

Relying on Rescue

How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you (Psalm 31:19).

Scripture: Psalm 31:1-5, 19-24

Song: “I Cry Out”

In 2017, parts of southeastern Texas saw extensive flooding in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. A woman in a Houston neighborhood found herself trapped in her apartment as she went into labor. Rising to the occasion, neighbors banded together. Some gathered supplies for an at-home delivery, while others sought help from their outside contacts. They eventually formed a human chain in the floodwaters to help guide the woman into a dump truck that had managed to make its way into their community. From there she was transported to the hospital, where she safely delivered a baby girl.

Even neighbors who are not typically close will often come together to help each other in desperate times. How much more is the Lord ready to help His children in their time of need? He has especially promised to be their refuge when others actively seek to harm them.

We do not always know how God might answer our cries for help, but we do know that He hears us. He stores up goodness for us and is always ready to pour it out. As a result, His people experience deliverance, and He receives glory as we respond in worship.

Father, thank You for the promises You have given to me as Your child. You never leave me, and I know that You hear my cries for help. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Persevering Faith

“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you” (Mark 10:52).

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

Song: “Look to Jesus”

As a news reporter, it's important for me to interview the best sources for each story I write. Only certain people can provide the answers I need. I get information from the person in charge and gather first-person accounts, meanwhile taking hearsay accounts only with a grain of salt. In the past when I've been called to respond to house fires or car accidents, I've had to push through crowds and around obstacles to find the fire chief or police officer in charge. They were the ones with the facts that I needed to report the story accurately.

In today's passage, Bartimaeus knew what he needed to do too. He was blind, and he wanted to see. The only one he knew who could open His eyes was Jesus. He did not turn to anyone else. Despite those in the crowd who tried to keep him quiet, he repeatedly cried out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus responded to this man's great faith and healed him.

We often seek places, people, and things we think will solve our problems or give us the answers we want. However, Jesus is the only source of truth, strength, and healing. He said His grace is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9), and He is ready to give it. If we turn to Him with all our hearts, we will find our answers.

Father, help me to be as sure and as determined as Bartimaeus, knowing that my deepest needs can only be met in Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Unshakeable Fortress

The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one (Psalm 28:8).

Scripture: Psalm 28

Song: “We Won’t Be Shaken”

The Genbaku Dome in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park is one of the city’s most famous ruins from World War II. It was the only building in that area still standing after the first atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945. Since then, efforts have been made to preserve the building, including reinforcing its remaining structure to prevent collapse from earthquakes. Today, it stands as a memorial to the fateful day that leveled the city and resulted in 140,000 casualties. It stands as a reminder of the need for peace.

Throughout human history, wars have been a reality in this sin-marred world. Nation has risen against nation to exert power or gain control. In the midst of this chaos, God is still sovereign and is still the only one who is able to administer righteous judgment. Under His rule—especially in the fullness of His coming kingdom—the wicked and their schemes are torn down.

But all who realize there is no hope for peace, strength, or safety apart from the Lord can run to Him. He is our fortress, no matter what threats we face in this life. All who put their trust in Him will ultimately stand in His presence, rejoicing.

Father, I rejoice in knowing that You are my strength and refuge in a world that is often scary and uncertain. Thank You for being my safe place, my unshakable fortress. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Released from Our Burden

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you (Acts 15:28).

Scripture: Acts 15:22-35

Song: “Once for All”

My parents received a disconcerting phone call recently. The caller convinced them that she was my sister. The troubled voice reported that she'd been in a terrible accident. She was injured, but she had also injured someone else. She'd been arrested and needed money for bail. After hanging up, my parents decided to call my sister's husband to get more information. That's when they discovered the call was a scam, an attempt to extort money. Imagine my parents' relief at discovering that not only was my sister safe but also that they had not fallen prey to the scammer.

In today's passage, the early Church was dealing with a false report as well. Certain Jewish believers were disturbing the Gentile converts, telling them they had to submit fully to the Law of Moses. Church leaders in Jerusalem, however, sent a letter to these Gentiles assuring them that, other than a few essential observances, they were not to be burdened by the requirements of the old covenant.

Hebrews 8:13 tells us that the new covenant in Christ has made the old covenant obsolete. The Lord's ultimate purpose has always been to give us freedom and rest (Matthew 11:28-30). He does not require us to earn our salvation through works. We never could. Rather, through His grace we find release from sin, strength to obey, and peace within.

Father, thank You for lifting the burden of the law so I can live in the joy of Your salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Tangible Faith

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

Scripture: Micah 6:1-8

Song: “To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice”

It was Dr. Nelson Bell’s (1894–1973) faith in Christ that led him to China in 1916. Surrounded by spiritual darkness and political turmoil, his work there at a mission hospital was not easy. But Bell knew the transforming power of the gospel, and for years he served the people’s medical and spiritual needs. He modeled the fruit of the Spirit so that others would see Christ’s love in action and desire to know Him. Bell also left a lasting impression on his own family, including his daughter Ruth Bell Graham (1920–2007), who married the late Billy Graham in 1943.

The Israelites of Micah’s day had turned the law of God into a mere list of outward requirements. Meanwhile, they oppressed one another and worshipped idols. They had lost sight of what God required of them. Their sacrifices meant nothing if they were not daily living and demonstrating His justice and mercy.

The Lord is not satisfied with just our outward actions of piety. We can go to church, give to the poor, and volunteer for a good cause, but our hearts are what matter most. He has shown us what is good and what He requires: hearts that put Him first and serve out of love and thankfulness. When we serve with right hearts, we will reflect His love and mercy to the world.

Father, continually teach me to live according to what matters most to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Judging the Heart

God does not show favoritism (Galatians 2:6).

Scripture: Galatians 2:1-10

Song: “The Ground Is Level at the Foot of the Cross”

A man living in a small town in central Pennsylvania was considered by many to be somewhat eccentric. He was tight with his money, often riding his bicycle around town, wearing his clothes until they were in rags, and keeping his thermostat at 45 degrees so he did not have to pay for heat. When he passed away at age 95, no one expected what followed. His will bequeathed hundreds of thousands of dollars to various beneficiaries: his alma mater, several friends, and the borough he lived in. Today, the local library, which has benefitted from the funds, is named after him.

It's tempting to judge someone by their outward appearance. Some Jews in the early Church did this. They mistakenly believed that to be a part of the new body of believers, everyone—including the Gentile converts—had to follow the laws of the old covenant. This consisted of many outward rituals. Some among them exaggerated their own importance based on their strict adherence to this law.

However, the gospel—God's new covenant through Christ—is equally available to all people. It does not matter how the world might view us, whether we are rich or poor, revered or unknown. Every heart that trusts in and calls upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation will receive it.

Father, thank You that my salvation does not depend on outward appearance or outward achievements but on the level ground at the foot of the cross. In Jesus' name, amen.

Perfect Grace

[Paul said,] “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:21).

Scripture: Galatians 2:11-21

Song: “Grace Greater than Our Sin”

In 18th-century Oxford, England, John Wesley helped start a group called the “Holy Club.” For much of his life, Wesley struggled with the need to be perfect in his faith. While ministering in the American colonies, however, he met a group of Christians who encouraged him to have simple faith and to rest in God’s grace by faith. Wesley went on to start a movement of passionately preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to the masses.

We all have been born with a sinful nature, and it is impossible to achieve sinless perfection. We should seek to lead lives that honor and obey God. This, however, is less about our efforts and more about looking to and leaning on Christ. By His Holy Spirit, He gives us understanding of God’s truth and grants us strength to stand against temptation and do what is right.

When we mess up, it is an opportunity to remember that we do fall short of God’s standards on our own, that we are still affected by sin. However, our failings should also cause us to find comfort in the truth that our hope is in Christ alone. He defeated death and the power of sin, and one day, in eternity, He will give us an incorruptible dwelling (1 Corinthians 15:53).

Father, thank You for sending Jesus, that through His death and resurrection I can be made right with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.