

“Rewarder of Them that Diligently Seek Him”

By Chris Ulrich

Sunday, January 7th, 2018

Amen. Good to see everybody this morning. You may be seated. Anybody here sick of the cold? I was out at Jewel yesterday, out there in Gurnee, talking to a guy, and just come to find out that we broke a record for the most consecutive days that the temperature did not go above twenty. So, I think, out there, right now, I think it just hit twenty, so praise God! Praise God!

So, happy New Year! As Andy had mentioned, and Parrish had mentioned, we've got a theme for the month. The theme of the month is to learn of me. It comes directly from The Book of Matthew, chapter eleven, verses twenty-eight to thirty, which says:

Matthew 11:28-30 *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

I would like to ask right now, if Pete, he's going to play a clip out of a movie, it's a short clip, and, I appreciate his efforts on that. I'm going to ask Greg if he could dim the lights here in a moment.



Lights, please. I'd like to ask if you could bow your heads in a word of prayer, please. God, we just thank you, God, you brought us through another year. And, we thank you, God, for what you've given us, and, sometimes it may not appear to be as flashy, or as things that we always want, God, but

you provide our needs, God. You give us our needs in due time, Lord, God, and, we ask right now, God, that you would bless this time, Lord God, that you would bless the message, God, that you would bless the messenger, God; that you would bless all of us here, God, that we would have ears to hear, and eyes to see, Lord, God, and understand what you would have for us to do, Lord, God. We just thank you God for what you've given us, and we ask these things in your name, Jesus. Amen.

So, I know that wasn't as flashy as the one Kirk had shown a couple of weeks ago, with the Wonder Woman, and the shooting, and blowing up, and all that kind of thing, but... I appreciate that, because it shows that if you look at the people of nations and kind of a long journey, and it shows the struggle, but the thing that really gets me, is they look at the Statue of Liberty and they see that hope. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..." And, I imagine a lot of us have read that, or heard that, that famous declaration where, whether we've been to Ellis Island or not. That's the beginning of the inscription is written on the plaque that's at the base of the Statue of Liberty. It's been a Beacon of Hope to millions of immigrants that have come to this country over the course of generations.

So, what's it mean, and what's it look like, to go to God? Do we go to God as a first option, as a last resort, or somewhere in between? Do we go to God when we're legal, or financial trouble, or experiencing a health concern? What about when we feel like we're worn out, or just burdened down with life in general? What about when life is going well? What about when things are going smoothly, and everything seems to be going our way? What does any of that have to do with the Statue of Liberty? I'm going to ask you to turn with me to the book of Hebrews, chapter eleven, verses one through six. That's the faith chapter. A lot of us have read it before. Some may not know what it is, but, it says:

Hebrews 11:1-6 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Part 1: Going To God

And, I know it comes from the passage that we read earlier, from Matthew, eleven, where Christ said, come unto me, all ye that are labor and heavy laden. But, because it's Christ words, and it's Christ speaking, I chose to call this going to God, because if I say, come to me, it might get misinterpreted. I don't think it will, but, I would rather say, go to God. But, however we decide, or whenever we decide, we need the Lord, and I would suggest the sooner, rather than the later, we need to believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and we need to seek Him wholeheartedly. We can't just do it with strings attached, or we can't just do it when we're going through problems, or if God does deliver—and God will deliver—then forget about it a week later, a month later, a year later, twenty years later for that matter. We've got to remember that that Deliverance did happen; we've got to remember that God changed our life for the better. So, some might ask, "What does that mean to just believe that He is, or am I just supposed to take that at face value, like, okay, I just believe that He is? What's that even mean?" We have to take a step back, and understand, we have to have faith. What does it mean to have faith? We have to look back at Hebrews eleven, one. And, we also have to consider

that from the book of 2nd Thessalonians 3:2, it tells us that not all people have faith. Not everybody wants to go to God. I mean, we live in a world full of people and, far more than not, just don't seem to really have any interest whatsoever. So, where does that put the rest of us? Stand our ground. It's not as though we look at it in an envious way, or in a compromising way to what God has given us. We have to understand that, I know what God did for my life. I think about that passage in John, chapter nine, I'm not going to go to it, and I suspect a lot of us, too, where it talks about the blind man that Christ healed. And, the interesting point is that people speculated, they said, well, who did send? Him or his parents, that he was born blind? And, Christ said, neither, but that the works of God might be made manifest. And, then, I think about where it talks about people challenged him, or questioned him, or second-guessed it, or said, no, this didn't really happen, or who really knows? And, his parents, of the man that was born blind, said, "Well, go ask him, he's of age." And, the man, after them grilling him, and questioning him, and second-guessing him, and here's something that's remarkable, just a miracle for the ages, and they're sitting there acting like, "No, we don't want this to have happened, because, we don't like the guy that perform the miracle." That's really what it came down to. But, we have to look at it like what that man said was, "All I know is I was born blind, but now I see. Whether He's a sinner or not, or whether He's the biggest jerk on the face of the Earth, or whether you like Him or not, it doesn't matter to me. It has to matter to this miracle: I was born blind and now I see. Can't you just be happy for me?" And, yet, sometimes people just, "No, no, no, we want to prove, we want to figure it out, we want to study it, and analyze it, and overthink it, and try to come up with a different analysis as to what could have happened, and how this could have happened." Who cares? It's a miracle, that's all we really need to know.

Again, some might go to God, just as a result of a major personal crisis. And, that's not to be critical of them, if that's the case. Because, whether you're facing a crisis on the outside, whether it's legal, or health, or financial, or family crisis,—I appreciate what Arman, I know Arman is in the classroom, but what he shared, and the connection that was made, being able to deal with a family problem or issue—all of us are going to come to an understanding, we're going to come to a point in time where God is going to deal with us. But, if we dismiss the ways of the Lord before we're ever even born again, we short change ourselves. If we stop before we get to that point where the Word of God teaches us this is what we must do for our eyes to be opened, we're short changing ourselves. We're not hurting God. Although, God is looking at it like, "I want to see people do well. I want to see them prosper. I want to see them live a holy life, and a thankful life. And, it's not like God trying to boss us around, or being there like, trying to control our lives; He gives us choices, He gives us options. And, it's a matter of looking back and thinking, "I'm thankful for those choices; I'm thankful for those options." But, I've seen God bless my life, and, I know, a lot of us—I'd say every one of us in this room—have seen that too, over and over and over again, to where it's proven to us that it works. It does work. But, I suppose that God deals with us in a unique way that is specific to you, that's specific to me, to get our attention. In Titus 2:11, it teaches us that the Grace of God that brings Salvation hath appeared to all people. Nobody's going to be able to stand at judgment and plead ignorance, or act like, "No, no, God never told me." We're all standing there, and this is future tense, but, it's a matter of wanting to know now. It's a matter of trying to understand, well, what does it take? What is it that God is really wanting for my life? And, you'd be surprised how much God gives us than what He expects in return. Yeah, God does expect something from us. But, going back, and I know I'm jumping ahead a little bit, He said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." It's not as though He said, if He were to say, "It's kind of hard, and it's really pretty difficult, and you may not know what you're getting yourself into," if eternal life was at stake, I'd venture to say, there's still people that would say, okay, I'm willing to do it. Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." (Job 13:15) That's a pretty bold declaration; that's a pretty strong stance. But, here's Christ saying, and don't get me wrong—I'm not saying, "Oh, yeah, it's going to be a piece of cake."—He's talking about spiritual things. There will be some battles, we're going to talk about

some of that. But how many remembers the first time that God dealt with you in a way that was personal to you? I know that, for me, I have a lot of good memories of that experience. And, I would hope that all of us do, but I can't speak for everybody. But, I know that, personally, the recollections that I have personally are memorable, and absolutely unforgettable. And, it was something that I knew existed, spiritually speaking, that there is a truth out there, and it's not —what is that? The X-Files? “The truth is out there.” Or something like that. That's an older show that they're now resurrecting, like they're starting to resurrect all these older shows. But, I think—is that correct? The tagline for The X-Files, it was, “The truth is out there?” Okay. I'm just making sure.

So, what does going to God have to do with the Statue of Liberty? It might seem like kind of an odd comparison, but, going to God is all about hope and a rest from our labors and starting over. If we are right in the eyes of God, then we're going to be laboring. That's it, plain and simple. And, that means work, and that means effort. It's true; it's not all about work. And, being saved by Grace is not something that I'm leaving out of the equation. I'm going to ask Abbey Avellino if she could come up. She's going to read for us from the Book of 2nd Corinthians, six, one to seven. And, yes, being saved by Grace, it's not all about work. But, we can't be serious if we think then we can just sit around with her hands folded, and that's going to be pleasing to the Lord. By the way, Abbey, welcome back from Florida. She was down there, her and Ken, and she was posting oh, it's 80 degrees, it's 85 degrees. And, then, you got a cold front, right? Welcome back.

2 Corinthians 6:1-7 *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,*

Thanks, Abby. So, we look at where it talks about in stripes, imprisonments, tumults, labors, and watchings, and fastings. And, if you mishear this, or misread it, or misunderstand to where, “Oh, I thought you said the Christ said, ‘It’s going to be, My yoke is going to be easy, and My burden is light,’ and yet, you're saying here, ‘Oh, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watchings, fastings...’” because, what Christ was talking about is spiritual, and it's a matter of looking at it, and having a good discernment, and having an understanding that it's not as though, all of our life, every single second of everyday, like even as Andy had mentioned, when he had talked about this place, this building —and I want to touch on that in a moment here. it's not flashy, it's not, you know, it's okay, kind of dull colored and... I mean, we get it. But, if I'm not thankful for what we've got, if I'm not thankful—if we're not thankful for what God has given us, are we really expecting to take it to the next step? I know that the place that I live, when I first moved in there, probably eight years ago, I felt like it really needed some work, it needed flooring, and cabinets, and carpet, and just a whole bunch of stuff, a long list of—a laundry list as they say—of upgrades, and it took about eight years to get it to where, it really feel like, this is the way I like it. And, there's other things, because it's a four-unit apartment building; it didn't just happen instantly, or overnight. But, it's a matter of looking at it like, okay, those labors have paid off; the persistence, and the time, and the patience, and praying to God. And, here's my point: if I looked at it back in the day, and said, “I hate it! I absolutely hate this!” Then it would be like, okay... Well, there's things that are going to come along in life where we may not like, but to be thankful for. We may not always like it, but to be thankful for it doesn't mean, we give up, or we quit, or we just think, “Okay...” You might not even like it at all. You may not like the job you've got, you may not like the car you drive come, you may not

like a lot of things about your life, but are you thankful to know God? That's ultimately what it's going to come down to.

And, there was a song that was quite popular years ago; it became kind of an anthem for a generation of people. The title of the song was, "Give Peace a Chance." It was written as kind of a culmination of searching for answers and, relatively popular, as far as the guy that wrote it. And, it was searching for answers in many segments of society, whether it's in politics, or whether it's in Divinity, or whether it's in philanthropy, or whether it's just in human relations, or race relations, or whatever way you'd want to look at it, and, it was inspiring, and ultimately, a good message, but it's an incomplete message. Parrish touched on something last week, and, now that it's officially the New Year, I can say, that it was a long time ago that Parrish mentioned this. Even though it was only last week, it was way back in 2017, Parrish mention this, he said—and he's a man of humility, and it's not as though he said it thinking, "I'm the first one that ever said this. I want to take credit." Because that's not it at all — but, he said, "Give God a chance." And, when he mentioned that, I really have to say, it sank down deep, and it brought back a lot of those memories of my life, and things that I know God's blessed my life in, in so many facets, in so many ways, that sometimes it's hard to even keep track. And, I'm not going to sit here and say, "Oh, I haven't had some hardships," but, ultimately, we have to look at it like, "What are the other options? What other way would I want to live?" And, I have to say that I'm thankful to know God, and know what it means to be born again, to be baptized in Jesus name, and, yeah, give peace a chance is a great thought, it's a great concept, it's a great idea, but it doesn't hold a candle to the one who's the giver of peace, and not just the giver of peace, but a whole lot of other things as well. And, He's a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and that just so happens to be the title of the sermon today.

And, you know, I touched on this just briefly, here, earlier, and Andy did kind of allude to it, but God laid on my heart: about don't equate going to God with coming to this place, or just going to a Sunday morning service. Don't equate your walk with God as just, this is it. This is a highlight, this is an important part of our life in God, but it's by no means, even close to, this is our walk with God: "I go to church on Sunday morning and that's it. The rest of the week, I don't seek out any Fellowship, I don't seek to read the Bible, I'm not seeking to do any visitation, I'm not interested in connecting with anybody else, I'll live however, act however, do whatever, and think that's going to be okay with God." Because, if this was it, if this is our walk with God right here, it's okay, it's good, it's pretty good, it's good to see people, I think, more than anything, it's really good to be connecting with people, and in fellowship with people, and people that have a like-mindedness about Christianity, and are serious about the Gospel. But, we all live in different places, so we go our separate ways, we work at different places, we have different families, and there are so many other connections and so many other interactions that we have with different people and different parts of society, that this isn't it. This is not it. Because, if this was the ultimate, it would be a letdown. It would be, "Uh, it's not that great. You're telling me that that's the..." But, I'll tell you this much, if this was the absolute, most beautiful place, and you could just pick one, I mean, I like the Southwest, so let's just say we're in Sedona, Arizona, and we were all like, "Wow! This is a great. Look at those rock formations, and the Grand Canyon is close by and those mountains are so beautiful. And, our Focus was just on what we were seeing, and not on each other, it wouldn't be long before, if something happened, and then we had to stake a step down, like, let's just say we had to go to, say, an old, renovated, building. It would be like, Wow! Remember how nice it was, up in Sedona? Remember how nice it was an Aspen Colorado, when we were there? Yeah, yeah, God must not be listening to us. God must not be still with us, because, we've really had to, we've really had to be humbled down. We've really had to go down, I don't know, I don't know if this is worth sticking around. It's not like that. That's not the case. God is still with us.

Part 2: Labor to Enter Into That Rest.

For those of us who trust in God, but still fight battles—which is everybody—it pays to remember what it felt like not to have peace in our life. It pays to remember what it felt like to be tossed to and fro with every wind of Doctrine, not having stability in any of it. To remember what it felt like to not know where you stood with God, come Judgement Day, which we all knew, deep down inside, that's coming. It is coming; I don't care how much, articles on the internet say, "Oh, well, we found that it's really not a judgement." I don't care. I mean, that's, ultimately, some of these things aren't even close to moving us. And, really there, really, ultimately, shouldn't be anything that moves us, either. But, it just seems like there's so many naysayers, and second guessers and questions about, "I don't know. Oh, I don't go to church. I haven't been to church in twenty years, thirty years, forty years." Okay, give God a chance. Give God a chance. Don't just go somewhere that's just random, or, "Oh, I don't know, I'll just go somewhere just because it's close to my house." Seek God, pray to God, read the Bible, ask people questions. God's going to bring us, God's going to show us. The Grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared to everybody. So, nobody's off the hook.

I'm going to ask if you could turn with me to the Book of Hebrews, three, verses fifteen through nineteen. And, before we read it, I just want to say that this Scripture is a little bit harsh. Because, it ends on a note that isn't favorable for what our end goal is.

Hebrews 3:15-19 *while it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And, to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? [Highlight verse 19] So, we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

It just got to a point where, "Ah, it can't be that real. Too many people say it's not, too many people are living contrary to what the Word of God teaches. And, it doesn't matter what those influences are, but there are a plenty. They are a plenty. And, I'll tell you that a passage of Scripture like that, is not the type that I like to read on a Sunday morning, or at all for that matter. Why? Because it's convicting to me, and I'm sure to everyone else. But, it's a good thing if it keeps us on the path of righteousness, because God chastens who He loves. He's not trying to do it just to knock us around, or mistreat us. If anything, God's going to treat us better than anybody could ever possibly treat us, ever. Do you believe that? So, the good thing about this passage that we just read, it's not the end of the story. It's not even the end of the story for the Book of Hebrews. It's just the end of that chapter.

So, I'll ask Ed Howes, if he could come up and read. This is going to be from the book of Hebrews, chapter four, which is the very next chapter, verses one through nine. Go ahead, please.

Hebrews 4:1-9 *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And, God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And, in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Thanks, Ed. The Bible says that we need to work while it is day, for the night comes when no man can work. It describes our walk with God as a race. It tells us we're going to have to endure hardness as a good soldier. It tells us we're going to have to die daily, and that we need to fight the good fight of faith. It tells us in the Old Testament that Satan is going to try to wear out the patience of the Saints of the Most High. And, it's not an easy road, but it's a rewarding road. And, again, we're going back to the theme: "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, My yoke is easy and My burden is light." So, I'd ask you just not to mishear that, and think, "Well, He's giving us mixed signals. He's telling us it's going to be easy, and then He's telling us it's going to be hard." That's not it. Because, if we interpret it that way, then we've already lost, or we've already given up, or we've already speculated that, "I don't want to live that life." That's not the kind of message that I would want to give. That's not the kind of message that God wants us to hear. God does want us to have people that love Him, and serve Him, and love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. No, it's not an easy road, but it is a rewarding road. It's not always fun, but I'd say there's more joy in God than anything else I've ever experienced. I would venture to say a lot of people in this room, too. And, it's not as though we all would get things exactly the way we like them, when we like them, and it's immediate gratification, because that's not the case. But I like, and I don't know if you can hear, I know that, when we watched that clip earlier, it was a little difficult, I appreciate Pete's efforts, because he's been very flexible this morning. But, you know, in that clip, just towards the end, and, again, I know, maybe, you couldn't hear it that well, but we certainly did the best we could, that little kid, as he's looking out, and he's looking at the Statue of Liberty, he start singing. And, I mean, that touches my heart, it just does, because I know it's a movie, but you know what? It's a very accurately representative of the way things are, the way things were, as far as people coming here and seeing that hope. It's a Beacon of Hope. And, God is like that. And, you know, we may not have come to America through Ellis Island, or across the border from the South or the North, we may not have crossed the ocean with a goal of finding refuge in America. Maybe you were born right here in this country, I would speculate that's probably most of us. But, can we embrace that same hope, that many of those that came here in search for a better place, and a new lease on life, and a chance to start over? Because, that's what it means in God. When He says to learn of Me, that's stark and there remains therefore a rest to the people of God.

Thank you very much and God bless.