

Sermons on THE PURSUIT OF GOD

#1 -- 3/24/96 p.m. -- “The Pursuit of God” -- Isa. 55:6-9; Psa. 27:4, 8.

#2 -- 4/14/96 p.m. -- “The Pursuit of Righteousness and Godliness” --
1 Timothy 6:11, Part 1.

#3 -- 4/28/96 p.m. -- “The Pursuit of Faith and Love” --
1 Timothy 6:11, Part 2.

#4 -- 5/5/96 p.m. -- “The Pursuit of Patience and Meekness” --
1 Timothy 6:11, Part 3.

#5 -- 5/12/96 p.m. -- “The Pursuit of Christ” -- Phil. 3:12-14.

#6 -- 5/26/96 p.m. -- “King David’s Greatest Prayer Request” --
Psalm 27.

#7 -- 6/2/96 p.m. -- “Discovering the Goodness of God” --
Psa. 34:3, 8-10.

#8 -- 6/9/96 p.m. -- “Where is Thy God?” -- Psalm 42.

#9 -- 6/23/96 p.m. -- “Seeing the Unseen” -- 2 Cor. 4:17, 18.

#10 -- 6/30/96 p.m. -- “Following Hard After God” -- Psalm 63.

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THE PURSUIT OF GOD

Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 27:4, 8

Intro: *The Pursuit of God* is not a new thought to the people of our generation. Years ago A. W. Tozer wrote a book which he entitled, *The Pursuit of God*. And then in more recent years our dear friend, Jerry Bridges, wrote a book which he called, *The Pursuit of Holiness*. It is, of course, impossible to pursue holiness without pursuing our holy God. I am sure that there have been many, many books written throughout the years in which people have been encouraged to seek God, and books written also to show that for the child of God the pursuit of God never ends. I don't mean by this that we can search and search for God without finding Him, because we have His promise, given to Jeremiah long ago that *His people would seek Him, and find Him, if they would search for Him with all of their heart*. See Jer. 29:13. And even to those who do not know the Lord we have Isaiah's encouraging word in one of the passages I have chosen as my text for tonight,

6 Seek ye the LORD **while he may be found**, call ye upon him **while he is near**:

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: **and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon** (Isa. 55:6-7).

And then for believers we have David's words in Psalm 27:8:

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

Now I think you can see why I have chosen these two passages of Scripture as my texts: the first, in Isaiah, has to do with unbelievers pursuing God; the second, in Psalm 27 shows that *the pursuit of God* continues on after we are saved.

When we put these two passages together we can see that man's greatest need of for God. That is true of every person who is living on the earth tonight. Everybody stands in great need of God. We see evidence of this every day that we live. The world, including our own beloved country, is in the condition it is in tonight because man chooses to live without God. And when he does, he reaps the harvest of such a choice. The mercy of God is displayed every day as people not only refuse to turn to the Lord, but they turn to everything and everybody else but the Lord. There is a growing attraction in our country toward heathen religions. The cults flourish. For many people the psychologist or the psychiatrist is the Savior. Many people are determined to settle their own problems. But

the result of leaving God out of our lives is seen everywhere. Our problems get worse, not better. And the kinds of problems seem to be multiplying constantly. Long ago the Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, gave Timothy this ominous prediction:

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

In our Tuesday Bible Class where we have been studying 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus we have learned that the word that Paul used here, translated “fables,” means *a lie*. We get our word *myth* from the Greek word Paul used, and Vine said in his Expository Dictionary that this speaks of situations where there is “a falsification of facts.” And so Paul was saying that when people refuse to hear the truth of the Word of God, there is only one other place to which they can turn, and that is to error. There are many different categories of error, but they all lead away from God, not to God. People believe lies and accept the lies as the truth because they do not know the truth. One reason that God has given us His Word is so that we will know the truth and therefore be able to identify error. And we cannot find the real solution to our problems except through understanding the truth. *And the foundational message of Scripture is that man needs God, and that man needs to seek the Lord.*

This brings me to my text in Isaiah:

I. GOD CALLS UPON PEOPLE TO SEEK HIM (Isa. 55:6-9).

Isaiah was one of the great Gospel preachers of the OT. We all need to know that the Gospel was not withheld until Christ came. What He did while He was here on earth, and why He did it, is the Gospel. And I am speaking of His death and resurrection. You won’t find any clearer statement of the Gospel than the Lord has given us through Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 53. Isaiah wrote to many of the nations of the earth as well as to Judah, but he knew that even among the Jews there were many who did not know the Lord. Their hearts had never been changed. They carefully did what their religious leaders told them to do, but they were like people today who go to church but who do not have the slightest idea as to what the Gospel is, or why the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. But it has always been possible for people to find out the truth if they have wanted it. It has always been possible for people to find God if they have been looking for Him in the right way, and the right place.

That is why God gave His Word in OT times, and that is why we still have His Word today. It is to be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. Man is spiritually blinded, and we live in a world of spiritual darkness. But the Word is here. Those of us who know the Lord are to spread the Word; we are to make it known. And that is what Isaiah was doing in His day, and that is the task of the people of God today.

Look at what Isaiah wrote in the first part of Isaiah 55. (Start reading with verse 1, and comment on the glorious fact that you don't need money to buy salvation because it is free.) Note how Isaiah stressed the importance of hearing what he had to say. That is because, as Paul said many years later, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

And then we have a special command which God has issued to all of the wicked and unrighteous people of the earth! To how many does this apply? It applies to every person who has ever lived with the one exception of our Lord. Our problem is sin. Sin has alienated us from God. Not only that but our sin has put us under the judgment of God. Try as we may, there is no possibility that any of us can free ourselves from divine judgment. But God has chosen to act in grace and to provide for us through the death of His Son full forgiveness for all of our sins, as well as the gift of eternal life which makes us new persons, a new creation! But what we need to hear is His command, and I want you to notice that it is a command. (Read verses 6 and 7 again.) And to fail to hear the command and to obey the command is to increase your sin and add to your judgment.

Now I want you to see the apostles in the NT preached the same Gospel. Please turn in your Bibles to Acts 17.

The latter part of Acts 17, beginning with verse 22, tells us about the message which Paul preached to a group of people in Athens, Gentiles. (Read vv. 22-31, and then see the results in vv. 32-34.)

I want to call your attention to the word "commandeth" in the latter part of verse 30. This is not an option; this is a command.

We have the same idea in Acts 3:19 when Peter was preaching in Jerusalem. Listen to what he said:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

He didn't say, "Please repent." He didn't weaken his message by indicating that they could take it or leave it. He said very forcefully, "Repent." As Paul said in Athens, "God ... now commandeth all men every where to repent." And the reason:

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

Who is that Man? *Paul was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ.* He will either be our Savior, or our Judge.

Now I am not suggesting for a moment that men are seeking the Lord. The Bible, in fact, tells us just the opposite. "There is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11b). What I am saying is that God has placed this command on all men everywhere. Men need to know this, and to seek the Lord, trusting Him for His mercy and for His grace in salvation. And they need to know that we can only seek the Lord when we seek Him through the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for the salvation of sinners. Our Lord Himself said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Those of us who know the Lord Jesus as our Savior know that the only reason we ever sought the Lord was because He moved upon our hearts to seek Him. But what we need to see from our text tonight is that God has issued a call to "all men every where" that they seek Him while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near. The loss for failing to seek the Lord through Christ is everlasting judgment from the presence of the Lord. We need to call people to come. God will do what needs to be done in their hearts so that they will come.

So let me say that the most urgent need anyone has who has never sought God, is to seek Him, and to seek Him now. Nothing else you ever do, nothing you have, can possibly meet your need. Only God can save you, and He saves you through faith in His Son. The Philippian jailor was seeking the Lord when he asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they gave the only right answer when they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). *This is how sinners need to engage in the pursuit of God.*

But now in our closing moments I want to go on what *the pursuit of God* means in all of our lives *after* we have come to Christ. Our lives as Christians can very accurately be described as a continuing pursuit of the God Who has saved us, Whom we love, and for Whom we want to live

our lives here on earth. We will be looking into several aspects of this wonderful truth, but for tonight let me take you to a very wonderful Psalm written by David. Here we see that:

II. GOD CALLS UPON *HIS PEOPLE* TO CONTINUE TO SEEK HIM (Psa. 27:4, 8).

The situation here in Psalm 27 is very different from that of Isaiah 55. Here we have a Psalm written by a believer. The superscription of the Psalm tells us that it is “a Psalm of David.” David, as we all know, was the King of Israel. He replaced Saul Who had disobeyed the Lord, and in the words which Samuel spoke to Saul when he told him that he would no longer be king, we have an indication as to the kind of a man David was even at that time. Let me read Samuel’s words to you. This is what he said:

13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: **the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart**, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee (1 Sam. 13:13-14).

No greater testimony could be given to any child of God, man or woman, young person, or child, than that he should be called *a man after God’s heart*. This means that David was a man who not only had a great desire to know God, but that he wanted to live His life to please God. He loved God, and delighted in his fellowship with God. God meant more to David than anyone else did in his life.

When the Apostle Paul was speaking in Antioch of Pisidia on his first missionary journey he briefly reviewed the history of Israel, and he referred to the removal of Saul from the throne of Israel and God’s appointment of David to take his place. This is what he said:

21 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, **I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.**

23 Of this man’s seed hath God according to his promise

raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus (Acts 13:21-23).

You see, to be a man after God's heart means that you are a person who is committed to do the will of God. So when we are speaking of the way in which David sought the Lord, we are not talking about something that characterized his life *after* he became king. *David was a man after God's heart before he became king.*

Just when the Lord said to David what we read in Psa. 27:4, I don't know. Perhaps it was a word addressed to all of the people of God. However it came, David responded to it, and this was the way he spent his life. And being king intensified his desire to know the Lord. See Psa. 27:4. We know that David could not spend all day every day in the house of the Lord, but what he was expressing here was his desire to have the closest possible fellowship with the Lord every day that he lived.

In this connection, cf. Psa. 24:3-6. ("O Jacob" at the end of verse 6 probably should read, "O *God of Jacob*.") Verse 4 shows that there are conditions to be met if a person is to "ascend into the hill of the Lord ... and to stand in his holy place." "Clean hands" outwardly; "a pure heart" inwardly; humility and honesty. *This is a general statement of what is involved in seeking the Lord.*

Concl: From what we have seen in the Word tonight about seeking the Lord, may I point out to you that the emphasis on what the Word of God has to say to that vast number of people who do not know the Lord as well as what we can see about the emphasis in the Word on the Lord's people seeking Him, in both cases it is seeking the Lord Himself, as a Person, not primarily seeking His blessings. We want His blessings, and we need His blessings. We can't live a moment without His blessing. But what we need to focus our attention upon is *our need of Him!*

If you don't know the Lord as your Savior, let me make your need as forcible as Isaiah made it, and as the apostles made it. Seek Him now. Seek God through Christ. Repent of your sins, and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. To repent means not only that you are sorry for your sins and never want to return to them again, but it means that by the grace of God your own life is going to be turned around so that you will be headed in the opposite direction. Come to Christ tonight. Delay no longer.

For those of us who know the Lord, may I ask if we have been continuing to seek the face of the Lord. Do we really love Him? Do we rejoice in

the times we can spend in His presence, listening to Him as He speaks to us through His Word, and then pouring out our hearts to Him in prayer as we bring to Him our worship and our burdens?

Let us remember that there is nothing more important that we have to do on any given day than to pursue God, and to walk in fellowship with Him. May God make us men and women and young people and children who are people after His heart. That is where the blessing is. That is where we find real peace and joy. And it is in seeking the Lord day by day that we not only grow in our knowledge of Him, but this is what makes us faithful and fruitful servants of His in this world of our which so desperately needs God.

May the Lord use His Word in our hearts tonight as He sees our need.

THE PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND GODLINESS

1 Timothy 6:11

Intro: The dates given for the writing of the books of the Bible are not always agreed upon by those who have tried to give us the background of the epistles. That is true of 1 and 2 Timothy. But it seems certain that the writing of these two epistles, with Titus written between them, could not have been more than two years, and may have even been as brief a time as one year. It seems generally agreed upon that they were written in the 60's A.D. However, the exact dates are not important for us to know. What is important is to know that they were written close together in time -- one or two years apart. And the reason that this is important in the message that I want to bring to you tonight is that what Paul said in 1 Tim. 6:11, the text I plan to be in for three Sunday nights, he said again in 2 Tim. 2:22. The verses are not identical, but close enough for us to be able to see that Paul was saying again in 2 Timothy in this regard what he had said before in 1 Timothy. The statement in 1 Timothy is longer mentioning six characteristics which Timothy was to pursue; in 2 Timothy we have only four.

This points to the importance of these verses. Paul was not repeating himself because he had forgotten what he had written in the first epistle. We need to remember that he was writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit. No, he was not just repeating himself; instead, he was emphasizing the importance of these characteristics in Timothy's fellowship with the Lord as well as in his ministry.

The word we have in our KJV is the word "follow." That is a good translation of the Greek word, but a better word would probably be *pursue*. *To pursue* something seeks to indicate to me a stronger effort than simply following something.

Because it is possible to pursue something with a bad purpose in mind, all through the Gospels (Matthew, Luke, and John) every time this word was used in the original text it is translated as *to persecute*. This is what the enemies of the Lord did. They pursued Him in order to persecute Him. In fact, their pursuit was in itself a persecution.

But Paul was using the word here, as he did in other places in his epistles, with the idea of *seeking eagerly after something with the purpose of acquiring it for himself*. He did this in Phil. 3:12 and 14:

Not as though I had already attained, either were already

perfect: **but I follow after**, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

So the word expresses the idea of eagerly seeking certain things, and devoting one's self to acquiring whatever a certain person might be seeking.

Some people work so that they will have the money to play. That is really their purpose in life, and it usually has very sad consequences. Politicians pursue more prominence and more power. A man in business can have as his objective in life the climbing of the corporate ladder. It can be said that most people have had something, some one main thing, that they are pursuing. Life is a pursuit.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ had one chief pursuit which dominated His whole life. It was to do the will of the Father, and to finish the work that the Father had given Him to do. We have His own words in John 4:34. The Lord was speaking to His disciples when He said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

To Paul, it was very important that Timothy be pursuing the right things in his ministry, that he be devoting his energies toward those qualities of life and character which would make him an effective servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul's words are very important for all of us who know the Lord. Regardless of where we may be in life, or whatever might be the way we spend our time in life, we need to pursue what Paul told Timothy to pursue. In 1 Timothy it was "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." In 2 Timothy it was "righteousness, faith, charity (love), peace." Cf. also Titus 2:12.

My text for this brief series will be 1 Tim. 6:11.

Many years ago there was a set of NT commentaries written with the title, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*. The commentaries were not all written by one man, but by several NT scholars. The one who wrote on 1 and 2 Timothy was a man I am not acquainted with by the name of Newport J. D. White. He probably was an English scholar. I mention him because he made what I feel was a very accurate observation about the six words Paul told Timothy to pursue. I believe that he was quoting a man by the name of Ellicott who recognized that we have three pairs of words here:

- 1) "Righteousness" and "godliness" are related.
- 2) "Faith" and "love" are related.
- 3) "Patience" and "meekness" are related.

— I am not going to follow exactly what these men have said about how they are related, but I don't think that there is any question but that they are related, and we need to deal with them as pairs.

I pointed out in dealing with these two epistles in the Tuesday Bible Class that the title Paul gave to Timothy here, and again in 2 Timothy 3:17, "man of God," is used only here in all of the NT. It is used many times in the OT, but only twice in the NT. It speaks of a man who belongs to God, who is serving the Lord, and who supposedly makes it his primary objective in life to do what is pleasing to the Lord. In Paul's eyes, Timothy was a "man of God." But both in 2 Timothy as well as here in 1 Timothy Paul warned Timothy that if he were to do a good job of pursuing the right things, he must "flee," run away, from any inclination to pursue things which would hinder his walk with the Lord and his ministry. Here in 1 Timothy he was to steadfastly avoid any temptation to make money his pursuit in life, even in a small way. In 2 Timothy Paul expanded it a bit by telling Timothy to "flee youthful lusts." Instead, he was to "follow righteousness." I am inclined to think that when Paul told Timothy in his second epistle to pursue "righteousness," but did not mention "godliness," that he was using the one word in 2 Timothy to include the two words that he had used in 1 Timothy: "righteousness, godliness." I think you will find that is the case many times in the NT. The two ideas which we find in righteousness and godliness can be expressed in the one word, righteousness.

What did Paul mean by "righteousness" and "godliness."

Let us take "righteousness" first.

Obviously Paul was not telling Timothy to pursue the righteousness which we speak of when we talk about salvation. He was not telling Timothy to pursue righteousness in the sense that he was not saved, and needed to be saved. Timothy was saved. The righteousness of God had been put to His account through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. Timothy was justified before God. All of the charges which were against him in heaven had been fully satisfied through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. So this was not what Paul was concerned about.

Paul was thinking instead of what we call *imparted righteousness*. This is the practical evidence of righteousness in the life of one who knows the Lord. It is the righteousness which can be seen in the way that a person lives, showing that he is a new creature in Christ. Paul was speaking of the righteousness of life which is seen increasingly in the life of a child of God who is growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was actually exhorting Timothy to pursue with all of his might and determination to continue to grow in the Lord. This, as we will see in connection with the other five words, is a pursuit which is to occupy us as long as we live. Regardless of how long we live, we will always need to grow. And a growing Christian will be a righteous Christian.

Now let me deal a little more with the word *righteous*.

Whenever you think of anything or anybody being righteous, always think of a standard, a measurement by which anything is judged. The Bible has a lot to say in the OT about *just weights and balances*. There were weights and measure then just as we have them today. If you go to a market to buy a pound of meat, you expect to get 16 ounces, or a pound. If you do, you are receiving what you paid for. If you get only 15 ounces, that is not a pound. It is an unjust sale, or an unrighteous sale, that the man with the meat has given to you.

Now in the Christian life there are standards of measurement for the Christian. Where do we find these? We find them in the Word of God. All through Scripture we find certain things that God wants us to do, and certain things that He does not want us to do. If we are measuring up to the standard set by Scripture, our lives can be described as *righteous*. Righteous character and righteous living are in agreement with the Word of God. So there is no other way for us to be righteous in our behavior, and ultimately righteous in character but by being obedient to the Word of God. And, as you may have already realized, the perfect Example we have of a Person Who was completely righteous, is our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord loved righteousness, and He hated iniquity. So to be righteous is to love what the Lord loved, and to hate iniquity, sin in every form. In speaking about practical righteousness we are speaking about holiness -- holiness of life and holiness of character. And, as I have said in the Tuesday class, the only way to holiness is through obedience.

So Paul's charge to Timothy to *pursue righteousness* was a charge to take the utmost care in all that he did to be obedient to the Word of God. You and I have nothing more important in our lives than this. When we obey

the Word of God, we are being righteous. If we are not obedient to the Word, we are not pursuing righteousness.

But what does *godliness* add to *righteousness*? Why did Paul use both words?

The word “godliness” raises the idea of holiness, or practical righteousness, to a higher level.

Let me illustrate what I mean by referring to the Pharisees, and even to the Apostle Paul before he became a child of God.

When the Lord was giving what we call *the Sermon on the Mount*, He said this:

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

Even the Apostle Paul, when speaking of his life as a Pharisee when he wrote to the Philippian church, said that “touching the righteousness which was of the law” he was “blameless.”

What was lacking in their righteousness when you consider it from a practical standpoint? Outwardly they were seeking to do what the Law said. And it was the Apostle Paul as a Christian who said that his life as an unbeliever was “blameless” when compared with the Law. He was like most people are before they see the light; he thought he could make himself acceptable to God through obedience to the Law. What was lacking?

These passages seem to take that it is possible for us as Christians to seek to be pleasing to God through obeying the Word of God, while at the same time we are lacking in that added quality which is described as godliness.

What is godliness? Godliness speaks of a person who is devoted to God, one who has been drawn to God, one whose obedience is not just trying to live according to the commandments of Scripture without much of a heart of the Lord, but who does it out of love for the Lord. Such a person obeys the Lord because he wants to please the Lord. He does not do it out of fear unless it be the fear of doing that which displeases the Lord.

The Lord wants us to be obedient. We can't be righteous in our conduct

or in our character unless we are obedient. But He wants our obedience to be motivated by, and an expression of, our love for Him. He wants our obedience to show that we are not seeking to please Him in our own strength, but that we are trusting Him to enable us to do what He wants us to do.

Concl: So when Paul was telling Timothy to *pursue righteousness AND godliness*, he was telling him to be very careful about his obedience to the Word of God, but to be sure that his obedience was an expression of the way he felt drawn to the Lord in his heart, and of his intense desire to do the will of God because he loved the Lord so very much.

After all, don't those of us who have children, and who have sought to teach our children obedience, long to see that they obey us, not because they are afraid not to, or because they want to get something out of us, but that they are obeying us because they love us?

The Lord has given us His Word to guide us in our lives because He knows that we would make more mistakes than we do if we did not have His Word. And He delights in our obedience when He sees that we obey Him because we love Him. This is the true pursuit of practical righteousness. It was important for Timothy to learn this, and to pursue righteousness along with godliness, that our obedience might cause the Lord to delight in the love that we have for Him.

Remember that this comes down to the individual things that we do every day as well as setting the tone for all of our lives. This is how true obedience increases our fellowship with the Lord, and brings us into a deeper knowledge of our God and heavenly Father. By God's grace, let us seek this week to pursue righteousness and godliness. The pursuit of righteousness and godliness is actually a pursuit of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PURSUIT OF FAITH AND LOVE

1 Timothy 6:11 -- Part 2

Intro: When Paul told Timothy to “follow after,” or to pursue, “righteousness,” he did not mean that he had no practical, no personal righteousness, but he meant that he was to seek to be more righteous. When he told Timothy to pursue “godliness,” he did not mean that he was not godly, but he meant that he should seek to be more godly. And the same thing can be said about faith and love. He did not mean that Timothy was not trusting the Lord, but he was encouraging him to trust the Lord more than he had been trusting him. And when he told him to pursue love, he did not mean that Timothy was a failure in this area of his life. He meant that he needed to seek to be more loving.

It is reasonable to think that Paul was ahead of Timothy in all of these areas of life, including the last two which we will consider next Sunday night, the Lord willing -- “patience” and “meekness.” But the exhortation applied just as much to Paul as it did to Timothy. The point is this: regardless of how righteous we are, we can be more righteous, and we need to be more righteous. Regardless of how godly we may be, we need to be more godly. Regardless of how much we may be trusting the Lord, we need to trust Him more. And regardless of how loving we might be, we need to be more loving. None of us ever gets to the place where we no longer need to grow spiritually. When Peter ended his last epistle with the words, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), he did not mean that he was speaking to the more immature believers; he was speaking to all believers. We never know all that we need to know, nor are we ever as mature as we need to be, and can be, by the grace of God. So a year from now, or five years from now, or however many years the Lord may give us, we will need 1 Timothy 6:11 every bit as much as we do tonight.

Tonight we are going to talk about trusting God, and we are going to follow that up with the importance of love in our lives as Christians, love for the Members of the Godhead, and love for each other in the family of God.

I am following the suggestion made long ago by an expositor by the name of Ellicott that the six words, or virtues, which Paul mentioned here, fall into three groups of two each:

- 1) Righteousness and godliness go together.
- 2) Faith and love go together.
- 3) Meekness and patience go together.

Perhaps we could add another word of explanation about the relationship that these words have to each other. To pursue righteousness and godliness in our relationship to God, is going to call for more faith and love in our lives, and such a person who seeks to be all that God wants him, or her, to be is going to need a growing measure of meekness and patience. Remember that Paul told Timothy in his second epistle,

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

Godly people are not the world's favorite people. In fact, the world would like to get along without us. People will tolerate Christians up to a certain point, but then even many professing Christians back down because they don't want to get too serious about the Christian life.

So we set out to be righteous, and to combine righteousness with godliness, and we find that this calls for more faith and more love.

Ellicott called "faith" and "love" "the fundamental principles of Christianity" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 145). Let us consider them together for just a moment.

I. "FAITH" AND "LOVE."

This morning I point out to you these two words in 1 Tim. 1:14 where Paul said,

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with **faith** and **love** which is in Christ Jesus.

He meant that when God in His grace saved him, he was given an abundance of faith and love which were given to him in Christ Jesus, and from Christ Jesus.

Why did Ellicott call these "the fundamental principles of Christianity"? It was because if you don't find these two virtues in a person, he cannot rightly claim to be a Christian. Wherever you find a true Christian, you will find some faith and some love, some faith in God, some faith in the Lord Jesus, some love for God and Christ, and some love for the people of God. You won't find the same amount manifested by every child of God, but a true Christian is never totally lacking in either faith or love.

Paul did not found the church at Colosse. And at the time he wrote to them, he had never been with them. But this is what he said at the beginning of his letter to them:

3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints (Col. 1:3, 4).

The presence of these two qualities in their lives convinced Paul that God had really done a work in the hearts of some of the people in Colosse. It would be a contradiction in terms for a person to say that he had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior if he did not go on trusting the Lord in his daily life. And how could a person profess to love God if he did not also love the people of God, and love to be with them, and choose his best friends from among those who are the Lord's people. The Apostle John wrote these words linking together God and His people:

And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:21)..

And earlier in the epistle John had written these words:

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death (1 John 3:14)..

So faith in God and love for God as well as love for the people of God, are two distinguishing marks of a Christian. A professing Christian who is not willing to trust the Lord to some degree, probably is not a true Christian after all. And a person who claims to be a child of God, but prefers to be with the people of the world, probably is not what he, or she, claims to be. In every Christian you will find faith and love.

But how are we to pursue faith and love? Let us take faith first because it is really basic to the other, to love.

II. THE PURSUIT OF FAITH.

In my class this morning we were talking about the misconception that many of the Lord's people have about faith. They look upon faith as our contribution to our salvation. They look upon it as something which we generate within ourselves. And even many who are truly saved go on in their lives as Christians thinking that it is up to them to produce the faith they need so that they will really be trusting the Lord. And so they look inward instead of looking where they need to look.

To be sure, we need to be concerned by our failure to trust the Lord as we should, but what is the remedy?

There are two very important things that we need to know about faith if our faith is to grow. The first is brought out in Heb. 12:1, 2. Please turn to those verses, and let me read them to you.

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 **Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;** who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

Faith does not come from us. It is true that we exercise faith, but we need to know that it comes from God. It comes from the Lord Jesus Christ! He is the source of our faith, and He is the perfecter of our faith. And we grow in faith the more we keep “looking unto Jesus.”

The verb “looking” suggests that we look away from everything else and everyone else, to turn our minds to the Lord Jesus, to focus our attention upon Him, to learn more of Him, to get better acquainted with Him. And the more we do this, the stronger our faith becomes. The more we know of Him, the more we realize that He will never fail us. Faith is really confidence in the person we are trusting. If you know that a person is a liar, you are not going to trust Him. But the Lord is not a liar. He has never lied. And He has never failed any of us when our trust is in Him. And so the foundation of our faith is the trustworthiness of Jesus, our Savior and great High Priest. I think it was Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission who used to explain our Lord’s statement, “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22), as meaning, *Hold the faithfulness of God*.

How do we look at Jesus today? We learned this morning that He is “invisible” to us, and so we can’t see Him with these eyes of ours. No, we see Him revealed to us in the Word. Keep looking at Him every day in the Word, and you will find that your faith is growing.

My second point with regard to faith will head all of us in the same direction. I refer to the Apostle Paul’s words in Rom. 10:17:

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Faith cometh by hearing and hearing and hearing and hearing what? “The Word of God.” Read the Word. Hear it read. Hear it taught. Memorize it. Meditate on it. What will be the result? Your faith, and my faith, will get stronger and stronger.

And then as we trust the Lord to be faithful to His Word, not only are we exercising faith that has come to us through the Word, but we will find

that our faith is growing, and we start to trust the Lord where we have failed to trust Him before.

Now let us move on to pursuing love.

III. THE PURSUIT OF LOVE.

Again let me emphasize that these virtues which we are possessing do not come for us, and we would not need to pursue them. They come from the Lord and are the fruit of our knowing Him and our fellowship with Him.

When the Apostle John, who is really the apostle of love, spoke of our need to love one another, and to love God, he said this:

Beloved, let us love one another: **for love is of God**; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God (1 John 4:7).

Did you notice that expression, “for love is of God”? Don’t miss that! It is very important.

The love which Paul was talking about pursuing is not a love of human origin; it is the love of God manifested in us. When Paul was talking about love in Romans 5, he said this in verse 5, the latter part of the verse: “Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” And we can add to that what the Apostle John said in 1 John 4:19, “We love him, because he first loved us.” The Greek is even more powerful than this translation. John actually said, “We love, because He first loved us.”

The world has a perverted form of love even at its best. Sometimes it is nothing more than lust. At other times it is a selfish love: we love those who can benefit us in some way. Or it is a conditional love. “You do what I want you to do, and I will love you.” But the truth is that no one really knows true love until he or she knows the love of God in Christ. It is a perfect love. It is a love that never changes. It is not a love which is conditioned on the right response. The Lord loved us even when we were yet sinners. Such love can only be expressed as we walk in fellowship with our precious Lord.

But there are two sides to this love. The love of our Lord is a love which loves righteousness, but it hates iniquity. We learn that from Heb. 1:9 where the Apostle was quoting from Psalm 45. And the stronger our love for righteousness grows, the stronger will be our hatred of sin.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love...” Therefore, to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with love. We need to remember also these words from the Apostle John:

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world (1 John 4:16-17)..

No child of God can walk with the Lord day after day without experiencing in his heart and life, the love of God. We love Him, and we love the people who belong to Him.

The Lord has given us a wonderful description of love, His love, His love in us, in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.

The Charles Williams translation of the NT has been praised for years because of the accuracy of the translation of the Greek verbs. Let me read his translation to you to give you the same meaning expressed in slightly different words.

Love is so patient and so kind;
Love never boils with jealousy;
It never boasts, is never puffed with pride;
It does not act with rudeness, or insist upon its rights;
It never gets provoked, it never harbors evil thoughts;
Is never glad when wrong is done,
But always glad when truth prevails;
It bears up under anything,
It exercises faith in everything,
It keeps up hope in everything,
It gives us power to endure in anything.
Love never fails.

You see, it is love which gives real value and blessing to our faith. And as we seek to pursue faith, the Lord gives us the opportunity to exercise our faith in love. And that is what is so pleasing to Him.

Concl: May the Lord make this week a week of special blessing for all of us as we not only pursue righteousness and godliness, but also faith and love.

THE PURSUIT OF PATIENCE AND MEEKNESS

1 Timothy 6:11 -- Part 3

Intro: When we speak of pursuing “righteousness, godliness, faith, love,” as we have, and now come to the thought of pursuing “patience” and “meekness,” it is right that all of these be included when we speak of *pursuing God* because it is only in God the Father, only in Christ, and only in the Holy Spirit, that we can ever find the “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience,” and “meekness” which we need. None of these are merely human characteristics. You find a resemblance of some of these in people, even people who do not know the Lord, because we have all been made in the likeness of God. But Paul was speaking not of human righteousness, but of divine righteousness; not of a merely religious person, but of divine godliness; not of human faith, but of faith which comes from God; not of human love, but the love of God; not of human patience, but the patience of God; and not of meekness as we sometimes see it in people, but a much greater meekness, the meekness of God.

So if we as believers want to be righteous, we need to seek righteousness from God. If we want to be godly, only God can make us godly. If we want to be loving, the love that Paul was talking about is the love that we see in God, that we see in Christ, the love which is the fruit of the Spirit. If we want to trust God in our daily lives, the Lord Jesus Christ is “the author and finisher of our faith.” If we have come to any understanding of God’s love, we know that His love is very different and much greater than mere human love could ever be, and so we seek the love which can only be found in the Members of the Godhead. Some people appear to be endlessly patient, but the patience that God displays through us can’t be found anyplace but in Him. And the same is true of meekness -- the kind of meekness that Paul was speaking about is the meekness that we will only find in the Trinity.

So we need to know in considering this important verse in 1 Timothy that Paul was speaking to Timothy about characteristics which are divine in nature, and which can only be found in God, and by pursuing God.

Let me point out three other facts about these characteristics: First, they are not available to anyone but a true child of God. The Apostle Peter was emphasizing this fact in the words we find in 2 Pet. 1:2-4. Let me read those words to you:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:
4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The only people who can be partakers of the divine nature are those who have been “called ... to glory and virtue.” In other words, you must know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior or these characteristics are completely out of reach for you. Until you are saved, you will be satisfied with mere human substitutes, but you can never experience the “glory and virtue” that Paul was speaking about here.

The second point I want to make clear is that if you are really saved, you are going to want to be righteous and godly and believing and loving and patient and meek in the same way that God is, and that Christ is, and that the Holy Spirit is. If even discussing these great characteristics does not create in your heart a stronger desire for each one of them, you had better get before the Lord and make sure that you really do know Christ as your Savior.

The third thing that we need to recognize is considering these six virtues, or characteristics, is that these are really six of the main qualifications for the ministry. And they are qualifications that need to grow in the life of every servant of the Lord.

When I was in my fourth year of seminary, I went down each week end to preach at the Church of the Open Door in Beaumont, Texas. I didn't have a car, and so I took a train each weekend, traveling from Dallas to Houston, and then from Houston to Beaumont (which was east of Houston, close to the Texas-Louisiana border. One Monday as I was returning, I got into a car on the train which had a lot of men in it. I soon realized that they were pastors on their way to Dallas for their new assignments. In their particular denomination the churches did not call their own pastor, but he was assigned to them by the leaders of the denomination. As I listened to their conversation (which was sometimes heated) I heard what they were interested in. I do not say that what I am about to tell you was the attitude of all of the men, but it was of those who were doing the talking. What were they interested in? Was it godliness, righteousness, faith, love, patience, and meekness? No, what they were talking about was what churches had the best parsonage, the churches with the best buildings, the churches with the highest salaries,

and the churches which were nearest the big cities where there would be a lot to do. Now I realize that they may have had other interests that would have been closer to what we have been thinking about on these Sunday nights, but I didn't hear anything about people who needed to be saved, or what opportunities there might be to lead people on in their walk with the Lord. It all had to do with material things, not spiritual things. As I remember, I don't think a single man mentioned what the will of God might be. It was all on more of a human level.

Paul in these verse was writing to Timothy about what he needed to be concerned about in the ministry that the Lord had for him, and we can all see that it really had to do with what was going on in Timothy's heart. These have to do with what Timothy *was*, and with *what he was going to be*. Nothing was said about *where* Timothy would be serving the Lord, nor about *how* his needs would be met, nor whether he would be ministering to many or to few. *Paul was talking to Timothy about Timothy*. And the reason he was pointing Timothy in the direction of these characteristics was because if Timothy were earnestly seeking these qualities of life for himself, it is most likely that he would awaken the same desires in the hearts of the believers to whom he was ministering, wherever they might be, and whether their numbers were great or small.

So, as I have said many times, and I need to remember this myself, these are the qualities that need to occupy our attention as long as we live. Pursuing these characteristics will cause us to be more like our dear Savior, and this should be our goal in ministering to our people; this should be our goal day by day for ourselves.

Well, we have considered righteousness and godliness, and then faith and love. Tonight we will be looking at "patience" and "meekness." And so let us turn first to:

I. THE PURSUIT OF PATIENCE.

I think we all know that patience is not one of the dominant characteristics of the human heart. None of us was born with a big supply of patience. In fact, you can see how impatient we are by nature when you look at a little baby. When babies get hungry, they want to be fed, and fed right now. They don't like to wait, and as we get older we find that this is one of the hardest things that we have to do. We just aren't patient by nature.

But one of the first things that I have to do in speaking about patience is

to clear up the idea that most of us have about patience. We think of patience as only waiting. We would illustrate it by waiting for someone to answer a letter which we have written to them, or waiting on a street corner to meet a friend for lunch, and time rolls on and on and he or she does not come at all, or is much later than the appointed time. Of course, such circumstances call for patience.

But the Greek word for patience speaks of *remaining under* a particular situation. And by that it speaks of continuing on, or persevering, while we are waiting. Life does not stop for any of us until we die. Things move right on, and so must we. So a patient person is a person who may be waiting for God to answer prayer, but while he is waiting he continues to pray. Prayer is one major place where the Lord tests our patience, and where we can, by the grace of God, develop patience.

One man who is mentioned in Scripture for his patience, is Job. Let me read to you from the book of James what James had to say about Job:

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (James 5:10-11).

When James said, "Behold, we count them happy which **endure**," he used the verb from which we get the noun *patience*. To be patient is to *endure*. Through all of Job's trials he had his troubles. He didn't always see things the way the Lord wanted him to see them. But neither did he follow the advice of his wife who wanted him to curse God and die. And James indicates in this passage that what encouraged Job to be patient was that he knew that God had a purpose in his trials, plus the fact that he knew that "the Lord is very pitiful (full of pity), and of tender mercy." He didn't understand what the Lord was doing, but he knew that he could depend upon the Lord, and that the Lord had a good purpose behind all of the human tragedy and loss which he had experienced.

Now let us move to the first chapter of James where we find another important passage which has to do with patience. I am speaking of James 1:2-4 -- and it is with these words that James began his epistle. He was writing to believers who were suffering. Notice in verse 1 that he was writing "to the twelve tribes which were scattered abroad." They had been driven from their homes by persecution. Many of them had lost all of the earthly possession they had. Very likely members of families had

been separated from each other. But this is what James said to them:

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (James 1:2-4).

I spoke about faith last Sunday night. If faith is to be strong, it always has to be tested. And God tests our faith by making us wait on Him -- not just wait, but wait on Him! And you know there is a difference. Job was waiting on the Lord. Abraham waited for a son for over twenty-five years before Isaac was born. Joseph waited for approximately 13 years before he saw the promise of God fulfilled. Think of how God tested Moses by making him wait while he went time and time again into Pharaoh telling Pharaoh that he was to let Israel go! You see it all through Scripture, and you can see it in your own life if you are paying attention to what God is doing.

It is through the trying of our faith that we learn patience. This is one reason that we must be careful not to take matters into our own hands when the Lord is asking us to wait. And we wait, not always knowing what God is doing, whether the outcome will be good or bad, but we wait, and we persevere in our walk with the Lord, knowing that He knows what He is doing, and that the ultimate outcome will be good. This is what Romans 8:28 tells us, doesn't it?

But we can't be patient in our own strength. That is why the Apostle Paul prayed for the Colossian church the way he did. Cf. Col. 1:9-11:

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, **unto all patience** and longsuffering with joyfulness.

No child of God ever matures without learning patience. And it is through the trial of our faith that we learn to trust the Lord more and more.

We could say a lot more about patience and how important it is for all of us, but let me go on to the last word in our text so that we can learn what we need to know about meekness.

II. THE PURSUIT OF MEEKNESS.

We were not born with a supply of patience, nor were any of us born with a supply of meekness. What is meekness?

This word has been defined by Thayer as meaning “*mildness of disposition, gentleness of spirit*” (p. 535, column 2).

Here we have the best of illustrations: our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Cf. Matt. 11:28-30:

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; **for I am meek and lowly in heart:** and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Some students of the Greek believe that this word has special emphasis when one is dealing with opposition of any kind. It is in this connection that Moses was called “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). Let me read the entire passage to you. **Please turn to Num. 12:1-13.** (Read.)

Paul had warned Timothy in this epistle, and continued the warning in his second epistle to Timothy, that he would not have an easy time. He would continually face false teaching, accusations of various kinds, and possibly even persecution itself. **Therefore he needed to pursue meekness.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ manifested meekness when he was dying on the Cross in two things that He said:

- 1) “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).
- 2) “Verily, I say unto thee, To day thou shalt be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Luke records these words, but what made it a statement of the greatest meekness was the fact that just previous to this the repentant thief was saying exactly the same thing that the crowd was saying, and that the unrepentant thief had said. Matthew tell us this in Matt. 27:44 after record what the crowd had been saying, that if He were the Son of God He should come down from the Cross, and that He had saved others

but He could not save Himself. This is what we read in Matthew 27:44::
The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the
same in his teeth.

— The meekness of our Lord was seen in the forgiveness that was granted to
the repentant thief when actually he had not formulated a confession to
the Lord as such.

Stephen was manifesting meekness when just before he died by the
stoning of the crowd, he said, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”
(Acts 7:60). And after he said this, he died.

The Apostle Paul also showed great meekness in his prayer for the people
who had made life so miserable for him. Listen to what he wrote in Rom.
9:1-3, and the first phrase of verse 4:

- 1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also
bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,
- 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my
heart.
- 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ
for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:
- 4 Who are Israelites...

— Our natural reaction toward people who reject us and our message, or
who have taken advantage of us in any way, is, like James and John, to
want to call fire down from heaven upon them. But that is not meekness.
How do we learn meekness? The Lord said that it is through coming to
Him, and learning of Him. The world may despise meekness and lowli-
ness, but this is God’s way, and it always leads to blessing when we react
toward difficult people like the Lord wants us to react. We need to
remember what Solomon told his son about his enemies:

- 21 If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if
he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
- 22 For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the
LORD shall reward thee (Prov. 25:21-22).

Concl: When the Lord commands us through His Word to pursue
righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness, we
can be sure that we will see our need and have many opportunities to
cultivate these characteristics. And let us remember that it is only as our
confidence is in Him, that we will be able to become the people that the
— Lord wants us to be. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our great Example in all of
these qualities because they are found in their perfection in Him.

PAUL'S PURSUIT OF CHRIST

Philippians 3:12-14

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:7-14.

Intro: For three Sunday nights we have been looking into what Paul must have meant when he told Timothy to pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.” Timothy could only find these virtues in God; he possessed none of them by nature in himself. And the blessing of God upon Timothy’s ministry was dependent upon the extent to which Timothy started, and then continued, a life-long pursuit of these characteristics.

Tonight I take you to another of Paul’s epistles, written not to an individual, but to a church, the church at Philippi. This letter has been considered by many as Paul’s spiritual autobiography, and the heart of his own testimony is found in chapter 3.

He began by stating that one thing that is true of all believers is that they have “no confidence in the flesh.” This, of course, is seen in varying degrees as you look at any cross section of the people of God. But in Paul it was so predominant that it was impossible to miss it. And this was a complete turnaround from the way he had lived before. In verses 4 through 6 he mentions the things that he used to glory in, the things which were the most important in his life. *And they all had to do with Paul.* (Read them in verses 5, 6.)

However, when we come to verse 7 we see the change, and a new name appears in his autobiography. I do not mean that he had not mentioned the Lord before, but here we see the major place that the Lord began to fill in Paul’s life. *Everything in Paul’s life underwent a major change as a result of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into his life.* This is what he described in verses 7 through 11. (Read.)

We might be inclined to believe that although Paul had been saved by the grace of God in spite of all of the evil works that he had done, he felt that he was to continue to be saved only if he were diligent in seeking the Lord. But is that what he was saying here? *Very definitely not!* What, then, did he mean, and how do his words apply to us today, hundreds of years later?

The Apostle Paul was saying that while we are not saved, nor kept saved, by our works, we do have a definite responsibility in the pursuit of

holiness. This is a point which Bishop Ryle stressed very strongly in his book, *Holiness*. In more recent years Martyn Lloyd-Jones picked this up, and you find it appearing again and again in his writings. And then one man whom we all know and love who has been used to emphasize this truth in our generation has been Jerry Bridges. God has not ordained that we become holy without any effort on our part, but there are certain things that we must do if we are to become holy.

Let me go back to the second chapter of this epistle to emphasize what I am saying. Let me read for you Phil. 2:12, 13. (Read.)

Working out our salvation is not something that we do “on our own,” but it is what we do as a result of God continuing to work in our hearts following our salvation. He works in us both, not only to make us willing (as though it were some kind of a surrender), but He makes us determined to do the will of God, and then He gives us the enabling power to do it. So we must get out of our minds any idea that we produce our own holy life and holy character. We have a responsibility, but the will and the power to do it all, comes from God.

Another passage where we see this same emphasis is in Eph. 2:8-10. How easy it is for us to quote Eph. 2:8, 9, but then to ignore verse 10. Please turn to the Ephesians passage, and let us note the connection between verses 8 and 9, and then verse 10. (Read.)

We are God’s workmanship, a work that He is doing, a work that began when we were first saved, a work that continues as long as we live, but a work that will not be finished until we are with the Lord. And Paul told the Ephesians that we are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, **which God hath before ordained that we should WALK in them.**”

God works, and we walk. God commands, and we obey. But what He tells us to do, we do by His mighty, enabling power. We could never do God’s will in our own strength, and that is one of the first lessons that every child of God needs to learn. Then periodically, and frequently, we need to be reminded of this throughout our lives. Somehow it is very easy for all of us to forget how much we need the Lord’s help if we are to walk with Him and work for Him.

Now Paul knew that God had saved him for a specific purpose, and I do not mean by that that He needed Saul of Tarsus to become an apostle. That was the place that the Lord had for Paul as a place of ministry, but God’s purpose in Paul’s salvation was just like God’s purpose in your

salvation and mine: *It was to make him like the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not to make Paul deity, but to make him God-like and Christ-like in his character and in his behavior. The great change which came into Paul's life when he was saved was that he was brought into a living fellowship, a living relationship, with the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Christ Who made the difference in his life. It was Christ Who made him see the emptiness and the futility of all that he had been doing before he was saved. It was Christ he wanted to win. It was Christ He wanted to know. He wanted more than anything else to be like Christ.*

We are not reading the word here of a man who had just been saved, and who in the first joy of knowing the Lord, was expressing his feelings about the Lord. We are reading the words of a man who had been saved between 20 and 30 years, a man who had walked faithfully with the Lord, a man who had grown in his love for the Lord, and man who could say that to depart and be with the Lord was "far better" (Phil. 1:23). These are the words of a mature servant of the Lord, but one who still knew that he had a long way to go before he would be like the Lord.

This is what he was saying in verses 12 through 14. And since we are thinking about ***Paul's pursuit of Christ***, I want you to notice these two words, one in verse 12, and the other in verse 14.

The word, or words, in verse 12 are "follow after" -- but they are the translation of one word in the Greek. The other word in verse 14 is the word, "press." Both of these words are translations of the same word in the Greek. The way Paul used the word in verse 12 suggests not only his pursuit of an objective, but his pursuit of a Person -- and that Person was the Lord Jesus Christ. His use of the word in verse 14 was intended to give us a mental picture of a man running a race and putting all of his energy into reaching the goal. There is no idea of just sitting back and expecting that the goal is going to be reached the way we want it to be without any effort on our part.

Now the thing that we need to be concerned about is this: What was Paul doing in his day to day life which could be described in this way? If he were pursuing Christ, running his race, to become like the Lord, what was he doing? How was he living his life?

Whole books have been written on this subject, but let me mention some simple truths which we know from Scripture are basic to the answer to this question. And let me start where we all need to start, a point which the Lord emphasized with His disciples in His Upper Room Discourse.

Let me call this point,

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE WORD, CHRIST, AND PAUL.

Please turn to John 16:14, 15.

When you read through John chapters 14, 15, and 16, you should be able to see that it was on our Lord's heart to speak to them about the Holy Spirit and His ministry. The Lord would leave them soon, but the Holy Spirit would be given in a new way to each and every believer. And what would He do? He was coming as their Teacher, to guide them into all of the truth of the Word of God. And what would be His main purpose in teaching them the Word. John 16:14, 15 gives us our answer.

We have never seen Christ, and in spite of what some people claim for themselves, we have no hope of seeing the Lord until He comes or until He takes us to heaven by death. How then are we going to get acquainted with the Lord? It is through the Word of God.

Paul was given an honor that you and I do not have. He was one who had been chosen by God to be one of the writers of Scripture. And as the Holy Spirit revealed the truths that we find in our Bibles from Romans to Philemon, and possibly through Hebrews, Paul, who had not known the Lord in the flesh, under the powerful influence of what he was writing, had come to a place where the Lord Jesus Christ meant more to him than anything else, or anyone else. I don't think that any of us can fully appreciate what all of this did to the Apostle Paul. And this was going on as he was writing this letter to the Philippian church. He was being moved by the Holy Spirit. Even as he wrote, he was learning, and Christ was becoming more precious to His heart.

So what does this mean to us?

It means that if we are going to pursue Christ, we have to pursue Him through the pages of Scripture -- from Genesis to Revelation. That is where we find Christ. That is where we learn to know Him, and to love Him. The Holy Spirit, the Author of Scripture, has nothing that He would rather do than to take the things of Christ, and show them to us. And this means that He loves to show us Christ.

But pursuing Christ includes another thing:

II. PAUL PURSUED THE LORD IN PRAYER.

— And isn't this the idea that you get in Scripture from the prayers that are recorded for us. The people of God sought God in prayer, not just for what they needed, but just for the fellowship that they desired to have with Him. If our prayers have just become times when we seek to get things from the Lord, we are missing the greatest privilege and the greatest blessing of prayer. Many have suggested that one reason the Lord often delays the answer to our prayers is because He wants us to keep coming and keep coming and keep coming to Him. That is why He said, "Ask, and keep on asking," etc. Read Paul's prayers, and notice the place that He gave to the Lord in his prayers. The Romans stopped his missionary work (except for his letters), but they could not stop his prayers.

Now let me mention one more thing before I close. And these come out of this Philippians epistle. The first I read to you this morning at the close of the service. I am referring to Phil. 1:20, 21.

III. PAUL PURSUED CHRIST BY BEING SUBMISSIVE TO THE WILL OF GOD (Phil. 1:20, 21).

— This was a lesson that Paul had to learn in a deeper way in prison, but he had learned it before in submitting himself to the Lord's dealings with him.

One of the greatest ways we see the character of our Lord was in His perfect and continual submission to the Father. And it was at no time more evident than when our Lord was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Was it a real struggle for our Lord? Let me ask you, has the prospect of doing the will of God ever made you sweat drops of blood? I don't read of anyone else in Scripture who had an experience like that. Some faced great trials, but none ever to compare with what our Lord experienced.

Now let me read to you those familiar verses in the second chapter of Philippians where we read of the humiliation of our Lord, and then of His glory. (Read vv. 6-8.) And the Apostle Paul began all of this by saying what he did in verse 5.

— You see, to pursue the Lord means not only knowing Him, winning Him, but it means to seek to be like Him. And if we are to be like Him, we must be like Him in His submission to the Father, and in His love for the Father.

Perhaps many of you have been trying to listen to the tapes of Frank

James' messages with us, and also of Carolyn's messages. We men were excluded from her messages, but Carolyn made a suggestion in one of her messages that I had never heard before. She was talking about how the Lord delighted in the Father, and she recommended that we read the Gospel of John in particular to notice how constantly the Lord Jesus was speaking of the Father. He only did the Father's will. He sought in all things to please the Father. He only spoke the words which the Father had given Him to speak. He refused to turn away from the Cross because He had come to finish the work which the Father had given Him to do. He found His joy on earth in His relationship with the Father.

If you and I are pursuing Christ as Paul did, then we are not only going to delight ourselves in Christ, and find our joy in Him, but also, like our Lord, we are going to find our joy in the Lord -- a joy that lifted Paul even above the trials of a Roman prison to such an extent that he could write a letter which would never have indicated that he was confined if he had not made just passing references to his bonds -- not as an appeal for his release, but to show the sufficiency that he had found in God and in Christ.

Concl: You can tell that I have only touched the surface of one of the most important subjects in Scripture --pursuing Christ! Pursuing Him to know Him, pursuing Him to be like Him, and pursuing Him so that we, by His grace, can make as much progress in a holy life as it is possible for us to make before the Lord comes, or before He calls us home.

May we pursue Christ in the Word, may we pursue Him in prayer, and may we pursue Him with the deepest of all desires to be like Him.

KING DAVID'S GREATEST PRAYER REQUEST

Psalm 27

Intro: If you or I were to write a biography of the life of King David of Israel, we all would know that a good title for the book would be, *A Man After God's Heart*. This was the description given to him by the Lord Himself. Perhaps you remember the circumstances under which he was given this title. It was during Saul's reign. Samuel had promised to meet Saul in Gilgal in seven days (1 Sam. 10:8). But Samuel was delayed in his coming to meet Saul, and Saul, instead of waiting for Samuel, went ahead and offered a burnt offering to the Lord -- which he had no right to do. As soon as he finished making the sacrifice, Samuel came, and asked him what he was doing. Saul told Samuel that when he did not come, and the people of Israel were being scattered from him, and the Philistines were gathering together, he "forced" himself (1 Sam. 13:12), and offered the sacrifice.

Listen to Samuel's response to Saul which is found in 1 Sam. 13:13, 14:

13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: **the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart**, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.

This title for David does not appear in Scripture again until we get to the message that the Apostle Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia when he and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey. Paul was briefly tracing the history of Israel, and he came to the place in his message where he was telling about how God removed Saul as king, and announced that David would be his successor. And this is what the Apostle Paul said,

And when he [the Lord] had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he [the Lord] gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, **a man after mine own heart**, which shall fulfil all my will (Acts 13:22).

Now we don't have to wonder what the Lord meant by this title for David because the Lord Himself tells us. *A man after God's heart is a man who*

is committed to do the will of God. And it is important to note that this was true of David before he ever became king: He was a young man whose life was lived his life *by the will of God.* And we know that David lived that way for most of his life. He was not perfect, but during the majority of his days he lived by the will of God.

There is only One Who is more deserving of that title than David was, and that was our Lord Jesus Christ, David's greatest Son according to the flesh. Our Lord's record was perfect. There was not a single blemish upon Him. He did everything the Father wanted Him to do. He said everything the Father wanted Him to say. He never was guilty of a single sin in thought, word, or action. In John 6:38 we read what our Lord said about the will of God:

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will,
but the will of him that sent me.

And then in the last part of John 8:29 we are told that He said this: "I do always those things that please him."

So David was really a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both were men after God's heart, but our Lord was the greater of the two.

Tonight I want to take that title, *a man after God's heart*, and apply it to David in a slightly different way, but a way that is supported by Psalm 27. And then I hope that we will all see that as much as we may seek to do the will of God, we are not fully doing the will of God if we are neglecting this one, very important matter.

And so let me point out one verse in this Psalm in which the will of God is very clear.

I. THE WILL OF GOD (Psa. 27:8).

I want to call your attention to Psa. 27:8. (Read.)

David lived in OT times before all of the Word of God was completed. In fact, we know that the Lord used David to give us some of the most wonderful parts of the Word of God in the many Psalms he wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit. So, as most of you realize, while we call Psalm 27 a Psalm of David (and it is), yet it is also the very Word of God.

Just when and where David was when the Lord said this to him, we do not know. *But I hope that there will not be a doubt in anyone's heart but that the Lord said this to him. And I hope also that none of us will doubt*

but that this was David's response. Please note David's answer. It did not just come from his mouth spoken by his tongue, but it came from his heart! It is important to notice this: "My heart said unto thee..." This means that David really meant that he was going to do what the Lord wanted him to do. He was going to seek the Lord's face! Furthermore, he was going to begin *immediately* to do it.

As I have said, I don't know when the Lord said this to David, but I am sure that it was before he became king of Judah first, and then of all of Israel.

And I am equally sure that the Lord was dealing with many others in that day in the same way. But those days were like our days: Many, possibly most of the Lord's people know that this is something that we ought to do, and may seek to do it for a time, and then not continue. Sometimes you will find a child of God whom you feel could be described as *a man, or woman, or young person, after God's heart*. But it must be the exception rather than the rule today. But I am just as sure as I am that we are here tonight that this is the will of God for all of us, and it has been the will of God for His people from the beginning of time until time is no more. Furthermore, I believe that there is nothing that is more important for any of us as far as the will of God is concerned than for us daily to be seeking the face of the Lord.

But now let me ask a question:

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEEK THE FACE OF THE LORD?

Perhaps it would help if I reminded all of us that most of the time we come to the Lord we are seeking some kind of a blessing, or blessings, from Him. And I am not saying that is wrong. We need the Lord's blessing. But we can be seeking the Lord's blessing without really seeking HIM!

To seek the Lord's face is to seek the Lord, not because we want something *from* Him, *but because we want Him!* And there is a real difference. The Lord wants us to want Him.

Isn't this what David was saying when he wrote those words in Psa. 37:4, "Delight thyself also in the Lord"? Too often our prayers are more of a habit that we seek to maintain rather than a desire for a more intimate knowledge of our Lord and a closer fellowship with Him. Too often we

are more occupied with our faith than we are with the Faithful One. How many of us know in our own hearts and in our experience what was in the heart of the Apostle Paul when he wrote those powerful words in Phil. 3:10, "That I may know Him" -- speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A. B. Simpson, who I believe is looked upon as the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, wrote several hymns during his lifetime. One of them had this as its first verse,

Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word;
Once his gift I wanted, now, the Giver own;
Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone.

This is what David was speaking about, seeking the Lord, seeking His blessed presence, seeking a closer fellowship with Him, seeking to have his mind stayed upon the Lord, finding the joy and peace that comes from being with Him.

Look at verse 1 of this Psalm. We seek light from the Lord. David said, "The Lord is my light." We seek His salvation. David said, "The Lord is...my salvation." We seek strength. David said, "The Lord is the strength of my life." I hope we all see the difference. Our focus needs to be upon the Lord. If we do, we will find more blessings than we have ever thought of asking for.

Let me give you some of David's statements from other Psalms which he wrote where we find the same emphasis. First, Psa. 42:1, 2:

- 1 As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

Listen to Psa. 63:1-4:

- 1 O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;
- 2 To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.
- 3 Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.
- 4 Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

Also those wonderful words in Psa. 84:1-4:

- 1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!
- 2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the

LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

And then Psa. 143:6-8:

6 I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.

7 Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.

8 Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

These are obviously the words of a man who had found his greatest delight in God, a man who rightly deserved to be called, *a man after God's heart*.

But now let us look at:

III. DAVID'S PRAYER (Psa. 27:4).

I believe I am right in saying that the Lord's word to David in verse 8 preceded and was the reason for his prayer which is recorded here in verse 4. You see, the promises of God and the commands of the Lord are the foundation upon which we come to God in prayer. What God commands, as many before me have said, God provides. What He tells us to do, He pledges Himself to give us when we come to Him in prayer. And what He promises, He gives in answer to prayer.

Notice how this verse begins: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after." The word "desired" means that he had requested this of the Lord, he had prayed for this blessing. But when he went on to say that he was seeking after it, he meant that he was doing that which God would bless in answering his prayer. It is not right for us to pray, and then to do no more. We pray, and then we seek God in His Word, and we look for Him in all of the experiences of our lives. The Lord was telling David to do something when He said to him, "Seek ye my face." I am not saying that we answer our own prayers, but I am saying that we use the means that God has given us. Here it is that we pray, and that we

seek the Lord in His Word.

But what was his request? There are actually three requests, one built upon the former request.

The first: “That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” Now we know that David had many, many responsibilities as the king of Israel. He could not actually be in the temple twenty-four hours of every day. Nor was that what he meant. “The house of the Lord” was the place where God’s presence was concentrated in OT times, but since God is omnipresent, every place can become a house of the Lord if we are truly walking in fellowship with Him. David was praying that his life might be one continual time of fellowship with the Lord.

Why did He want this? The second request: “To behold the beauty of the Lord.” He wanted to be able to contemplate, to gaze upon, the delightfulness of the Lord. Some grammarians say that “beauty” means *grace*. Samuel Rutherford used to speak of *the loveliness of Christ*.

And then what was the third request: “And to enquire in his temple.” This means that he was asking the Lord for the privilege of delving more deeply into the beauty of the Lord which he was daily feasting his eyes and his heart upon. He wanted time to meditate upon the glory of the Lord.

How would he do this, and how can we do this? It does not seem that David was blessed with visions of the Lord like other OT men were, but he was made a special instrument for receiving and recording that portion of the Word of God which we have in the Psalms. And that is where we must go. We must go to the Word every day, looking for the Lord as He is revealed in the Word from Genesis to the book of the Revelation, and then meditating upon what the Holy Spirit shows us of the glory of our Savior.

This is what the Lord did for the disciples He met on the road to Emmaus. And what was the result for them? The Scriptures were opened, and their hearts burned with joy and delight as the Lord spoke to them about Himself.

Concl: Franz Delitzsch, in his commentary on Psalm 27, says that when David said, “One thing have I desired of the Lord,” he expressed it in such a way in the Hebrew to show that he had “an ardent longing” in his heart which extended “out of the past into the future, and therefore”

ran “through the whole of his life” (Vol. I, p. 357). And he said this surrounded by wicked enemies and faced with all kinds of trouble, yet in such an environment his heart was filled with the realization of the presence of the Lord, and so was at peace.

So for us, not separated from the troubles and trials and responsibilities of life, but in the midst of them, we can be at perfect peace when our minds are stayed upon the Lord.

Tonight we have seen the great desire of David’s heart, expressed in prayer, and the blessing it was to him day by day. Let me conclude by using the words of the Lord Jesus when He ministered to His disciples in the Upper Room. He said, and I say tonight, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

It does us no good to know the truth if we do not follow it, by the grace of God, with our prayers and obedience. David could not have prayed a greater, nor a more important prayer, that we have seen tonight in Psa. 27:4.

DISCOVERING THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Psalm 34:3, 8-10

Intro: You will probably remember that when David was fleeing from Saul, at one point he went down to Gath among the Philistines, to seek protection from Saul. But some of Achish's servants recognized David, the one who had, according to the song composed by the women of Israel, slain ten times as many as Saul. To protect himself David pretended that he was insane, and, as a result was driven away from Achish. David escaped, and went to the cave of Adullam. It is thought that it was here that David composed this thirty-fourth Psalm, or that it was written as a result of the experiences which David was having at this particular time in his life.

The Psalm certainly fits the circumstances which David faced at that time. He had plenty of reason to be afraid. See Psa. 34:4. He had plenty of troubles (v. 17), and afflictions (v. 19). These were not wasted experiences, but we can see how the Lord was teaching David to trust Him, and to trust Him alone. David had gone to Achish, a heathen king, for help, only to find that he was in as much danger there as he was from Saul. So quite obviously David was going through some of the greatest struggles of his life -- and his struggles did not end at the cave of Adullam. But the point is that he was learning. And God was his Teacher. He would have to learn these same lessons over again in a deeper way, but Psalm 34 surely marks a milestone in David's experience.

Alexander Maclaren said in his comments on Psalm 34,
One might have pardoned him (i.e., David) if, at such a moment, some cloud of doubt or despondency had crept over his soul. But instead of that his words are running over with gladness, and the psalm begins, 'I will bless the Lord at all times, and His praise shall continually be in my mouth' (Vol. 3, p. 213, 214).

But we must never think that David reached this point all at once, nor should we think that verse 1 was always expressive of David's feelings. He had his failings just like we have ours, but, as I have said, God was teaching him, and he was learning.

There were times when David had placed hope in Saul, but had been a great disappointment to him. He had seen Saul friendly at one moment, and ready to kill him the next. So he was learning that his hope could not be in Saul. And he presumably had just come from the Philistines, and he found that he was not safe there. David was earnestly looking for some-

one who would be “good” for him and “good” to him.

The Lord was teaching David that there is only One Who is really good, only One Who would not fail him, only One Who would be sufficient for him regardless of the circumstances he would face.

But now this brings me to explain the phrase in my text, verse 8,

I. “THE LORD IS GOOD.”

“Good” is an attribute of God. It is one of those attributes that is recognized over and over again in the Word of God. The Israelites were continually praising God for His goodness. Perhaps you remember this from our Bible readings in 2 Chronicles.

For example, when Solomon had completed the building of the temple, the Levites brought the ark of the covenant to its place in the temple. As they did this, the trumpets sounded and the singers sang. This is how it was all described in 2 Chron. 5:13, 14:

13 It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, **For he is good;** for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;
14 So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

Then, after Solomon had ended his prayer of dedication for the temple, fire came down from God out of heaven and consumed the sacrifices that were being offered, and again the priests could not enter the temple because of the glory of the Lord in the house of the Lord. But then we read this in 2 Chron. 7:3:

And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, **For he is good;** for his mercy endureth for ever.

Verse 10 of the same chapter tells us,
And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in

heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people.

Surely you remember the refrain that runs through Psalm 107:

8 Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness,
and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

9 For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry
soul with goodness (Psa. 107:8-9).

Verse 8 is actually the refrain, but I have read verse 9 to you also because it suggests to us two of the important words in *the definition of what it means that God is good*. They are the words “satisfieth” and “filleth.”

When the people praised the Lord for His goodness, they were saying that God is the only One Who is sufficient for our needs, and that He alone is satisfying. ~~Also that which is pleasing to us.~~

All of us have our own ideas as to what will make us happy and secure and satisfied. And it usually has to do with things, or experiences that we would like to have. My Dad used to say that his boss was a good man to work for until he made his first hundred thousand dollars (which was a lot of money in days past), but after he made his hundred thousand he wanted more and he was afraid that he might lose even a dollar of what he had. His money was neither sufficient nor satisfying to him.

None of us knows what we will have to experience before we die. We don't even know what tomorrow holds for us -- or even this evening. But we need an anchor in life that will really satisfy us, and be sufficient for whatever may be ahead. God is a God Who is good, and He does good things for us -- not necessarily what we call good (although sometimes He does that, too), but what He calls good. *And it was in the dark and trying hours of David's life when he was cut off from all human help, and could not do for himself what needed to be done, that he discovered the goodness of God*. How wonderful it would have been for Israel if this theme which they were always singing about had continued to be the source of hope in all of their trials.

I am speaking in this series about pursuing the Lord, seeking the Lord. David was concerned about this also as he wrote Psalm 34. He was not only telling what the Lord in His infinite goodness had done for him, but he wanted others to share the same discovery which he had made in his life. He knew that he had no corner on the Lord, but that the lesson he had learned was a lesson that every child of God needs to learn. And that holds for today as well as it did 3,000 years ago!

What did David long for as far as the people of God were concerned? We have it in the words,

II. “O TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD.”

“O taste and see.”

This plea which came from David’s heart suggests something very important for all of us to notice. No one in Israel would doubt the goodness of God. They sang about it all of the time. They believed that God was good and gracious and loving and merciful and all of the other words that belong in the same group. They believed that. *But David knew that it had not become a reality in their daily experience.* And the history of Israel confirms that very few knew down in the depths of their hearts that God is good. It was easier for them to trust in themselves, or to trust even in other nations, than it was to trust in the Lord. They had not come to realize that God is sufficient for all of our needs, and that He alone is sufficient. God may use people to minister to us, and He often orders our circumstances in most surprising ways, but we need to learn to trace all of the blessings which come our way back and up to the Lord because the blessings always come from Him. And it is not the Lord *plus* someone else, or *plus* something else, but the Lord alone. He “satisfieth” and He “filleteth.”

Now we all have different tastes. We all have foods that we like very much, and others that we will eat but may not enjoy, and then we have some foods that we don’t want to eat at all. To taste anything is really to eat it. We take what we eat into our bodies, and our food becomes a means of strength and nourishment to us.

Imagine suggesting that there is One we all can taste, can bring into our lives and make Him a part of our being, so that we will all agree that feeding upon Him will bring that sense of satisfaction and sufficiency which we all need. And yet that is what we have in the Lord. We may differ about a lot of things, but for those who “taste and see” they will always find that “the Lord is good.”

But one thing that is important about taste is that it is very personal. If I see you eating something, and you tell me that it is good, there is only one way for me to find out if I agree with you. I have to taste it for myself.

David knew that he could talk all day long about the goodness of the

Lord, but people would never really understand what he was talking about until they tasted and saw for themselves. And you will notice that our text does not say, “O taste and see if the Lord is good”; no, it says, “O taste and see **that** the Lord is good.” David said that the Lord is good. There is no question about that, no debate. But every person needs to find out for Himself.

This verse always reminds me of a verse in Bernard of Clairvaux’s hymn, “Jesus, the Joy of loving hearts.” This is the verse:

We taste Thee, O thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the Fountain-Head,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.

Bernard must have gotten the inspiration for that verse of his hymn from our Lord’s words in John 6:53-58. Listen while I read them to you. Our Lord was speaking to unbelieving Jewish leaders, and this is what He had to say:

53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever (John 6:53-58).

This is the great truth which is pictured in the Lord’s Supper which we observed this morning. We do not taste of the Lord just long enough to be saved, and then we don’t eat anymore. We are to feed upon Christ every day. Peter gave us a similar word in 1 Pet. 2:2, 3 where he wrote,

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word,
that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

How do we taste and see that the Lord is good? By learning about Him in the Word of God. You will find Him all through the Scriptures, and it is

in learning about Christ that we will be tasting and experiencing what David had discovered when the Lord took away every prop in his life, and all he had was the Lord. Then he found that he could write a Psalm like Psalm 34 while he was still in trouble, and could not see what the outcome would be. He found the Lord sufficient and He found that Lord was all he needed.

Now how can we tell that we are really tasting and seeing, or learning, that the Lord is good? The answer is very obvious, and it is found as the last statement in Psa. 34:8:

III. “BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT TRUSTETH IN HIM.”

It is the greatest of all joys to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” And the blessing continues as we put our trust in Him so that we can experience the riches of His goodness. Then we will understand also why David said in verse 3, “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.”

Concl: One wonderful thing about this verse we have been considering tonight is that there is something here for those of us who believe in the Lord, and there is something here for those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. The Lord was speaking to unbelievers when He spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He wanted them to consider Who He was and to consider the meaning of His death. His “flesh” had to do with His nature; “His blood” had to do with His sacrificial death. If you don’t know the Savior, let me encourage you tonight to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Take the Gospel of John and seek to learn what the Apostle John wanted to teach us about the Lord Jesus. And ask God to give you an open heart. I doubt if you will get all of the way through the Gospel before you will have put your trust in Him as your Savior. Why not do that, and start tonight. You, too, will find that Christ is sufficient for your spiritual needs, and Christ alone.

For those of us who know the Lord Jesus as our Savior, has your Bible reading deteriorated into nothing more than reading, or are you feeding upon Christ as you read? Do you read seeking to learn all that you can about Him? Do you realize that you may be facing a tough time in your life right now because the Lord wants you to “taste and see” again that He is good, He is the One you need, and the only One.

May the Lord use this verse in each one of our lives so that we will “taste and see” that the Lord Jesus alone is good and sufficient for us.

Thayer's definition of the word κόσμος as it is used in the NT:

- 1) an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution, order, government
- 2) ornament, decoration, adornment, that is, the arrangement of the stars, 'the heavenly hosts', as the ornament of the heavens. 1 Pet. 3:3
- 3) the world, the universe
- 4) the circle of the earth, the earth
- 5) the inhabitants of the earth, men, the human race
- 6) the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ
- 7) world affairs, the aggregate of things earthly
the whole circle of earthly goods, endowments riches, advantages, pleasures, etc., which although hollow and frail and fleeting, stir desire, seduce from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ
- 8) any aggregate or general collection of particulars of any sort
 - a) the Gentiles as contrasted to the Jews (Rom. 11:12 etc)
 - a) used of believers only, John 1:29; 3:16; 3:17; 6:33; 12:47 1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Cor. 5:19

“WHERE IS THY GOD?”

Psalm 42

Intro: The Psalms are divided into five books, and Psalm 42 is the first Psalm of the second book. Psalms 42 and 43 are related to each other as we can see from the refrain in Psa. 42:5 and 11 and Psa. 43:5. We don't know who the writer was. The superscription says that they were written “for the sons of Korah.” They were the temple musicians and evidently the experiences reflected in this Psalm were common enough among the people of God, that it became a fitting Psalm for the people to join together in singing as they came to the Temple to worship the Lord.

It is clear from both Psalms that the Psalmist, or Psalmists, were in trouble. It is equally true that the writer had made a strong profession of his confidence in God. And yet in His trials his enemies had constantly taunted him with the question which we find in Psa. 42:3 and again in verse 10 of the same Psalm. He also asks the question which we find in Psa. 42:9, “Why has thou forgotten me?” And there is a similar question in Psa. 43:2, “Why has thou cast me off?” It is a situation in which the Psalmist does not understand God, nor does he understand himself. See the refrains again, especially the first part in Psa. 42:5 and 11, and Psa. 43:5.

Quite obviously the Psalmist had not lost his hunger for God. See 42:1, 2. Evidently he was in the northern part of Israel at this time, but he longed to be back in Jerusalem where previously he had enjoyed great evidences of the Lord's presence and His blessing. But at the time these Psalms were written all of the past joys seem to have been taken away from the Psalmist. He was in something of the same predicament as Job was when in the heat of his trials he said. Job was answering Eliphaz:

3 Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might
come even to his seat!
4 I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth
with arguments.
5 I would know the words which he would answer me,
and understand what he would say unto me.
6 Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but
he would put strength in me (Job 23:3-6).

When we are in such circumstances, this calls for the pursuit of God. And yet the question of the Psalmist's enemies is worthy of our consideration. They made a bad situation even worse for the Psalmist.

What did they ask?

I. "WHERE IS THY GOD?"

Was it true even then that the only place they could find the Lord was in "the house of the God" which the Psalmist mentioned in Psa. 42:4.

We also see in Psalm 43, verses 3 and 4, expressions which have to do with the house of God.

(By the way the psalms in this second book are what scholars have called, Elohimic Psalms. In the first book the Psalmist are Jehovistic. By this they meant that in Psalms 1-41 the Deity is referred to as Jehovah 272 times, and as Elohim only 15 times. Here in the second book the numbers are reversed: Jehovah, only 30 times; Elohim, 164 times. As an illustration of this note that "Lord," *Jehovah*, occurs only once in these two Psalms (42 and 43). That is in 42:8. All of the other references to Deity are God, *Elohim*.-- 13 times in Psa. 42; 8 times in Psa. 43. The difference would emphasize the special meaning of each Name -- *Elohim*, the God of creation and His mighty power; *Jehovah*, God's unchanging and eternal character, and His faithfulness.)

But going back to the Psalmist's mention of "the house of God," was it true even back in those days that God was only present in the Temple, "the house of the Lord"? Let us examine what the OT Scriptures say on that point.

First, what can we learn from Solomon who built the first temple? In his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, this is what Solomon said,

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? (1 Kings 8:27).

We have a similar statement in Psa. 113:4-6:

4 The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

5 Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high,

6 Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

But the classic passage on the presence of the Lord is found in Psalm 139, which was written by King David. Cf. vv. 7-12:

7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell [sheol], behold, thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

And what about that simple statement about the presence of the Lord which we have in Heb. 13:5, 6 (which is a quotation from Joshua 1:5):

5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Tonight we are speaking about what theologians call, the immanence of God. This means that He is omnipresent. He is everywhere at the same time. Listen to the way A. W. Tozer described this great truth in his book, *The Pursuit of God*:

What does the divine immanence mean in direct Christian experience? It means simply that *God is here*. Wherever we are, God is here. There is no place, there can be no place, where He is not. Tell million intelligences standing at as many points in space and separated by incomprehensible distances can each one say with equal truth, God is here. No point is nearer to God than any other point. It is exactly as near to God from any place as it is from any other place. No one is in mere distance any further from or any nearer to God than any other person is (p. 62).

This is a most precious truth, a truth designed for our comfort, but also a truth to encourage us in our need to be obedient to the Lord. Solomon said, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3).

So wherever I am, I can say, "God is here." And I can go miles away and say also, "God is here." But I have to say at the same time that He is still where He was when I said earlier in the day that God was there! He is in

heaven. He is on earth. He is in Portland. He is in Vancouver. He is in Los Angeles. He is in London. He is in Paris. Circle the globe. Mention any place you want to, and the people who are there could all say in unison, "God is here." We need to dwell on this truth until it sinks deeply into our souls.

But now we have to go on to say that the presence of the Lord is one thing, but the manifestation of God's presence is another thing. And it was the manifestation of the presence of the Lord that was bothering the Psalmist when he wrote Psa. 42 and Psa. 43 (because I am inclined to believe that the same person wrote both Psalms).

Take Jacob, for example, when the Lord appeared to him at the top of the ladder which reached to heaven. The Lord promises to go with him and to bless him and to fulfill His purposes in and for Jacob. When Jacob awoke from his sleep (because it was in a dream that the Lord appeared to him, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16). And in the next verse we are told that he said this: "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17). So what did he name that place? He called it *Bethel* which means, *house of God*.

What a difference it will make in all of our lives for us to know that we live in the presence of the Lord. He sees where we go. He listens to what we say. He even understands our thoughts. It is no wonder that David prayed as he did in Psa. 19:14,

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable **in thy sight**, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

But what are we to do when we do not sense the presence of the Lord, when we pray and it seems that the Lord is not listening to us, or when people seem to have more control over our circumstances than God does? What are we to do? Here was a man who longed for God, who thirsted for God, and yet it seems from his circumstances that the Lord had forgotten him. What should he do, and what did he do?

The Puritans used to speak of such times as times of God's apparent *desertions*. What do we need to do? *We need to do what the Psalmist did*. Look with me at verse 5 in Psalm 42.

II. WHAT TO DO WHEN IT SEEMS THAT GOD IS *NOT* THERE (Psa. 42:5; cf. v. 11; Psa. 43:5).

A. Talk to yourself.

This is what the Psalmist was doing in all three of these verses. We are so inclined to jump overboard when it seems that everything is not what it should be, when what we ought to be doing is to talk to ourselves. That not only goes for times of trouble, but also when we are happy in the Lord. Cf. Psa. 103:1 ff.

B. Ask yourself why you are the way you are: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?”

Don’t forget everything that you have learned about God. Your circumstances might have changed, but God has not changed. He is present even though you may not feel that he is. Remember that we walk by faith, and not by sight.

To be “cast down” is to be depressed, and to be “disquieted” inside of you is to be in all kinds of inner turmoil and uproar because of your difficulties. But the big question is still, “WHY?” We must not react to our problems like unbelievers would, or like many believers would. And so it is good to question ourselves as to why we are as upset as we are.

C. Tell yourself what to do: “Hope thou in God.”

Just because we don’t sense the Lord’s presence, and just because we can’t see any evidence that He knows what we are going through, we still need to continue to trust him.

When Jehoshaphat was faced with overwhelming numbers of his enemies, the Lord took over and promised him victory (as He does for us in every difficulty). But Jehoshaphat went to his people and he said this to them:

Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper (2 Chron. 20:20).

No child of God would ever say that the promises of God are not true, but the big question is, are we showing by our behavior that we are really depending upon the Lord to help us, and to do what He has promised to do. We need to believe, and then continue to believe.

The last thing that we need to tell ourselves is related to hoping in the Lord, and yet it needs to be considered separately. This is it:

D. Encourage ourselves in the Lord: “For I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”

— We do not trust the Lord wondering if He is going to help us. We trust Him knowing that He will, and that the time will certainly come when we will be just as full of praise as we have been depressed and all torn up inside. “The help of his countenance.” That means that He is not going to send angels to meet our needs, or anyone else, except it be in addition to His own blessed presence.

Concl: We all have our problems and we all have our needs. And at times they get very heavy, mainly because we persist in carrying the load ourselves. But here we are told how to seek God when He seems to have forgotten us, and cast us away. We talk to ourselves, reviewing what we know about God and His faithfulness, as well as remembering that being God He is the Mighty One. And then we go on trusting Him, assured that He will turn our anxiety into joy, and our depression into fulness of joy.

So maybe you and I need to go home tonight and do some talking to ourselves.

—

SEEING THE UNSEEN

2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

Intro: I doubt if there is anything that pleases God more than for us to pursue Him. And because of this He uses various means to keep us in pursuit. One of the most frequently used means is *suffering*. That was certainly what Paul was talking about in the two verses I am using as my text tonight. Right from the very first of this second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians we are conscious that Paul was facing, and had faced, some very severe trials in his ministry as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of the doxology with which he praised God right at the very beginning:

- 3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;
4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.
5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

And then just a few verses later Paul wrote this:

- 8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:
9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:
10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;
11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf (2 Cor. 1:8-11).

Paul was brought to an end of his own resources. God did not want Paul and his fellow-workers to trust in themselves; He wanted them to trust in Him. It was only God who could deliver them.

This passage in chapter 1 tells us that God was using the trials which Paul and his companions were experiencing to work also in the hearts of the Corinthian believers who prayed for them. We never pray more earnestly than we do when we know that everything that is needed comes from God. And so you can see from just the way that Paul began this epistle

that God was teaching him and those who were with him to focus their attention on what I might call, the unseen world of God. It is always easier for us to pay more attention to the things that we can see than we do to the things which we cannot see. But, as Paul told the Corinthians, what we see all about us is temporal. That is, it is not going to last forever. What we cannot see is eternal, which means that the unseen is going to last forever.

To look at the unseen is the very essence of faith, isn't it? If we go on reading in chapter 5 of this epistle, we will find Paul saying that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). The writer of Hebrews tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). And in the twenty-seventh verse of Hebrews 11 we are told this about Moses:

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

But let us return to our text.

I. WHAT DID PAUL MEAN WHEN HE SPOKE OF SEEING THE UNSEEN?

Was he speaking of some kind of a vision? No! Was he thinking as many people do today of delving into the world of make-believe, or visiting someone who claimed to be able to tell fortunes? No! Was he talking about what Mrs. Clinton apparently has been doing in having an imaginary conversation with Eleanor Roosevelt and Mahatma Ghandi? Absolutely not! We can imagine why Mrs. Clinton might do something like this because what she can see seems to be very permanent, and she has lost any place where she can look for help.

No, Paul was speaking in terms of the greatest reality. He was speaking of seeking God.

The word that Paul used in this passage for "look" is the Greek word σκοπέω. It is not the common word that he might have used if he had simply been speaking of seeing something, such as, a friend, or a city here on earth. That word, βλέπω, appears four times in the latter part of the verse: "Not at the things which are **seen**, but at the thing which are not **seen**: for the things which are **seen** are temporal; but the things which are not **seen** are eternal."

No, Paul was not speaking of what he could see with his physical eyes all

around him, he was indicating that he was seeing what you can only see by faith with the eyes of your heart and your mind. It speaks of what he was setting his mind on, what he was paying particular attention to, with the idea of seeking and getting what he in his mind and heart was looking at. It means also that he wanted to understand what responsibilities this placed upon him.

Let me illustrate it with one of Paul's prayers, the one we find in Ephesians, chapter 1, beginning with verse 15 and going down to the end of the chapter:

15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

18 **The eyes of your understanding** [the Greek says, *the eyes of your heart*] being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:15-23).

So when Paul was speaking of *seeing* he was speaking of understanding spiritual truth, truth which we can only understand with the help of the Holy Spirit.

But where do we find all of this? There is only one place, and that is in the Word of God. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:9, 10:

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

— What all of this means is that God uses trials and other circumstances in our lives to make us pay attention to His Word. It is in the Word that we learn about God. It is in the Word that we find the promises of God. It is in the Word that we learn about God's purpose in our salvation. It is in the Word that we learn about the ways of the Lord. This is where our faith comes from. This is where we art to get our comfort and our strength.

But let me point out another thing that Paul was indicating about looking "not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen." His use of the Greek verb for *looking* indicates that this is not just what he did when he was in trouble, or something that he did occasionally whatever his circumstances might be. *He was speaking of the way he lived. He was speaking of what he did as a way of life.* Paul habitually spent more time looking at the things that the natural eye cannot see than he did looking at what he could see. He did not ignore what he could see with his physical eyes, but he always turned from the circumstances he faced to look at the eternal truth of God.

— So I hope that we all understand what Paul was speaking about here. But now let me raise another question.

II. WHAT IN PARTICULAR GAVE PAUL COMFORT AND HOPE IN THE FACE OF THE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES HE WAS FACING?

The answer to this question is in verse 17. (Read.)

See also 2 Cor. 4:13, 14, and then 5:1-9.

Paul was thinking along the same line when he wrote the words we find in Rom. 8:18:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

And we can add to that verse, Rom. 8:28.

— Now I think that you and I should realize that the reason Paul could place such trust in the Scriptures was because it was through this Word that Paul himself had come to understand the glory, the holiness, the faithful-

ness, the power, the wisdom, and all of the other attributes of God -- God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit. He knew that God cannot lie. He knew that He cannot fail. He knew that God will not fail even when we do. He knew that whatever God promised, He would do. But His thoughts, His meditation, was continually being directed toward the Members of the Godhead and the marvelous Word which They have given us.

The things that we see, as wonderful as they may be, or as terrible as they may be, are temporal. They are only here for a brief time, just for a season. But the things of God, His Person, His purposes, His power and wisdom, are eternal. They will never end.

And so in times of need what a joy it is for us to be able to look away from what we can see, to feast our hearts on what we can see, and to know that, although we may not always understand how what we are going through may have anything to do with God's ultimate purposes for us, yet we know that it does, and that the goal is worth far more than any suffering that we might have to endure here.

Illus: Years ago when I was on the faculty of the Multnomah School of the Bible, a man came to speak in chapel, and these last two verses of 2 Cor. 4 were the verses he had chosen for his text. I don't remember his name, and I don't remember but one thing from his message, and it was this: Perhaps as he was closing he said, "The most cheated Christian in this room is the Christian who has a greater appreciation for the things that he can see than he does for the things that he cannot see." And he went on to point out that we are the ones who are cheating ourselves out of blessings that God has provided for all of us.

Concl: If we have been cheating ourselves because we have not been looking at and pursuing the things of God as we should, let us not cheat ourselves any longer. Let us quit reading our Bibles just to cover a certain number of chapters. Let's read our Bibles as people who want to see and understand and profit from the things of God. Let us ask God to show us Himself in the Word, and then to enable us to trust Him as we should, and to obey Him as we should. Then, as Paul said at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, not only will we be comforted and encouraged in our walk here on earth, but the Lord will enable us to comfort and encourage others with the comfort and blessing we have received from God. The looking that Paul was speaking about in our text is what we need to understand is pursuing God.

FOLLOWING HARD AFTER GOD

Psalm 63

— **Intro:** Derek Kidner, in his commentary on the Psalms, said of this Psalm, “There may be other psalms that equal this outpouring of devotion; few if any that surpass it” (Vol. I, p. 224). And he prefaced this by saying, “Once more the worst has brought out David’s best, in words as it did in deeds” (*Ibid.*).

Commentators are generally in agreement that this Psalm was written some time during David’s escape from his son, Absalom. It was a time of great distress for David that his son would treat him in such a humiliating way, but the Psalm gives us evidence that God used this time in his life to draw David even closer to Himself.

But I cannot agree with Perowne who said that there is no petition in this Psalm. How else can we take the first four verses if it is not a prayer? It is addressed to God, and certainly contains the greatest desire that David had in his heart: the desire for a more intimate fellowship with the Lord. And it is even more important because it comes from the pen and lips and heart from a man who know a fellowship with God which surpassed that of most men – so much so that he was known as *a man after God’s heart*.

— This Psalm was so important in the estimation of the early church fathers that they decreed that not a day should pass without the singing of this hymn. They felt also that this Psalm expressed “the spirit and soul of the whole book of Psalms” (quoted by Perowne, Vol. 1, p. 486). We would have to admit that it would change the church of the present day if we who make up the church on earth could honestly pray from our hearts what David prayed so long ago.

It seems to me that we have three divisions in this Psalm:

- 1) David’s prayer (vv. 1-4).
- 2) David’s pursuit (vv. 5-8).
- 3) David’s peace (vv. 9-11).

I. DAVID’S PRAYER (Psa. 63:1-4).

— Only in the first verse, and then in the last verse, did David mention “God” by name. He was thinking in terms to God’s “power and...glory,” and so this was the appropriate title for David to use. Absalom might take David’s throne, and his authority, and the place of honor that David

had with the people of Israel, *but he could not take David's God from him*. And it seems that David found great blessing in his flight from Absalom and his cohorts in thinking about the permanent and intimate relationship that he had with God, his God!

David was a man who was well acquainted with God, but what he knew of the Lord and the fellowship that he had enjoyed with the Lord only made him know that he needed to know the Lord better, and this was what he wanted more than anything else -- including his return to power.

Hebrew scholars tell us that the word that is translated, "early will I seek thee," comes from a Hebrew word which has to do with the dawning of the day. So it implies that David so desired fellowship with the Lord each day that this is what he always did the first thing in the morning. I am going to speak of *David's pursuit of God* in a moment, but I think it is important to notice that David's praying preceded his pursuing of God. And his pursuit of God was an indication of the sincerity of his prayer. "Early will I seek thee" means not only *early*, but *earnestly*!

The intensity of his desire for God is brought out also by his reference not only to his soul (his inner being), but also to his flesh (his outward being). But David was saying that his whole being cried out for God. In Psalm 84 (which may not have been one of David's Psalms) we have that verse which says,

My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the
LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God
(Psa. 84:2).

This was an indication of "that intense worship in which every thought, feeling, desire, affection are centered in the One true Object of Love" (Perowne, I, 487). Everything in David longed for God. It was the "one thing" that he desired, which we considered in Psa. 27:4.

And David's desire was increased with compared with the "dry and thirsty land, where no water is." The desert where David was may have prompted this expression, but in a larger sense he was speaking of this world. The person who pursues the wisdom and pleasures and possessions of the world for his satisfaction will sooner or later find that it is truly "a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." The world can never again even temporarily satisfy the child of God who has tasted the joy of fellowship with the Lord. He is the refreshing, satisfying, life-giving water of life. Remember what the Lord said when He was speaking to the Samaritan woman about water:

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh

of this water shall thirst again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:13-14).

And yet while we never thirst for satisfaction from any other source, we come daily to drink of Him who is the Fountain Head.

In verse 2 David was reflecting upon what he had seen of the presence of the Lord in the temple. But he could not go to the temple at that time. And yet he knew the truth of the immanence of God, that God is present everywhere, and so he longed to see the Lord make the desert a holy place, holy ground, as it was to Moses when God called him in the desert of Sinai.

How good it is to know that our geographical location can never be an obstacle to our fellowship with the Lord. God's presence is always characterized by His power and His glory, which is His divine beauty, His majesty.

In verse 3 David declares what he had learned in the past. It made no difference, actually, if Absalom hated his father. David would not have preferred it that way, but he didn't have control of his circumstances, and neither do we. But the one thing that David wanted to be assured of was that the Lord was pleased with Him. He would rather have died that to have incurred the disfavor of the Lord. And to have the Lord's blessing and presence was what made life worth living to David.

Remember that all that was taking place at this time in David's life was *after* his sin with Bathsheba, and his murder of her husband. And in David's Psalm of Confession, Psalm 51, one thing that he said to God was,

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me (Psa. 51:11).

On the other hand we have what David said in Psa. 16:11:

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

How wonderful it would be if we were as spiritually sensitive as David was, and had the desire in our hearts for God that he had! There is so much that we can learn from God's people in Scripture.

This brings us to what I have called,

II. DAVID'S PURSUIT (Psa. 63:5-8).

As we often see in Scripture, the desires and hopes of the people of God began with prayer, but they were followed by actions which accompanied their prayers. For example, it is foolish for us to pray for a greater knowledge of Scripture if we never read the Bible, or if we never go where we can be taught more about the Word.

David knew that the Lord's presence was all that could really satisfy Him, and that he could do nothing to bring the Lord near if the Lord were not manifesting Himself in a sovereign way. So he prayed, and, I am sure, continued to pray, but he also did the things that would put him where he could "see" the Lord.

In verse 5 he said that he knew that the Lord was the One Who could satisfy him, and he vowed that he would praise the Lord "with joyful lips" if the Lord were to hear and answer the cry of his heart. "Marrow and fatness" is an expression that they might have used to describe a great feast that had been prepared for them. That was something that was always anticipated with great pleasure.

But now notice something especially interesting in verse 6, and let me contrast this with what we learned in verse 1. In verse 1 we learned how David started his day, wherever he might have been. He knew about this in his shepherd days. He learned more about it when he was seeking to escape for his life from Saul. In all of the burdens of being king, he evidently kept this up. And at the time that he wrote this Psalm, the Lord was impressing this more and more upon him. His days were always to start with the Lord. Cf. Psa. 5:3.

But what about the rest of the day?

Looking at the end of the day, and perhaps when for some reason he was unable to sleep, what did he do? He remembered the Lord. But he did more than that. He *meditated on Him* "in the night watches." Meditating is more than remembering. We start by remembering, but we continue by meditating.

This is good for us to keep in mind when we come to the Lord's Table, as we will next Sunday morning, the Lord willing. We remember the Lord. And we remember His death. But this is to keep of chain of thinking going which we call meditation. So David pursued the Lord in the morning, and he pursued the Lord at night, through the night watches if

necessary. And this would suggest what we are going to learn in verse 8, that this is the way he spent his days.

— The way we use our spare moments is a good indicator of just how much the Lord means to us. When a serviceman is away from home, if he is married you can be sure that there are not many minutes in the day but what his thoughts go back to his loved ones and home, filling him with a great desire to be with them. This is how David felt about the Lord. Before we are saved, God is not in all our thoughts. But after we are saved, there should not be much time when our thoughts are not returning to the Lord.

Verse 7 tells us that David's past experiences of the Lord's faithfulness helped him to rejoice that he was under the kind of care that a hen gives to her chicks, but much greater than that. A hen lives to protect her little ones, and will die before she will see them harmed. Our needs are continually before the Lord in the same way.

And now we come to that wonderful eighth verse.

— David's language here not only suggests pursuing the Lord (as he obviously was doing in this Psalm), but it suggests clinging to the Lord, not letting the Lord get away.

This idea can be illustrated by the times we see little children in a supermarket with their mother. They are always curious about the food on the shelves and about everything that is going on, but there is one thing that can cause instant alarm for them. And that is if mother gets out of sight. That's when the tears can start. That is when you hear a child calling out for mother. That described how David felt about the Lord. Put him in the desert of Judea, but he did not want to let the Lord out of his sight spiritually.

But he had one great encouragement: "Thy right hand upholdeth me."

— The Lord has promised never to leave us, nor to forsake us. But more than that, He has promised that no one can take us out of His hand. David was concerned about the presence of the Lord, and about the Lord's blessing, but he could be comforted by the great truth that the Lord is even more concerned about being with us than we are about being with Him.

So we must not have the idea when we talk about pursuing the Lord that

He is trying to get away from us, or that He is reluctant to let us find Him. It may seem as though we have a hard time in finding Him, but He is always near, and by His right hand He *upholds* us. This not only means that He holds us, but it also means that He will not let us go. And this is not something that is true just when we are in trouble. It is true twenty-four hours of every day.

And so we come to the last three verses and what we can call,

III. DAVID'S PEACE (Psa. 63:9-11).

Kidner said about these verses that David had been so absorbed by his thoughts of the Lord, that only here at the conclusion of the Psalm do we find a reference made to his enemies. And yet David was never entirely free from those who would not only harm him, but kill him. He lived with the constant possibility of death. And yet when he remember his enemies, it was always with the thought that, as we sometimes hear it said, "We are immortal until our job is finished." God was more than a match for all of David's enemies. David knew his God well enough to know that if the Lord is on your side, it doesn't make any difference who your enemies are. Nor does it make any difference as to how many there might be. He knew that the will of God would prevail, and so his heart, in the unsettle future which he at that moment faced, was at peace.

Concl: After you read this Psalm, aren't you convinced that what David expressed this is what it means to live in fellowship with the Lord? We find the Apostle Paul saying essentially the same thing when he, from a Roman prison, wrote to the Philippian believers. This is what he said:

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of

the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing (Phil. 3:7-16).

May I close by asking all of us a question? *Could you and I have been the writer of Psalm 63?* That is why it is here, not just so we could see how much David loved the Lord, but so you and I would know how to follow in his footsteps. May we so walk with the Lord that we will find wherever we are that that place can become a sanctuary in which we, too, can enjoy precious fellowship with our Lord.