Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature
Presents:

Pearls of Great Price

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. **- Matthew 13:45-46**

AGES 10-13

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

Pearls Of Great Price

Vacation Bible School Lessons for 10-13
Written by Sister Megan Carter

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LESSON ONE

WEALTH

LESSON TEXT
MATT. 6:19-21

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

INTRODUCTION

Possessions. We all have them. No doubt every person in this class is blessed with an abundance of *stuff*. Are possessions bad? Are they good? Are they a help or a hindrance to the service of a child of God? Like so many other things we encounter, the good and the bad has more to do with *our attitudes* – how we handle the things with which God blesses us and our reasons for seeking after those things. In our first lesson, we will answer these questions and take a closer look at the blessing, the burden, and the responsibility of wealth.

LESSON TEXT DISCUSSION

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is instruction after beautiful instruction for living a godly and joyful life. In about the middle of our Lord's sermon, He speaks the words of our lesson text. A multitude so great had gathered to hear Jesus that He had to climb the side of a mountain in order for all of them to hear Him. And even after the passing of thousands of years, the words of our Lord ring out, directing us to lives of service and happiness.

The introduction of sin into God's creation did not just take its toll on man's spiritual awareness, but on everything that existed and everything that ever will exist. Scientists call it *entropy* – all things tending toward disorder. Collecting "treasures upon earth," focusing our energy and attention on gaining *things* and *stuff* cannot bring true happiness since those things are sure to eventually be worn out, broken, stolen, or otherwise lost. Loving our possessions traps us in a vicious cycle of discontentment and unhappiness since we are constantly trying to replace those things that we've lost to sin's affect on all things.

Jesus instructs us to focus instead on "treasures in heaven." The affects of sin cannot reach heaven, so the treasures we store there will never pass away. They cannot be broken or ruined and they can never be taken from us.

The final bit of wisdom that Jesus leaves with us on this topic pertains to the heart. The heart referred to in verse 21 is not our physical, beating heart, but the innermost part of us. When Jesus said, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,"* He meant that our intent focus, love, and loyalty would fall upon whatever we treasure most. If that happens to be earthly treasure, our eyes will never rise above the horizon of this world. Our lives will be wasted dwelling on things that pass away and profit us nothing eternally. But if our treasure is in heaven, then we can spend our lives looking forward to much better things that will be ours for eternity.

QUESTION: IS HAVING POSSESSIONS BAD?

Possessions, *things*, *stuff* are not, in and of themselves, bad. Inanimate objects can be neither good nor bad; it is our use of and our attitudes toward those things that are good or bad.

The story of the Rich Young Ruler is an example of riches being a hindrance to a person. Read Matthew 19:16-26. This man wanted eternal life; he wanted to be saved. Jesus' first instruction to him was that he must keep the commandments. The man didn't understand what he was doing wrong since he thought had kept those commandments all his life and was not saved. Jesus' next instruction was for him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. The man would not give up his great wealth and the scriptures say he went away sorrowful.

From this example we can see that it was not, in fact, the man's possessions that kept him from being saved, but his lack of willingness to part with them.

However, from the example of King Solomon, we can see that God sometimes gives His children temporal blessings when they please Him. It pleased God that Solomon asked for wisdom and understanding rather than a long life or riches or the lives of his enemies. Because of his humble request, God blessed Solomon not only with wisdom, but also with riches and honor. Additionally, He promised to give him a long life if he continued to obey His commandments as his father David had done.

Worldly possessions can distract a person from their service to God and, as in the case of the Rich Young Ruler, can even hinder them in being saved. On the contrary, though, God sometimes uses these same worldly possessions to bless His children when they do things that are pleasing to Him.

And so we pose the question: Is having possessions bad?

Answer: It can be. It all depends on where your *true treasure* lies – on Earth or in Heaven.

WHAT IS HEAVENLY TREASURE ANYWAY?

If we take a look back at the example of the Rich Young Ruler, in verse 21, Jesus says, "*…If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven*…" It would seem from this example that good works and heavenly treasure go hand in hand. First of all, it should be made clear that Jesus was not advising the man to do good works to gain eternal life. A person must be saved *before* he is able to store up heavenly treasure.

Giving to the poor, bearing burdens, praying for lost friends, and working for the Lord as He leads are just a few things that God sees and for which He rewards His children. Countless blessings proceed from the "good works" we perform during our lives. We are personally blessed, others for whom we pray are blessed, God is glorified, and His kingdom is furthered when we work for Him.

There is reference in the scripture to God's children receiving a crown of life or a crown of glory (James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4) for their service to Him. Revelation 4:10-11 says, "*The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*" So we know that any rewards, any treasures we lay up in heaven will be used to worship and glorify God throughout eternity.

JESUS AND WEALTH

From a worldly standpoint, the title of this section is one big contradiction. Jesus did not possess temporal wealth. Matthew 8:20 says that Jesus did not even have a place to lay His head. When we think of Jesus, however, we don't think of someone pitiful and destitute. Why? Because while the man Jesus may not have had worldly possessions, He had unimaginable heavenly treasure. He had no need of *things* because He had *everything*. Likewise, a saved person shares in that *everything* being a joint heir with Christ. There is no more joyful way to live than to bask daily in the heavenly, the eternal *everything* we possess as children of God. We are more than conquerors along with our Savior and one of the things we have conquered with Him is the need for things that will pass away.

CONCLUSION

Possessions. We all have them. How blessed we are to live so comfortably with not only the things we need, but also most of the things we want as well! Having earthly possessions is not a sin as long as we don't allow it to distract us from Heavenly purposes and the service to which we've been called. Amassing temporal wealth should not be our main goal in life; this will only bring us lifelong sorrow and discontentment. Focusing on building up heavenly treasures, however, benefits everyone involved and gives us the amazing privilege of glorifying God in life and throughout eternity.

Seek after heavenly treasure. Focus your life on serving and pleasing God instead of focusing on accumulating *stuff* and you will be blessed.

LESSON TWO

HEALTH

LESSON TEXT
PROVERBS 3:5-8

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

INTRODUCTION

Personal health is a hot topic. Everywhere you look, it seems, there are books, magazines, articles, television shows, and entire websites devoted to the subject of living healthfully. These sources address *physical* health and sometimes *mental* or *emotional* health. In addition to these, there is another type we aren't likely to hear about in mainstream media – *spiritual health*. In our second lesson, we will look at overall health, its effects on all other aspects of life, and the right and wrong reasons for seeking after it.

LESSON TEXT DISSCUSSION

Our text for this lesson comes from the book of Proverbs, a book full to overflowing with wise advice that every person's life would benefit from following. The particular advice delivered in these few short verses can be applied to every part of a person's life.

Our trust is always best placed upon the Lord. We will always come up short when we try to depend upon ourselves or any other person. Even the people who love us most in the world will likely fail us at some point; but *God never will*. Trying to find wisdom originating within ourselves will always be a disappointment. God may bless us with intelligence, but true wisdom is a gift from Him.

Verse 6 says "*In **all** thy ways acknowledge him…*" God is interested in and cares about all of our endeavors. He didn't instruct us to look to Him for guidance concerning spiritual matters only, but to acknowledge and seek Him in *all* situations. That means that we can and *are supposed to* seek His help with schoolwork and school-related issues, relationships with others, choosing a college, finding a job, finding a spouse, finances, and everything else we face in our lives – including our personal health.

According to our lesson text, trusting in the Lord instead of relying on yourself comes with a great reward: Good health! Verse 8 says, "*…it shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.*" In this case, "navel" refers figuratively to the center of a person's strength and "marrow" refers to a refreshment or renewal. In other words, relying on God to direct us in all aspects of our lives is the ultimate health tip. It will strengthen us all the way to our cores and refresh us all the way to our bones!

BEING SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY

The thing that God desires most for us is spiritual health. The first step in becoming spiritually fit, of course, is being saved. An unsaved person is unfit and has no hope of becoming any better without the grace of God. No amount of good works or trying to be better in and of ourselves will merit anything in God's sight without the blood of His son covering our sins. Think of it in this way: A person who is dying of a terrible disease cannot hope to get stronger just by taking vitamins and exercising every day. A person must first be generally healthy before they can get physically fit. Likewise, a person must be spiritually healthy before he can get closer to God and serve Him through things like prayer, study, and good works.

After we are saved, God continues to draw us to Him. He wants His children to be near Him. Walking with God is not always easy even when we know it's what is best for us. The natural state of a saved soul is hungry; once we are saved, that spiritual part of us will always be hungry for nearness to God. Unfortunately, that desire for God is sometimes covered up by fleshly desires and the cares of this world. This is why it's important for us to actively seek God's will in our lives. Praying, studying the Bible, and attending church regularly are only a few of the things we can do for spiritual "exercise" to keep ourselves fit.

YOUR TEMPLE

Spiritual fitness is of foremost importance in our lives, but that doesn't mean that physical fitness is not also important. I Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*." God created the outward shell that we see when we look in the mirror to house something eternal.

Look back at the scripture in I Corinthians.

Do we fully comprehend that our bodies are indeed temples? When we look at it that way, that our bodies are used as a dwelling place for the spirit of God, it makes it a little easier to see the importance of caring for our physical bodies.

Do we truly understand that God created our bodies and that they don't belong to us? When we borrow things from our friends, we no doubt care for it to the best of

our abilities. Likewise, God made these earthly bodies for us to "borrow" and use for the purposes in which He directs us.

God saw fit to mold a man from the dirt (which He created a few days earlier) and blessed us in giving us bodies that are capable of serving. Furthermore, He sent His Son to pay for our sins. God made us; Jesus paid for us. *Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your sprit, which are God's*.

By all of this we can see the importance of keeping our physical bodies in good working order. Putting unhealthy or even dangerous things into our body is disrespectful to God. He never intended our bodies to be used for such things. The Bible speaks against laziness and idleness in several places. Sitting around and doing nothing constructive weakens your body and your mind; it isn't healthy or productive spiritually, either. Being unhealthy dishonors God in several ways since it hurts the place where His spirit dwells and renders us less able to serve Him fully.

Contrary to all of this, there is a harmful side of physical fitness. As in the previous lesson, it all depends on our *attitudes* toward it. A lot of importance is placed upon physical attractiveness today. A person who exercises constantly for the sole purpose of being physically stronger or who keeps themselves fit for the sole purpose of appearing more physically appealing to others will not be blessed in their efforts. Proverbs 31:30 says, "*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain…*" Physical strength and beauty will pass away and if others admire us for things that aren't lasting, then they might as well not admire us at all. All of our pursuits should have eternal purpose; God will bless only those that do.

JESUS AND HEALTH

One of the main things we think of when we think about Jesus is healing. Jesus performed many miracles that involved healing a person of illness, blindness, deafness, and other physical maladies. In all of these instances, spiritual healing went hand in hand with the physical healing, so we know that all healing must depend upon faith. There is still healing in Jesus and we are instructed to pray for health and healing. James 5:15 says, "*And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*" For **all** the things that grieve us – whether physical, emotional, or spiritual –Jesus is the answer.

CONCLUSION

God wants His children to be healthy. He wants us to seek after Him in all aspects of our lives and not to rely upon ourselves. Indeed, He wants to *be* our health and strength. Spiritual health comes from God and our willingness to seek after and obey Him. That life of obedience is the only way to treat our bodies – our temples – appropriately. Our physical forms are intended for the purpose of glorifying our Creator, not as objects of praise by which we gain the approval or favor of others. Correcting these human faults, forgiveness for sin, and all healing comes from one source: Jesus. In seeking Him, we find ultimate health and help for all our endeavors.

Seek health to further your service to God; seek health so you can glorify Him more and you will be blessed.

LESSON THREE

WISDOM

LESSON TEXT
PROVERBS 9:10-11

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

11 For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.

INTRODUCTION

What is wisdom? Many would say that wisdom goes hand in hand with intelligence or with the quality of being very well-studied, but true wisdom has much more depth than even the very most intelligent person's mind can hold. A good definition for our study of wisdom is *knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action* (dictionary.com). The Lord expects us to use the mental capacity with which He's blessed us to be the best students or employees we can be, but at what point does worldly knowledge become hurtful to us? In this lesson, we will consider the harmful effects of seeking the wrong kind of wisdom, as well as the blessings and benefits of seeking the true and right kind.

FEARING THE LORD

The lesson text is very straightforward telling us that we are to fear the Lord. That naturally brings us to the obvious question: "Am I supposed to be afraid of God?" In simple terms, yes. Many people who read this verse try to explain it away by saying that fear in this case just means respect or reverence, and that's certainly part of the fear of God we're supposed to have, but fear also just means *fear* and, yes, we are supposed to be afraid of God's power.

There are many instances in the scripture that speak of God's wrath and refers to God as being *dreadful.* Just consider examples such as the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those situations were certainly terrifying events and God's showed His wrath in a mighty way. We have to consider, though, that God is the only One who is capable of *perfect* wrath, *perfect* dread… but also of *perfect love* and *perfect mercy*. God sent the flood to destroy everything, but He spared Noah and His family. God sent fire and brimstone to destroy those two wicked cities, but He spared Lot and his family.

God's wrathful destruction has never yet been complete; He's always shown His mercy. A day will come, however, when His destruction will be complete. The Bible says in Matthew 10:28, "*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" When the Lord returns to this Earth and time ends, there will be no more mercy. No one will escape His judgment. He surely will appear dreadful to those who have not made preparation to meet Him. For those of us who have been saved, He will appear glorious because we will finally be able to see His perfect justice in its fullness.

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

Before you can be capable of gaining any true wisdom, you must be saved. The first time you will truly fear God is when He shows you that you are separated from and lost without Him. Once you are saved, you have a true foundation. And a true foundation makes all the difference.

Read Matthew 7:24-27 – the account of the wise and foolish builders. The wise man built his house on a rock and when the storms came, it stood strong on its solid foundation. The foolish man, however, built his house on shifting sands, and when stormy weather came his way, his house, as the song says, went *SPLAT!*

Likewise, any godly wisdom a person tries to gain before they are saved is sure to fall flat. There are many religious people who can quote scriptures and tell you what the Bible says about this topic and that topic all day long, but if they are unsaved, they have no true wisdom of those teachings. God's written word is a wealth of knowledge and information, but until He speaks to you through it, really shows it to you and *applies* it to your heart, you can't gain true wisdom from it.

After you're saved, the wisest things you can do are pray and study, study and pray. It's through these times of diligent seeking, these "closet devotions," as the Church Covenant that hangs in so many churches calls them, that God will teach you how to be wise – *the right, true kind of wise*.

"BOOK SMARTS"

God gave you a brain. He expects you to use it. A saved person should strive to do their absolute best at whatever task lies before them, whether that's being a student, being a friend, working for NASA, or driving a garbage truck. There is nothing wrong with being intelligent and striving to gain intelligence, but all of that striving should have a depth of purpose.

If we spend our entire high school careers trying to get perfect grades so that we can get into the most prestigious college possible… if we spend our entire college careers trying to get perfect grades and perfect recommendations from all the right professors so we can get the best job to make the most money so we can have the best stuff… and so on and so on… those reasons lack *real, true* depth of purpose. And if we fail to spend any time going to God and asking for His assistance, we can be sure that we will fail to make the wisest

decisions concerning how to act next.

Everything we do in life, in school and otherwise, should be for the honor and glory of God. He knows that we have to do things to get by and to succeed in worldly things, but He wants our focus to remain on Him while we're doing it. If we dwell on the fact that all of our schoolwork and decisions we have to make along the way can glorify God, it will change our focus and the *reasons* for which we do everything. Furthermore, if we seek God's guidance as students, in where we attend college, and in choosing our careers, He will guide us and bless our efforts.

It's worth our time to consider that some (or all) of the work we do in school may at some point be used in a real, tangible way to serve God. A good writer could someday write devotional books, a good mathematician could someday be a church treasurer, a good musician could someday write hymns or provide music for their congregation's services – there are many possibilities. And all things are possible with God!

CONCLUSION

True wisdom comes from God and the only foundation upon which to build that wisdom is salvation. Finding that salvation and living a life of servitude is borne of a healthy fear of the Lord. Without that fear, we could never make a wise decision. Without the knowledge that we might be held accountable or even chastised for the things we do, we would wander around in the folly of our own minds. Using our minds is not inherently wrong, but it is a dangerous thing to gain wisdom only for the sake of being wise or for the purpose of furthering ourselves in this world. However, God can use the wisdom we do gain to His purpose and bless us in the process.

Seek after wisdom as a means to serve and glorify God and you will be blessed.

LESSON FOUR

FREEDOM

LESSON TEXT
John 8:32-36

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

INTRODUCTION

There is probably none of us who are fully aware of the freedoms we enjoy every minute of every day that we live. We are blessed with many privileges that our forefathers never knew. It's easy for us to lose sight of this blessing and to feel that it is simply our right to do as we please, but we must always remember that freedom is only attained through sacrifice of some sort. Acts 17:28 says, "*For in [the Lord] we live, and move, and have our being…*" Our freedoms come first and foremost from God and it's only through Him that we're able to do anything, spiritual or otherwise. In this lesson we're going to look at four kinds of freedom with which God has blessed us: national, personal, religious, and spiritual.

NATIONAL FREEDOM

How fortunate we are to live in a free nation! What does it mean for a nation to be free? It means many things. Very simply, it means the people of that nation are in control of its government. We are blessed with the privilege of voting on our leaders and government officials, taking our concerns or complaints to our leaders, and even removing those leaders from their positions if they misuse their power. Thanks to our free judicial system, even supposed criminals are given the privilege of a trial and are considered innocent until proven guilty. Another privilege we enjoy is the ability to set up and maintain military forces for our protection.

All of these (and many more) are freedoms that we enjoy as a nation, but we must never forget that they were not just handed to us. Many years ago, wise men sought God's council in setting up our government, and many did so at great personal loss. Some who we now call our founding fathers spent a good portion

of their life away from their families, used their life's savings, and ended up living on borrowed money all for the sake of doing their best to create a government "*of the people, by the people, for the people*" (Abraham Lincoln).

We should never fail to recognize the great responsibility it is to live in a democratic nation. We should be good citizens, follow the law, and most of all pray for our leaders and ask God to bless them with wisdom. We should also be prayerful and seek wisdom from God concerning those for whom we should vote during elections.

Furthermore, we have all learned about the many wars that have been fought to preserve our freedom. The one war that comes to mind, of course, is the American Revolutionary War – the war in which the original American colonies rose up against Great Britain to gain freedom from the rule of British Parliament. In this war and in every war down through history in which America has been involved, many of our young men and women have lost their lives in an attempt to do their part in maintaining our freedoms. Considering the fact that not just a few, but thousands upon thousands of people gave their lives fighting for our national rights, let us always be thankful for the national freedom we enjoy and never take it for granted.

PERSONAL FREEDOM

Personal freedom goes hand in hand with national freedom. If the land we lived in were not free, there would be little hope of having freedom to make choices concerning our own individual lives. Of course, we cannot recognize personal freedom without first recognizing the fact that God endowed mankind with free will – that is the ability to decide for ourselves whether or not we will serve Him as well as make decisions concerning all other aspects of our lives. God leads us and helps us make decisions when we seek His will, but He does not inflict His will upon us.

In corrupt and broken governments, people are sometimes told where to live, where to work, and even what to wear. Sometimes people are denied the privilege of attending school and are never allowed to earn more than a certain amount of wages for the work they do. It's easy to forget that when we're going about our day-to-day routines, that we're taking advantage of very basic but very important personal freedoms.

Even as children, we're allowed more freedoms than some people have in their entire lives. Think about the homes and all the nice things we have. Consider the fact that everyone in this class most likely went shopping and picked out for themselves most of the clothes in their closets. As each of us got dressed to come to this class, we undoubtedly went to our rooms and chose whichever outfit we wanted. Our families got into our cars and drove here without the fear of someone stopping us. We can attend school for as long as we want, obtain whatever degree interests us, and someday apply for jobs wherever we want. These are all basic personal freedoms that are so easily taken for granted.

As was the fact with national freedom, people have died to ensure these freedoms. People have made great sacrifices in their lives and done without many things to ensure that we won't have to do without. Again, these are all things for which we should never fail to be thankful.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Religious freedom is the freedom to practice whichever religion we choose. We must once again recognize God's mercy and providence in giving us free will to choose how we will worship Him or whether we will worship Him at all. Indeed, God even endowed us with the ability to choose to deny Him completely, but He also gave us hearts and minds capable of receiving enormous blessings when we choose to follow Him and seek His will. Religious freedom means that we can choose with which religion to affiliate ourselves. We should pray and ask God to help us learn His ways and to help us find the religion that best holds to those things. The Vacation Bible School literature that you're reading is written and sponsored by Missionary Baptists. We believe that the Missionary Baptist faith follows the biblical example of a church as well as the precepts of Jesus Christ. As children, we are taught and shown what we're supposed to believe. As we get older and after we're saved, however, we can read the Bible and study for ourselves and God will show us the truth or error in what we've been taught.

Religious freedom is also a part of our national freedom. Part of the first amendment to the United States Constitution says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…" In other words, our government cannot rightfully make any rule that in any way concerns religion or that concerns how people practice their religion. One of the reasons people first made the long journey from Great Britain to the United States was because they wanted to be able to worship God without governmental interference. Consider the sacrifices made throughout history because people were unwilling to lose their religious freedoms. Many of our spiritual forefathers lost their lives during the dark ages when Christians were persecuted for their faith. These brave men and women refused to deny the God they loved and lost their lives because of it. Likewise, had the United States refused to protect herself – to send men and women to fight and die – during past wars, other nations might have taken control of our government and removed the religious freedoms we enjoy.

There have been many people throughout history who have been denied access to Bibles and even been watched so closely that they weren't able to pray openly. Let us never take these precious blessings for granted! Thank God for His mercy in extending these freedoms to us for so long!

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Finally we come down to the most important kind of freedom, the kind spoken of in our lesson text: spiritual freedom. In the lesson text, Jesus, speaking to a group of Jews, tells them that the truth will make them free. The group to whom He was speaking was confused: "*We be Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to any man,*" they said, "*how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?*" But Jesus was speaking of a different kind of enslavement. He spoke of the kind of bondage to which we all find ourselves held bondage: "*Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*," was Jesus' answer.

All of us – every single human ever born (except Jesus, of course) – has a sinful nature. No one can escape his sin and even the very "best" person in the world *still* sins. Despite any effort we can make on our own, we are doomed to be sinners. How does our sin imprison us? During life, sin binds us to this Earth. It distorts reality, causes us to live in fear, plagues us with disappointment, and prevents our ever feeling truly fulfilled or joyful. These things are true for anyone, lost or saved. The difference comes, of course, when life is over. At that point, the soul of an unsaved individual will be cast into Hell and be a prisoner to the horrors of sin for eternity.

The next thing that Jesus explains in the lesson text is that the servant, referring to a servant of sin, does not live forever. There is only death and destruction to be found in sin. *BUT* the Son abideth ever! It's only through the blood of Jesus, the Son of God who will live and reign in Heaven forever, that our sins are forgiven. And so we know… ***If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.***

This freedom, like all the others, is only possible through sacrifice: the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus when He died on the cross. Spiritual freedom has a price, but that price has already been paid. We would all have been doomed to die and be cast into Hell – the only justice for our sinful souls – had Jesus not willingly taken our sins upon Himself and died that terrible sin-cursed death so we wouldn't have to. That's how much He loves us. True freedom, indeed the *only real freedom*, lies at the feet of Jesus and that is where all sinners must go to be truly free. At the end of this life, the soul of a saved person will be loosed from the bondage of a sinful body and go to be with Jesus for eternity.

CONCLUSION

There are several kinds of freedom with which we are blessed. We live in a free nation in which we are able to live, learn, work, and worship as we so choose. Many people throughout history have made great sacrifices to ensure the sustainment of these freedoms we enjoy. It's important for us to be always thankful for those sacrifices and never take our freedoms for granted.

Likewise, we should never forget or take for granted that we belong to Jesus and owe Him everything for the death He died on the cross. We could thank Him with every breath from now until we die and it couldn't be enough.

Things could change in our country at any time preventing us from having the freedoms we now enjoy. We could lose every right we have both on national and personal levels. We could, God forbid, lose our freedom to worship. We could be denied the right to attend church or even have a Bible in our homes. But praise God, spiritual freedom can never be taken away! If the Son has set us free, then we are free indeed… and so shall we be throughout eternity!

If you are lost, seek after this wonderful spiritual freedom. God can set you free, never to be bound again by the sin with which you struggle. Likewise, God can free a saved person from the chains of fear, worry, and other similar problems if we will seek His help. If you are saved, seek wisdom, boldness, and bravery to stand up against those who might try to take our freedoms. Pray for our leaders and your fellow countrymen to embrace those same attributes. Strive to be close to God and seek the freedom He provides and you will be blessed.

LESSON FIVE

PEACE & LOVE

LESSON TEXT
1 JOHN 4:10; ROMANS 5:1

WRITTEN BY
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I John 4:10
10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Romans 5:1
1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

INTRODUCTION

We have all heard the expression "to know him is to love him." Such is the case when we know God and have a relationship with Him. When a saved person strives to be close to the Lord, that person cannot help but see His goodness and mercy and providence and to love Him for those things. Likewise, when we are filled with the love of God, it naturally extends to those around us. The love of God helps us love others. Peace is similar in that it is a natural byproduct of salvation and closeness to God. A child of God can exude peace in the same way that he shows forth constant and unconditional love. Peace and love are two attributes that scripture refers to as "fruits of the spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). In other words, true peace and love exist in humans only through the presence of God's spirit. In this final lesson, we will discuss the true peace and love we receive from God as well as the peace and love we can share with everyone around us.

PEACE THAT PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING

We are fortunate to live in a fairly peaceful period of time. Many people have not been so blessed and have had to endure wars and general uneasiness. Most of us live in safe areas where we don't feel as if we have to be fearful. Thank God that He continues to provide us with a peaceful nation that isn't plagued with civil war. We should never take for granted the peace we enjoy.

It is possible, however, despite the peaceful conditions in which we live, to lack a feeling of peacefulness. This is because true peace does not come from outside conditions. True peace springs forth from within the heart of a saved person. When a person realizes that they are separated from God, their soul – the very essence of themselves – is at odds with God. As a person continues in sin, there is a war within them as God draws them toward Him and the person's sinful nature urges them to run from the pain and guilt of their sin. When a person is saved, however, that conflict suddenly ends and they reach a state of inner peace. A stillness settles upon their soul and there is no longer a feeling of struggle as they have been justified by faith and have found peace with God, as the lesson text says.

A child of God has access to that feeling of peace for the rest of their lives. Even in times of trouble, times of grief, times of hurt and fear… a child of God can be at peace. Consider Job and the trials he faced. He lost everything – his home, his family, and all his possessions – and scripture says that he was very grieved. Despite his pain, though, he was able to say, "…*the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*," (Job 1:21). Even in the worst of times, Job was able to find peace and bless the Lord. This is something that the world cannot understand. We have "*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding*" (Philippians 4:7). It is our natural inclination as humans to try to blame someone when something bad happens, but when we're saved, we can recognize God's providence in all things, knowing that "*all things work together for good to them that love God*" (Romans 8:28).

There is only one source for this deep-seated inner peace. It's unfortunate that many people search for feelings of peace and fulfillment in places where it's impossible to find anything but more hurt and disappointment. True peace comes with being saved and living a life that is pleasing in God's sight. It's only through His mercy that sinful humans are able to have such peace.

NO GREATER LOVE

Because we were created in the image of God, humans are blessed with an innate capability to love. We naturally feel affection for those to whom we're closest. A child loves his parents, siblings, grandparents, and others because he is designed to feel love for family members. Parents love their children because they were designed to love and care for their offspring. Similarly, God designed humans to choose a spouse based on their personalities and preferences and we love the person we choose based upon our common bonds. These familial and affectionate types of love are great blessings for which we should be very thankful (and we'll discuss them more fully in the next section). But there is a greater love.

"*God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*," (Romans 5:8).

"*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*," (John 3:16).

Our all-powerful God sent His only Son to die so we wouldn't have to. Furthermore, God knew before He had even created mankind that His Son would someday die in their place. God knew that we would be disobedient and disrespectful. He knew that Jesus would suffer terrible pain and humiliation; yet He loved us so much that He set up that plan anyway. *While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*. Indeed, before

we had *even lived* to commit any sin Christ's death was planned *for* us that through Him we might have eternal life.

Our carnally limited minds cannot comprehend the completeness of God's love toward us. God's love is perfectly holy, perfectly selfless, perfectly unconditional. He loves mankind because we are His creation. He loves His children because we belong to Him and are joint heirs with Christ; because when He looks upon us, He sees first and foremost the blood of His beloved Son.

BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US

The love of God is so great that, when we are saved, it spills over and gives us a whole new capacity for giving and receiving love. Before salvation, we are simply not capable of receiving the love of God; we don't have the right "receptors." Through salvation, though, God creates in us a new heart with which we can feel after Him and are able to love others more like He does.

The previously mentioned types of love reach greater depths for a saved person. A newly saved person gains a new kind of relationship with his family members who are also saved. Likewise, the love between a saved husband and wife goes far beyond affection. The marriage relationship is special in that God designed it to be symbolic of the relationship between Christ and the church. God can use all of our relationships with other saved people to His honor and our benefit.

If we will try to always remember that we are bought with a price, that God loved us so much that He sent us a Savior, that Christ *died for us*… it will change our outlook on everything. We are capable of having a godly love for everyone we encounter, even those who are unkind to us. Indeed, we are *commanded* to love. John 13:34 says, "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*"

Because He first loved us, we are able to love. Because He first loved us, we are commanded to love. As the lesson text from 1 John says, it is not of us – *not that we loved God* – but of God – *that he loved us*. Love springs forth from within us because He dwells there and *He is love*.

"*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*," (1 John 4:16)

CONCLUSION

The peace and love of God that comes with salvation is like nothing that can be found in this world, no matter how we might search. Many people look for fillers for these empty spots and can find only disappointment and ruin. True fulfillment and joy has only one source. True peace and love has a therapeutic effect on the lives of saved people when we walk close to God and seek His guidance. It strengthens our relationships, calms our lives, lightens our hardships, and helps us to live joyfully.

Unsaved people cannot fully understand the peace we find even in times of great distress; nor can they understand how we could possibly love everyone, including people who mistreat us. Godly peace and love are indeed beyond our human understanding because they are fruits of the spirit – there is no way we could accomplish true peace and love without God's providence and assistance.

Seek peace and love. Whether you are saved or lost, seek these things in your life. If you are lost, let the Lord draw you and don't run away from Him. He will give you the faith you lack, bless you with that stillness in your soul, and fill you with His love. If you are saved, draw near to the Lord and ask Him to help you to exercise and show forth the peace and love that dwells within you. Live your life feeling after God, the only source of true peace and love, and you will be blessed.