, because the goodness of God extends not just to the saved and the unsaved, but to His creation, to all the animals as well. In Psalm 104, beginning with verse 10: "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills.

They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills

from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies. He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

In Psalm 107, there is a verse that occurs four times: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Another word related to that verse is the little word “then”—T-h-e-n. You find it in verse 6, verse 13, verse 19, and verse 30. Each time, notice how “then” is connected to the distresses that men find themselves in. The psalm is very easily divided into four distinct categories, or four distinct examples.

Four Illustrations of Distress and Deliverance

First of all, in this psalm, you have the example or illustration of someone who is weary and lost in their traveling. The second illustration you have in this psalm happens to be miserable captives in a hideous dungeon. The third illustration you have in this psalm is the sick and the dying. And the fourth illustration you have in this psalm happens to be mariners who are in a raging storm on the sea.

Have you ever found yourself in any of these situations or any of these circumstances?

It is easy for me to imagine a weary and lost traveler, because Alice and I have traveled all over this country. There have been times when I started driving at five o'clock in the morning and did not stop

until eleven or twelve at night, except for gas and to use the bathroom. On occasions, I have gotten lost—not really, really lost, but unable to find exactly where I was going.

I can identify with that a little bit, and probably you can as well. But some of you may say, "I have never been a captive in a dungeon, especially a hideous dungeon." Before you say that, let me remind you of Pilgrim's Progress, written by John Bunyan. The truth is, many people have been in a dungeon, a hideous dungeon, and in deep distress. It may not have been a real physical dungeon, but it was a dungeon. I want to read a few paragraphs from Pilgrim's Progress.

Pilgrim and Hopeful, weary in their journeys, fall asleep on land owned by Giant Despair, who captures them and throws them into his dungeon. "Neither could they, with all the skill they had, get again to the stile that night. Wherefore, at last, lighting under a little shelter, they sat down there until the daybreak; but being weary, they fell asleep. Now there was, not far from the place where they lay, a castle named Doubting Castle. The owner whereof was Giant Despair, and it was his grounds that they now were sleeping. Wherefore he, getting up in the morning early, and walking up and down in his fields, caught Christian and Hopeful asleep in his grounds."

Then, with a grim and surly voice, he bid them awake and asked them whence they were and what they did in his grounds. They told him they were pilgrims and had lost their way. Then said the giant, "You have this night trespassed on me by trampling in and lying on my grounds, and therefore you must go along with me." So they were forced to go, because he was stronger than they.

They had little to say, for they knew themselves to be in a fault. The giant drove them before him and put them into his castle, into a very dark, nasty dungeon, stinking to the spirits of those two men. There they lay from Wednesday morning until Saturday night without one bit of bread or one drop of drink, or light, or any to ask how they did. They were therefore in an evil case and far from friends and acquaintance.

Christian had double sorrow because it was through his unadvised counsel that they were brought into this dungeon. Christian and Hopeful lie in prison in Doubting Castle because they were no longer looking to Christ and resting in His provision. They had looked to themselves to find an easier path. Even when they realized their error and sought to return to the way, they failed, striving in their own efforts. All the skill they had was insufficient to revive and restore them. It looked grim for the pilgrims, but their troubles were just beginning.

How did they escape? As Christian lay in the dungeon, he recalled the key called Promise, which he wore around his neck. Realizing its significance, he used the key to unlock the doors and gates of Doubting Castle, freeing himself and Hopeful from their tormentors. Here we are talking about a dungeon of despair, discouragement, and distress. There have been plenty of Christians in this dungeon, and probably still many as well. We can understand this, because I have known prominent preachers and believers who had great problems with despair, discouragement, and being downcast. Charles Spurgeon was one of them.

The third illustration, of course, would be that of sick and dying people. The fourth would be that of mariners. So let us look in our Bibles to Psalm 107 at the first five verses. Here is the weary and lost traveler: “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.” Now look what he has done for them: “And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west,”

They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

The distress was that they were weary, lost, hungry, and thirsty. Their deliverance was that they cried to the Lord, and he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

What should be the response of individuals when God delivers them from their distresses? “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”

Here is the second illustration: “Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.” Here they are in a hideous dungeon, discouraged and distressed. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.

What should be the response of man? “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Every time we are in distress, regardless of what that distress is, and God grants us deliverance, we should praise him for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men. It is only in distress that we really learn to cry and to pray. “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Yes, “For he hath”—that is something that God has done now.

The third illustration begins in verse 17: “Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.” In other words, we sin, and we get afflicted. Not all sickness is from sin, but some sickness is from sin, and here he is giving us an illustration of that. “Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; they are so sick they cannot eat, and they draw near unto the gates of death.” Here is a sick and dying person. What happens? Verse 19 says, “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” What should be the response when you were sick and were healed, when you were near death and were healed?

“Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Verse 22 continues: “And

let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing." Whenever God has healed us, we need to rejoice and thank Him for it. If I were to ask whether you have ever been sick and recovered, the truth is that each one of us has been sick and recovered. But did you really praise God and thank Him for His goodness in healing you and raising you up? Many times when we are sick, we take it for granted that we are going to get well, and sometimes we do not get well.

Years ago, Melvin Stringer's mother was in the hospital, in the intensive care unit. The entire family was called in. Although I was not related, I had been a family friend since childhood, so they called me in with the family. They told us that she would not make it through the day. I prayed for her and with her, as did Melvin, her son, who was also a preacher. When we left, everybody was downhearted and broken because they had told us she would not make it through the day.

The very next week, she was at our pond fishing. Doctors do not always know what is going to happen. So we rejoiced and thanked the Lord for that. We should learn to praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works.

The fourth example is in verses 23 through 27: "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind"—there is His providence—"which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end."

"Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven." And what should be the response? "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

I have never in my entire life been in a storm on the sea, and, to be absolutely honest, I do not care to be in one. I have, however, been

on a very large shrimp boat for twenty-four hours, forty miles from land in the Gulf of Mexico. There were some very interesting experiences on that boat.

One that I recall vividly occurred at midnight, when I was on the bow of the boat. The moon was full, the stars were shining, the ocean was as smooth as silk, and everything was reflected on the water. I sat there, unable to believe my eyes. You could not see land; you could not see or hear anything. I was vividly impressed by the vastness of God's creation.

But when I got back to land, I understood this verse: "They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end." Of course, I realize that verse deals with a boat going up and down. I understand that. But if you are like me, you are not a mariner and were not raised on the sea. I was on that boat for twenty-four hours, and when I stepped off, I almost fell. And why?

Because I was staggering like a drunk man, I no longer had my land legs. I had sea legs, because everything had been moving, and it took me hours before I could walk the way I should walk on land. I am simply pointing out the fact that it is very, very upsetting when you realize you cannot even walk after being in a ship.

You have seen videos and pictures of these boats, especially fishing boats, diving up and down in the ocean, with the waves wallowing over them and washing everything away. That is not my piece of cake. I would never be a Navy man. But God has sovereignly and graciously delivered plenty of individuals in storms like that. You can think of the apostles. They were in the boat when the storm came along, and our Lord calmed that storm.

So what should be our response? It is this: "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" It is very interesting that when you see the word "then" in relationship to these distresses, it is "then they cry."

Without commenting particularly on this next section, I want to read it. I want to get to the text that I want to expound, but I want you to see that there are multiple reasons why we should praise the Lord. "Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders." You remember the verse in

verse 2: “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.” Now he says, “Let them exalt him”—that is, God—“in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.” Our thanks should not be simply secret or private; they should also be public.

“ He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; and sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase.”

He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way. Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock. The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.

The Call to Observe and Understand

Now we are at the last verse: “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” Notice that he says, “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things.” In other words, this psalm teaches us to pay close attention to the providence of God in our lives. There are reasons why we get sick. There are reasons why sometimes we do not have any money. There are reasons why, at times, God blesses us immensely. There are reasons for everything in our lives.

So many times we simply ignore what happens to us. But we are not only to observe what God does in our lives; we are also to observe what God does in the lives of others whom we know. Hold Psalm 107, and turn to Matthew chapter 21, verse 32. Look at what our Lord said there.

Learning from God's Acts in Others and in History

This is a very powerful verse. Our Lord was speaking directly to the scribes and Pharisees: “For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not.” John, that is John the Baptist, came preaching righteousness. The publicans—the notorious thieves, the tax collectors—and the harlots believed him. They repented, were baptized, and their lives were changed. The Pharisees and scribes did not believe the preaching of John. Yet our Lord continued: “But the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.” They had seen the publicans and harlots believe John, repent, be baptized, and have their lives changed, yet they did not repent afterward so as to believe him.

In other words, the scribes and Pharisees were required, responsible, and accountable to learn from the work of God in the lives of others whom they knew, especially when God had done that work in their presence. You and I are obligated and responsible to learn from what God does in our own lives. But we are also responsible to learn what He does in the lives of others whom we know, whether family or friends.

We are also duty-bound, obligated, and responsible to learn what God does in time and in history, because nothing happens by accident. There is no such thing as luck, chance, fate, or fortune in a world ruled by God. Anything that comes to pass in time was based upon God’s eternal decree in eternity. Nothing happens by accident; we are accountable and responsible to learn.

Now look at what God says in Psalm 107:43: “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things.” When God says, “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things,” the word “observe” does not simply mean to see or look at. It means that we contemplate, meditate, study, think upon, comprehend, understand, and ultimately apply the truth that is communicated.

God's Strange Acts of Judgment

Most people do not even notice what is happening in their lives. They do not pay attention to what happens in the lives of other

people, and they certainly do not pay attention to what happens in the world. Do you realize that God's judgment is called his strange act? We are supposed to notice anything that is strange. If Steve came in here for this message wearing a T-shirt and a pair of Bermuda shorts, I would think that was very strange. And so with Lorraine. Why would he do that? What is wrong with him? Is he sick? What is going on? It would be strange.

Look in your Bibles at Isaiah 28:21: "For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act." In other words, the judgment of God is here referred to as his strange act. Look at the cyclones, the tornadoes, the hurricanes, the volcanic eruptions, the building collapses, the fires, the floods, and the droughts. These are God's strange acts. These are acts of judgment.

All of God's works are done in wisdom, righteousness, grace, mercy, and goodness. In the book of Job, he talks about the weather. He sends it, he said, for correction, or for punishment, or for the good of the land. Our Lord said, "Whoso is wise will observe these things." That also implies that those who are unwise, those who are foolish, will not observe these things. They will not consider them.

In Hosea 14:9, God says: "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein." God asks, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them." It is only as we observe God's providential acts in time and in history that we understand something. What is it? "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Have you ever considered how graciously God provides for us? I am not simply talking about food. He provides in a multitude of ways.

I could actually think of four, but I am going to mention three. Years ago, when Alice and I got a Chevrolet Trailblazer, I was driving it, and I can tell you exactly where we were. I had a flat tire, so I pulled over beside the road to change it. I was raised on a farm and have changed tires all my life. But when I looked at the spare tire

underneath the car, I could not figure out how to get it down. I got under the car on my back and tried to turn it, but it would not turn. Thankfully, a man pulled up right behind us. He laughed and said, "Let me show you." I did not realize that the little hole in the bumper was for inserting something to let the tire down. I had never seen that in my life. Thankfully, the Lord provided for him to come along.

On another occasion, Alice and I were going to church on 32 going into Douglas. I had on a shirt, tie, and slacks, and I had another flat tire. I pulled over and began changing it. Just as I stopped, a man pulled in right behind me. He saw me standing there and said he did not know I was a preacher. "Sir, don't worry. You don't have to get your clothes dirty. I'll change this tire for you." I told him I was thankful because we were on our way to church and I needed to get there on time. When he found out I was a preacher, guess what? After changing my tire, he handed me ten dollars. "This will get it fixed for you," he said.

One other time was hilarious. Years ago, Alice, her mother, and I were on our way to see Melvin Stringer, who was in a retirement village. I had a flat tire and pulled over. Just as I stopped, a young man in a truck pulled in right behind me. I was looking at the tire while he was on his cell phone. He said, while Alice and I stood there, "Well, I've got to go right now. I've got to change this tire for these elderly people."

We were only in our 60s. I thought, "Oh, Lord, have mercy. Elderly in my 60s?" But I said, "I thank you, Lord. I'm willing to let a young man change the tire for this elderly man who is about 62 or 3 or 4, something like that." Wow. Stop and think about how graciously God provides for us. Think about how graciously God protects us. Many times God has protected us, and we do not even realize what He has done.

Sometimes I might be fussing a little because I think we are five minutes late. Then we get down the road and there is a wreck, and the first thing that comes to my mind is, "If I'd left on time, that might have been me." God just stalled me where I could—yes, you and I have no idea how many times God protects us, or how many times God has preserved us. We should learn to praise Him. God graciously does this for His people and for His works.

Psalm 145 says, “The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power.” God has been so gracious and kind. In His providence, we do get into distresses, but then He delivers us.

There is a wonderful verse in Deuteronomy 8. Sometimes you wonder why you get into trouble, why you get into distress, or why things happen to you. Deuteronomy 8:1–2 says, “All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.” God does not humble and prove us so that He may know. He already knows. He humbles us and proves us so that we may know.

But look at verse 3: “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger.” Why did God allow them to hunger? “And fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.” God let them go hungry so that he could feed them, and in feeding them, teach them a biblical principle and a biblical truth. Many times things happen to us just so God can teach us.

Psalm 107:43 says, “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” If you want to understand, even to a small degree, the lovingkindness of the Lord, you must consider and pay attention to the providential acts of God in your life, in the lives of others, and in time and history. We may only get a glimpse of the lovingkindness of God, but a glimpse would be sufficient for us.

You remember how Moses said to the Lord, “Show me thy glory.” God said, “You can't see my glory and live. But I tell you what I'm going to do. I'll put you in the cleft of the rock. I'll pass by you and cover you with my hand, and when I pass by I'll move my hand and

you can see my back parts." If we just saw the back parts of God, it would change our lives. It would motivate us to praise him, glorify him, and serve him forever and ever. If we can just get a glimpse of God's lovingkindness in providence, it will change our lives.

Applications: Distress Drives Prayer, Observe Providence, and Give Thanks

Consider the little word "then" in its relationship to the distress these individuals found themselves in. The lost and weary traveler—then they cried. The ones locked in the hideous dungeon were suffering—then they cried. The man sick and dying could not help himself—then he cried. The mariner fighting that storm—then he cried.

Have you ever stopped to think about this? Many times it takes distress to make us really pray and cry to the Lord. When everything is going smoothly, we think we do not really need to pray, or we do not pray as we should. But when our boat starts to sink, we can start crying to God. When we think we are dying, we can start crying to God. When we are lost and cannot find our way, we can start crying to God. When we are captured and cannot escape the dungeon, we can start crying to God.

It is interesting to consider the word "then." When they reached rock bottom, discovered that they were absolutely helpless and hopeless, and could not deliver themselves, then they cried. As long as you think you can do something, you are not going to cry to God for help. But when you realize how helpless and hopeless you are, then you will cry.

It would be wise for us to understand the lovingkindness of God. In order to do that, we must not only study His Word, but also observe His gracious acts of providence: what He does in our lives, in the lives of others, and in time and history. When we observe what God is doing, we bring it to the Word of God and let the Word interpret for us, showing us exactly the purpose of God—the reason He has brought us into distress or allowed something to happen to us.

Most people think they are too busy. We are too busy to study, too busy to pray, and too busy to consider what is happening in our lives and the lives of our family and friends. But I do not think it is that we are too busy. I think what it is is that we really do not care. We really do not have any pleasure in the works of God.

"Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!" Praise the Lord for his goodness to the children of men, and praise him for his works. Psalm 111:2 says, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." If you have pleasure in the works of God, you are going to seek his works out. If you have no pleasure in the work of God, you are not going to pay any attention to them. If you have pleasure in the works of God, in what he is doing in your life, the life of your family, and the life of your friends, and in what God is doing in this world, you will consider it. You will pay attention. You will meditate. You will learn the truth and apply it in your life. The real reason most people do not pay any attention to the providential act of God is that they have no pleasure in his works.

The second reason is that they still believe in luck, chance, fate, or fortune. Here is the third application: We must learn to give God praise and thanksgiving for his multitudinous blessings in our lives. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." In everything give thanks. You can give thanks for your food, for life and health and sleep and rest, for protection, and for a multitudinous number of things.

I remember reading years ago about Richard Wurmbrand, who was in a communist prison for years. He came to the States and was in a Bible conference. The preachers who were with him went out to a restaurant, and they all ordered their food. When the waitresses brought out the food and set it before them, Richard Wurmbrand immediately fell on his knees in the restaurant and began to pray loudly, thanking God for the food. One of the preachers said, "I got embarrassed. And then I got embarrassed that I was embarrassed." He said, "If I'd eaten rats for about 14 years, I think I could learn to be thankful for real food as well."

Listen, you can be thankful that we are not reduced to that. You can be thankful that God allows you to have a garden, that God

allows you to have life, that God allows you to have health, and that God allows you to wake up. Wow.

The crucial question is this: do you really praise him? Do you think of those little incidental things that you take for granted every day, like breath, breathing? We do not ever think about that. I still praise God for his deliverance from the hurricane back the first of October. Guess what? They are still cleaning up. All along the roads, there are still roofs that have never been repaired yet. We are talking months. God is gracious. God is good. God is kind.

So we need to thank him not only for our lives, but also for the goodness of God in the lives of others. I am thankful when others are blessed. I am thankful that Justin and Catherine found each other. I am thankful that I found Alice many, many years ago. Well, let me change that: I am thankful she chased me down. There are so many things for which we could be thankful, and we can also be thankful for the goodness God shows in the lives of other individuals.

Psalm 107:22 says, "And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing." How do you sacrifice the sacrifice of thanksgiving? Today we do not go to a temple or carry a physical sacrifice. Hebrews 13 answers that question: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." There is his great sacrifice. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him"—that is, by Jesus Christ—"by him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually." It is "the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."

How do we offer the sacrifice of praise? With the fruit of our lips, and we are to offer it through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great sacrifice, and therefore our sacrifice is acceptable through him. The psalmist says in Psalm 107:2, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy." If God has blessed you, you need to learn to say so: say so to God, say so to his people; say so privately, and say so publicly.

Psalm 50:23 says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of

God.” But listen again to the first part: “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.” If you want to genuinely glorify God, give Him praise and thanksgiving. Acknowledge Him. Pay up your past-due rent of thanksgiving, and continue to pay your rent, because He continues to bless you, provide for you, protect you, and preserve you.

We need to learn from God’s gracious, sovereign providence. Father, we pray that You would indeed teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, help us to see Your work, and help us, Lord, to glorify Thy name and praise Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, whose name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 6

Repentance According to the Scriptures

Well, let me just mention this. I have two messages that I just finished yesterday that I want to be able to bring probably in the next two Sundays. And I titled them, "Cursing God." And you'd be absolutely astounded how easy it is to curse God. And you're going to find that an awful lot of preachers, as well as an awful lot of Christians, do indeed curse God without using profanity. So it's astounding what the Word of God teaches on those subjects. For today, though, I want you to look in Jeremiah chapter 31, and we're going to be reading verses 18 and 19. The title of the message today is this, "Repentance According to Scripture." So notice, if you would, Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 18 and 19. The Word of God says, "I've surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus."

"Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou me and I shall be turned for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented. And after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth."

Introduction: The Neglected Doctrine of Repentance

Now, the doctrine of repentance is much like the other doctrines in modern-day Christendom. It's barely ever considered, thought about, sought after, understood, and yet, according to Scripture, it's an absolute necessity in salvation, in sanctification, and in Christian growth. Repentance is also a neglected doctrine. I think it's neglected because, number one, it upsets and offends modern man. I can just see some of them, in fact, I know of some who have actually taken this attitude.

How dare God imply that I'm wicked, or that I'm a sinner, and I'm vile. And how dare the preacher get up and say something like, I'm totally depraved, and I'm sinful, and I'm wicked and vile. Oh, no. In fact, listen, he's condemning my parents and my grandparents. We've always lived like this. I mean, what's wrong with us? So, obviously, it's a neglected doctrine. And when you begin to think about this one truth, usually you cannot build a very huge ministry when you're upsetting people all the time and pointing out their sins. And so a lot of people, a lot of preachers, will kind of water down the Word of God in order that they might have what they deem a successful ministry. And the truth of the matter is, success according to the Bible is not something great, it's not something huge, it's not something big, it's faithfulness. When you stop and think about Noah, never had one convert, and yet he's in the heroes of faith.

Look at Jeremiah and Isaiah. They never saved their nation, never saved their society, as far as we know. They never really had any followers at all. In fact, most of the people wanted to kill Jeremiah. But these men were listed as heroes of faith, that is for sure.

Repentance happens to be a doctrine that is very easily and readily perverted by modern-day man. Repentance is usually presented as something that man can do. It is very easy, very simple, and it is in his power to accomplish it. It is in his power to perform it at his will. But I can assure you of one thing according to Scripture: many vainly believe that everything is in their hands when, in reality, it is not in their hands. Some stupidly and unwisely believe that somehow they are going to continue sinning right up to the point of their death, and then they are going to repent and find their way into

heaven. Like one individual said, many individuals who plan on dying at midnight actually die at 11:30.

So it is not always in your hands. Repentance is not something that you can do. Repentance, then, is not in the power of man to accomplish at his whim and in his pleasure.

Repentance Is Absolutely Necessary

Before we look at Jeremiah 31:18-19, I want to lay out for you several biblical truths so that you can see the exposition of those verses in light of the analogy of faith. That would be the teaching of the entirety, basically, of the Word of God. First and foremost, the truth is that repentance is not optional. It is absolutely necessary. In fact, God demands repentance. Scripture tells us that the only option other than repentance is perishing. Hold Jeremiah 31, but look in your Bibles to the book of Luke, chapter 13, and notice what our Lord says very clearly and very plainly. In Luke 13, let us begin reading with verse 1: Luke 13 and verse 1.

The Bible says, "There were present at that season some that told them of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." They were murdered while they were worshiping God. Jesus answered, "Suppose you that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay. But except you repent, you shall all likewise perish. Are those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay. But except you repent, you shall all likewise perish."

Our Lord is saying, Do not think that, merely because some horrible catastrophe or terrible tragedy afflicts certain individuals, they are super abundant sinners. Our Lord says, No. Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish. In other words, the only option to repentance is perishing.

Another important passage is Acts 17, verses 30 and 31, where the Apostle Paul is preaching on Mars Hill: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Why does God command all men everywhere to repent? Verse 31 answers: "Because He hath appointed a day in which He

will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, Jesus Christ, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

God is saying, first, there is a judgment day; second, Jesus Christ is going to be the judge; and third, to demonstrate that truth, He raised Him from the dead. Just as surely as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, there is going to be a judgment. Therefore, God commands all men everywhere to repent. Repentance is necessary simply because God commanded it, and He has assured us that there is a judgment and that we will be judged. Repentance was a theme not only in the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also of John the Baptist and all the other apostles. For instance, John the Baptist came saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In Matthew 4:17, from that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” One of my favorite verses that I have quoted for years is Mark 1:15: “The time is come, the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” In other words, you cannot really believe the gospel without repentance. Repent ye and believe the gospel. In Mark 6:12, speaking of the disciples, “And they went out, and preached that men should repent.” Since God commands repentance, and repentance was preached by our Lord, John the Baptist, and the apostles, we have to ask this question: What is repentance?

What Is Repentance?

The Greek word used for repentance over and over is metanoia. Noia comes from the noun nous, which refers to the mind. Thus, metanoia literally means a change of mind. When you repent, you change your mind concerning God, concerning man, concerning sin, and concerning righteousness. In other words, you change your mind about a lot of things. But it is not just a change of mind. It is a change of mind that results in a change of attitude, a change of actions, a change of conduct, and a change in the course of life. The interesting thing is that the Word of God teaches that we have some good examples and shows us exactly what repentance is.

The Thessalonians are an excellent illustration of what it means to repent. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, the apostle Paul says, “For they

themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols." They turned "to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." These lives of the Thessalonians were totally and completely changed. They turned from sin unto God. They turned from rebellion to obedience. And they turned from idolatry to the worship service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is exactly what John the Baptist preached. John gave two Scriptures. First, in Matthew 3:8, when he saw the Sadducees and Pharisees come to his baptism, he said, "Oh you nest of vipers, you bunch of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

Repentance Must Produce Fruit

In Luke 3:8, he said it a little differently, but it means the same: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance. And think not to say within yourselves that we have Abraham our father, for God is able of these stones to raise up children of Abraham."

What does it mean to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, or fruits worthy of repentance? These two verses simply mean that they were to bring forth fruit which evidenced and manifested true, genuine, biblical repentance. When someone says, "I repent," but there is no fruit and no evidence, the repentance is a lie. Whenever there is real, genuine repentance, there will always be fruit that evidences that repentance.

Before we look at Jeremiah 31, we need to keep in mind that God does command repentance and that repentance is absolutely necessary. The second thing we have to keep in mind is that repentance is just as much the gift of God as is faith.

Repentance Is the Gift of God

Everyone in this room probably could quote Ephesians 2:8–9. Most Christians can quote at least two passages, John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8–9, where God says, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it's the gift of God, not of works, lest any

man should boast." We can say, yes, faith is God's gift. It is not of man. It is not of works. You cannot work up faith or manufacture faith. Faith is God's gift; He must give it.

Although many Christians can quote Ephesians 2:8–9, very few could quote verses saying that repentance is also God's gift. If faith is God's gift, and you cannot believe without God giving you His gift, repentance also is God's gift, and you cannot repent without God giving you His gift. The first is Acts 5:30–31: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hang on a tree." Then, "Him hath God exalted with or at His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel." The word give is the Greek word didomi, which means it's a gift. He has to give repentance.

Consider Acts 11:18. In Acts 10, Peter went to the house of Cornelius, a Roman soldier, where his family and friends were gathered. Peter preached to them, and God saved them. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, they were ready to confront him because he had entered a Gentile's house, the house of someone unclean, which Jews did not do. Peter explained the vision God had given him, how Cornelius had sent men to Joppa, and how he had gone with witnesses and preached to them. God gave these men the same exact gift He had given them. Peter said, "Who was I that I could withhold baptism since God saved them?" Acts 11:18 says, "And when they heard these things, they held their peace, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." The word granted is the same Greek word as didomi: God also gave the Gentiles repentance unto life. Repentance is unto life. For another plain passage, look in 2 Timothy 2.

In 2 Timothy 2:24-26, the Word of God says: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

You can ask these questions: When do men recover themselves out of the snare of the devil? Verse 25 answers: when they acknowledge the truth. When do they acknowledge the truth? That is

when God gives them repentance. In each of these passages, repentance is the gift of God, something God must give.

I want you to understand that it is a flat-out lie from the flesh, the world, and the devil that man can repent whenever he wants and change whenever he wants. Modern-day Christendom says men can repent at will. That is not true. Repentance is not the work of the flesh or of man. Although it is worked in man, and man must repent, it is still the gift of God.

Fallen man cannot work up repentance, nor can fallen man work up faith. As children, everybody heard, "Well, if you believe something now, it's gonna come true." What's that Walt Disney song? "When you wish upon a star." We cannot make ourselves believe anything—not scripturally or spiritually. Neither can we work up faith or repentance. I wish for a million bucks; I wish I were slender and handsome and had a head full of hair. But wishing cannot produce faith or repentance.

I like what I read about one man: "Quitting smoking is easy. I've already done it 250 times." Which means he never really quit; he just started back over and over and over.

Repentance and faith are, in reality, the two sides of one coin. If a man genuinely and savingly repents, he also believes. That is why the Bible says in Acts 11:18, "Then if God granted them repentance unto life." If someone truly and savingly believes, he also repents. You cannot believe without repenting, neither can you repent without believing. It is impossible to do either apart from the gift of God, because God must give faith, and God must also give repentance.

With these two truths in mind, remember, first, that God commands men to repent, and repentance is absolutely needed and necessary. Then remember the further truth that repentance is God's gift.

Exposition of Jeremiah 31:18-19: The Pattern of Repentance

Turn back to Jeremiah 31, and look at verses 18 and 19. We see this truth put together. Verse 18 says: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus. Thou hast chastised me, and I was

chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God."

When you see the word Ephraim in the Bible, you must know that it is used in several ways. Ephraim is the name of one of Joseph's sons, alongside Manasseh. It is also the name of the leading tribe in Israel. Sometimes it refers to an individual, sometimes to a tribe, and sometimes to the entire northern kingdom, not merely the tribe. At other times, Ephraim is used of all Israel, north and south. Regardless of whether the word here refers to an individual, an individual tribe, or the nation itself, God gives us a very clear illustration of repentance.

A tribe is made up of individuals; so are a society, a family, and a nation. Therefore, whether we speak of familial, ecclesiastical, societal, or national repentance, no nation can repent unless individuals repent. When we speak of national repentance, however, we are not necessarily saying that every individual repents. We mean that a sufficient number repent to change the course of that nation.

He said in verse 18, "I've surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus." The very first step that leads to biblical repentance is what we know as bemoaning oneself. Another word for it is conviction. When we bemoan ourselves, when we are convicted, we realize that we are wrong, wicked, sinful, and that we have transgressed God's law. The Hebrew word for bemoaning is nud.

It means to sway back and forth, to show grief, and to bemoan oneself. A lot of people, when they get really down and depressed, start shaking their head: "Oh God, what am I going to do?" That is exactly what this word means. They are swaying back and forth, bemoaning themselves, and covered with grief. Conviction is another word for bemoaning, and you will find that word used in the New Testament in the Septuagint as well.

Consider the passage in John chapter 8 and verse 9, where these men were condemning the woman who was taken in the very act of adultery. I have often thought about this and smiled. If she was taken in the very act of adultery, where was the man? Why did they not bring him? The Bible says that Jesus knelt down and wrote on the ground. I have no idea what He wrote, but I have a pretty good

thought. I think He put down the dates and names of individuals with whom these men had committed adultery. Our Lord said, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” John 8:9 says, “And they went out being convicted of their own conscience. And they went out one by one, beginning with the eldest, even to the youngest.” They were convicted.

The word convicted is elegcho in the Greek. It means to convict, refute, find shame, expose fault, expose failure and sin, and call oneself into account. What is happening when Ephraim—whether an individual, a tribe, or the whole nation—is bemoaning himself? He is convicted. He is seeing himself as sinful and wicked, and is coming to the point Isaiah reached in Isaiah chapter 6 and verse 5, when he saw God in the holiness and righteousness of God. What did he say?

"Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the Lord of hosts." Woe is me. In other words, he is bemoaning himself: Look at me. I am sinful. I am wicked. Look at the people that I am dwelling upon and with and in and around. They are wicked and sinful. Woe is me. So he is bemoaning himself.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would, to—hold Jeremiah chapter 31. But look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 9 in light of this. Here is why it is necessary that we are indeed convicted, and I am going to show you just momentarily why it is necessary. In Matthew chapter 9, beginning with verse 10, look what our Lord says: "And it came to pass as Jesus was at meat in the house, behold, many publicans—tax collectors—and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with publicans and sinners?' But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, 'They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"

It is interesting that our Lord said very plainly, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick." There is not a person in this room who would wake up in the morning feeling absolutely wonderful and great, the greatest you have felt in years, and think, "This is so wonderful. I feel so good I think I am just going

to go to the doctor and give him a couple hundred bucks just to check me out." You are not going to do that. The truth is, when you get sick, you still go to the doctor or to your medicine cabinet. When that does not work, you are going to call Steve or Joshua, or somebody, and say, "Man, I have been down the last three or four days. Everything I am taking is not working. Have you ever been sick like this? If so, what did you take?" And someone may say, "Oh man, I had this peanut butter mayonnaise banana and pickle sandwich. It took care of me." That is what you are going to have for supper that night, because you are going to try it. When you finally reach the point that you cannot doctor yourself and your neighbor cannot doctor you, you finally break down and go to the doctor.

Our Lord said, “I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” If you do not think you are sick, you will never call the doctor. If you do not think you are a sinner, you will never need a Savior. If you do not think you are wicked, wrong, helpless, and hopeless, you will never come to Christ. Unless you see yourself as lost, you will never think that you need a Savior. The old Puritans had a great saying: “The scarlet thread of the gospel must be preceded by the sharp needle of the law.” In other words, if you are not convicted, if you are not bemoaning yourself, if you do not see yourself as lost, you will never want the gospel or believe it.

It is astounding how most sinners can not only sin gladly and willingly, but afterward be proud of it. They boast about it: “Well, I did this and I did that. Boy, I can’t wait till I do it again. We had the most fun.” They indulge in sin so greatly, and their flesh enjoys it. Yet once they are convicted and converted by the grace of God, all that boasting stops, and they become ashamed and sorrowful. What kind of change happens?

When you begin to bemoan yourself, you are being convicted, and you are being convicted in several ways. Number one is by the Holy Spirit. This must be understood. When we speak about God, we refer to the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. The ontological Trinity, based on the Greek word ontos, meaning being, is the logical order of being: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The economical Trinity is how God works. When you study Scripture, everything is out of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. The Father ordained salvation,

God the Son purchased salvation, and God the Holy Spirit applies what the Son purchased. This is known as the economical Trinity. Thus, when we come to John chapter 16, verse 8, our Lord says this concerning the Holy Spirit.

"When he has come, he will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." True conviction is by the person and power of the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit oftentimes—and, generally speaking, uses means. By means, I refer to the Word of God. It is like that Puritan quotation: "The sharp needle of the law must precede the scarlet thread of the gospel."

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 5:11, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," or rebuke them. How would you rebuke them? You could say, "You ought not to be doing this," or, "You ought not to be doing that." Usually, however, the way you rebuke is, "You should not do that because thus saith the Lord. Here's what God says. This is what you should be doing." Then, in 2 Timothy 4:2, the apostle Paul tells Timothy, who was a pastor,

He says, “Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” The word reprove literally means convict. How do you convict people that they are wrong? Number one, the Holy Spirit does so; but we convict by using the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and convicts the individual.

The beginning of real repentance is when we are convicted and begin to bemoan ourselves. It is when God the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God. He opens our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts to receive. We understand then not only our sins, wickedness, and transgressions, but also the desperate situation in which we are. Jesus Christ is the only way out. He is the only Savior.

Go back now to Jeremiah chapter 31 and look at this, because here is what God does. Watch verse 18. He says, “I’ve surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised.” In biblical repentance, when we are bemoaning ourselves and are convicted, all of a sudden we are shown the hand

of God in afflicting us with what we would call sadness and sorrow, but which also includes instruction.

The Hebrew word for chastise is yasar, and it means to chasten, discipline, instruct, admonish, teach, and correct. In the first clause, the chastisement itself is meant; in the second use, it is the beneficial result of the chastisement. Thus, “Thou hast chastised me, and I was corrected,” or, “I was instructed,” or, “I’ve benefited from that chastisement.”

Psalm 94 and verse 12 says, “Blessed is the man whom thou chasteneth, O Lord, and teacheth him out of thy law.” Real biblical chastening involves teaching. David said in Psalm 119, verse 71, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.” It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. When we realize that the hand of God has been upon us and has taught us, we say with David in Psalm 119, verse 75, “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in thy faithfulness hath chastened me.” God is faithful.

Now, let me show you. I want you to look so far at verse 18. He said, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised." Okay, let's stop right there just for a second. I told you the word chastisement refers not just to discipline or whipping, as you and I would say, but it also refers to instruction and teaching. Sometimes, sometimes, it does take discipline to instruct us. I've told you this before. There's an easy way to learn. There's a hard way to learn. Hmm. The easy way is to hear the words of God and obey. The hard way is Micah 6 verse 9: "Hear ye the rod and him who hath appointed it." God said, "I can teach you by chastening you." But I want you to see this.

I want you to hold Jeremiah 31, but I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of John chapter 6, and let me put this together for you. This should make this passage come alive in one sense of the word. Remember now, he said, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastened." In other words, there was a beneficial result. You whipped me, you taught me, and I've learned. So look in John 6 and verse 44. Our Lord says it like this: "No man can come unto me except the Father which has sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day." Now remember, can is a term of ability. No man

has the ability to come unto the Lord Jesus Christ. May is a term of permission. Can is a term of ability. So he says, "No man can come unto me, here's the only exception, that the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up in the last day." Well, how does the Father draw us?

Oh, look in verse 45. "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me." Isn't that amazing? He said, "Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised. I learned. I came." Yeah. When God chastens us, when God teaches us, when God opens our eyes, we come to Him.

In Jeremiah 31, we are given a wonderful picture of what we were like before conversion. Ephraim says in verse 18, “I've surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.” That is a perfect picture of a sinner.

Most of you know that I have a three-thousand-pound bull named General Hampton. I have never plowed with Hampton, nor have I ever put a yoke or bridle on him. Joshua and Clay are probably the two youngest men here, so I would like them to wrestle him down and put a yoke around his neck. You are not willing to do that, and I understand why.

What good is a bullock for plowing if you cannot put a yoke on him? If there is no yoke on him, he is uncontrollable; he does what he wills. It is like the fence around my pasture. I tell everyone that General Hampton stays within that fence at his own pleasure—and he does. He can walk through it at any time he wills, any time he wants to.

Consider also Deuteronomy 32:15: “But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.” Then the passage says, “Thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness. Then he forsook God, which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.” He is speaking of a big bullock that is uncontrollable and untamable. Exodus 32:9 says, “And the Lord said unto Moses, I've seen this people, behold, they are a stiff-necked people.” That is true of a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.

Here is another illustration, one with which some of us may identify more easily than with the bullock. When I was a boy, I rode mules, drove mules, and plowed mules. When I was seven years old, my father took me into a building in Fitzgerald, Georgia, which is still standing. It was a long building. On the left-hand side, all the way down except for the little office in front, were horses and mules for sale. On the right-hand side, all the way down, were cars and tractors for sale. When I was a boy, tractors were just coming into use.

When we plowed with a mule, we had the collar, the ropes, and the leather, but the trace came back to the single tree. If you were plowing two mules, it was called a double tree because you had two single trees together, or one long one. As long as the mule stayed within the trace that came from the neck all the way back to where the plow was, you could control that mule. But every now and then, the mule would do something called jumping the trace. When the mule stepped sideways out of the trace, you could not control the mule.

If the mule got scared, she took off across the field, dragging the plow; and if you did not turn loose, you would be attached to the plow as she dragged it. She was uncontrollable. So this is what he is saying in Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 18: “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.” In other words, sometimes you have to take measures to make that bullock go. What did the Lord say to Saul in Acts chapter 9? “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” The prick was that long, sharpened stick with which you jabbed the ox to make him go or do what you wanted him to do. Thus he said, “I was like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.”

He is saying, “I did not wish to obey. I did not wish to follow. I did not wish to plow like you wanted me to.” Do you realize that it takes the Lord Jesus Christ to put a yoke on a sinner? That is why He said in Matthew 11, verse 29, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, I’ll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.” For it is light. In other words, I will yoke you. I will make sure that you find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden light. His yoke

is not like the yoke of sin or the yoke of wickedness. Now look at verse 18 again.

He said, "I've surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." But then he says, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God." What is happening so far? This bemoaning is conviction. He is saying, "I'm chastised, I'm being afflicted. I'm being taught. I'm being instructed. And you might have had to take that prick to me, Lord, because I was a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." But when he sees how absolutely needed and necessary the hand of God is, and how helpless and hopeless he is, the convicted sinner says, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God."

In other words, we see our own helplessness and hopelessness without Him. We begin to understand that repentance is His gift, that faith is His gift, and that we must be quickened and turned. Psalm 80 and verse 18 says, "So will not we go back from thee? Quicken us, and we shall call upon thy name." Psalm 143 and verse 11 says, "Quicken me, O Lord, for thy great name's sake, for thy righteousness' sake, bring my soul out of trouble." Ephesians 2 and verse 1 says, "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Finally, Psalm 85 and verse 4 says, "Turn us, O God, of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease."

Faith is God's gift, but He does not believe for us. We must believe. Repentance is God's gift, but God does not repent for us. We must repent. Yet we cannot believe without His gift of faith, and we cannot repent without His gift of repentance. The responsibility to believe and to repent belongs to us, but the ability to do so belongs to God. God must give us the ability to fulfill our responsibilities; unless He gives us that ability, we will never fulfill our responsibility.

He said, "I've surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastened or chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God." What happens when God turns us? Look in verse 19: "Surely after that I was turned"—the hand of God, the power of God, the grace of God, and the mercy of

God were upon him—"Surely after that I was turned, I repented." God must turn us. God must give us repentance.

Then he says, "Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh." Have you ever smitten yourself upon your thigh? I remember, as a boy, seeing older people do that, especially women. They would say, "Well, Lord, have mercy," and take both hands and strike both thighs. Why does it say, "I smote upon my thigh"? Smiting yourself upon the thigh, biblically speaking, was a sign of the deepest grief. Let me show you.

In Ezekiel 21:12, God says, "Cry and howl, son of man. For it shall be upon my people. It shall be upon all the princes of Israel. Terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people. Smite therefore upon thy thigh." The words indicate that it is coming, and that it will be grievous and difficult. Smiting upon your thigh indicates great grief and sorrow. Thus Ephraim says, "Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh." Now you notice what is next: "I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth."

Biblical repentance always produces a godly sorrow. It is sorrow based upon the fact that we have sinned against a loving, gracious, merciful, kind, and good Heavenly Father. We violated His law, transgressed His commandments, grieved and insulted the Holy God, and spurned His grace and mercy. We refused to honor and glorify Him. When we realize that, it shames and confounds us. He says, "because I did bear the reproach of my youth."

Godly Sorrow vs. Worldly Sorrow

It is usually in our youth that we, as it is said, sow our wild oats. I usually tell young people that if they want a peaceful, contented, and happy old age, they should be as holy and godly as they can in their younger age. That is for sure, because then they do not have the regrets and memories they have to fight with. He says, "Yea, I was ashamed, yea, even confounded."

In 2 Corinthians 7:9, Paul says, "I rejoice not that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance. For you were made sorry after a godly manner, that you might receive damage by us in

nothing." Then he says, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of, but the sorrow of this world worketh death." There is a godly sorrow; it attends repentance. Even in repentance, there is still a godly sorrow.

Everyone in this room would be sorrowful for what you did in your youth, what you did in your adult life, and what you have done in your elderly life. Suppose I said, “For the next thirty minutes I am going to allow each one of you to stand up and tell us all the sins you committed when you were eighteen and younger, all the sins you committed from thirty and younger, or all the sins you committed from sixty and younger.” How many would volunteer to do that?

Even if you could remember them all, you would not want to do it because you are ashamed of them. I do not know about you, but I am ashamed of my sins. I still acknowledge my sins and confess them every time they come to my mind. I say, “Oh God, I am sorry. Would to God I had never done that. Would to God that had never happened.” But it did. And I am thankful that the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.

But I have news for you, folks: the memories are still there. Those are the consequences of our sins. But godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? Worldly sorrow says, “Oh man, I wish I had not gotten caught. I should have been smarter than this. Why did I do that? I was so stupid. Next time I will be smarter.” That is worldly sorrow. You are sorry you got caught; you are not sorry that you violated God’s law, grieved a holy, righteous God, transgressed Him, and spit in His face. No, no, no, no. Godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow.

I do not care how old you get; you still regret the sins of your youth, middle age, and old age. That is godly sorrow.

Applications: The Gifts of God Are Without Repentance

We have to understand two things, which I will give you by way of application. Here is the first one. Look in Romans 11:29 and see it in light of what I am about to say.

"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." When God gives a gift, He does not call it back. When God gives a calling, He does not take it back. God gives you the gift of faith, which enables you to believe, and you do believe. God is never going to take that gift of faith back; you will persevere in faith until you die. Moreover, God gives you the gift of repentance, and God is not going to take it back.

I've done far more repenting since I've been saved than when I got saved. When I got saved, I was convicted of several very particular sins. But since then, I've found out there is a whole lot more worse in my life than those few things. So, just as I continue to believe, I have to continue to repent when I see from the Word of God where I am wrong. I have to turn, make it right, and do that which is right. Repentance is a lifetime gift, like faith is a lifetime gift. We are never to tire of believing, and we are never to tire of repenting, because those gifts are without repentance.

The second application is this: It is the sinner's responsibility to seek God for His gift of faith and repentance. Someone may say, "If I'm going to be saved, I will be saved; if I'm not going to be saved, I'm not going to be saved." Wait a minute. You are God's creature; He is the Creator, and He has authority over you. Moreover, you are a sinner. You have sinned against the Holy Righteous God. You are accountable, answerable, and responsible to Him. Whether or not you ever repent or believe, you are still responsible and accountable to seek Him for the ability to fulfill your responsibilities. If you do not, it will be added to your judgment and increase your condemnation. You are responsible and accountable because God has commanded you to repent.

You know what the Bible says in 1 John 3? “This is His will, that we believe on His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.” You are responsible to believe. Whether you do or not, you are responsible and accountable. Remember this: there is a vast difference between ability and responsibility. You might be responsible and not have ability. I have used this illustration for years: Here is a fifteen-year-old boy who gets a fifteen-year-old girl with child. He is responsible to support that child, marry that young girl, and support her. He is responsible,

but does not have the ability. Men are responsible to God, although they are unable to fulfill that responsibility.

When you think that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, it means we should be thinking of faith and repentance on a regular basis. Whenever we see something wrong, what does the Bible say? “Open rebuke is better than secret love. The kisses of an enemy are deceitful. For the wise hear rebuke.” When we are wrong, we need to confess it, acknowledge it, and repent, because God has given us this gift of repentance, and it is in our being. We cannot escape it. Repentance is the gift of God, and it is the lifeblood of sanctification and Christian growth, just like faith. You will never mature in the faith without belief and repentance.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word and your truth. We pray, Lord, that you would indeed enable us to understand repentance according to the scripture, that we not only may apply it to ourselves, but may help others as well. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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Revelation 15:4 p. 52, p. 53

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