

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen. Heavenly Father, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts will be alive with the Holy Spirit and acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Reality television seems to grip our lives. Millions watch with interest as contestant after contestant is voted off of dancing with the stars, Big Brother, The Bachelor, the Bachelorette, America's got talent, The voice, and the seemingly endlessly running Survivor. If truth be known, I don't watch any of them. In my younger years though, I did watch Robin Leach as he hosted "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." It was hard for me as a young boy growing up in a lower middle class family in Moorhead Minnesota to comprehend the lavish ways of the Rich and famous. The wealthy people on Television had closets that were bigger than my house. They had more clothes than the Herbst department store. They owned more tools than Coast to Coast hardware, Gambles, and Scheels combined. And yet they were just people on the same journey through life that I was on, that we are all on. Today's scripture texts introduce us to a reality show that has been with us long before the survivor, long before Life styles of the Rich and famous. In today's scripture we see the journey that is life style of the saved and Righteous. This week's show is hosted by a paragon of virtue, Mr. Samuel Paul Luke.

Our reality show begins in the book of Samuel where we are introduced to Elkanah and his wife Hannah. If you remember the story, Elkanah and Hannah were unable to have children together. Hannah prayed and bargained with God. She prayed that if God would grant them a son, she would give the son back to God as his servant. God gave them a son. They named him Samuel and when he was old enough they gave Samuel to God. They brought Samuel to the temple to be raised by the Priest Eli. It was Eli's task to raise Samuel in the ways of the saved and righteous. But even though they had given Samuel to God, Elkanah and Hannah continued to be a part of Samuel's life. Each year Elkanah and Hannah contributed to Samuel's education and he continued to grow in stature in the eyes of the Lord. As you know, Samuel went on to anoint the first two kings of Israel. Samuel was God's representative here on earth. From his very birth, Samuel lived the life of the saved and Righteous in part because his parents dedicated him to God. And yet, for all his virtues, Samuel was not a winner on the Saved and Righteous.

From Samuel our journey takes us to Paul and his letter to the Colossians. In this Epistle, Paul tells us what the Saved and Righteous put on when they go out on the town. The truth is that the saved and righteous don't go anywhere in just anything. No, they dress themselves in finery that is unparalleled throughout creation. On the outside the saved and righteous are clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. On the inside they are filled with tolerance, forgiveness, thankfulness, gratitude, wisdom, and song. The inside and the outside are coordinated together, Paul tells us bound together, in perfect harmony by the peace of Christ and the love that is in our hearts. Paul was a powerful Christian, full of the Good news of Christ and yet for all his positive merits, Paul could not win on the Saved and Righteous.

The final piece in the Lifestyle of the saved and righteous is provided by St. Luke in today's gospel. The Lifestyle of the saved and righteous is personified in Jesus Christ. Here we meet him as a boy of 12. This is our only glimpse into his childhood. We find Jesus in the temple, church. He has been brought to this place by his earthly father and mother who are demonstrating the lifestyle of the saved and Righteous. Our text tells us that this was an annual trip. They brought Jesus to God's house on a continuing basis. Mary and Joseph showed their human side by forgetting to count noses before they pulled out of the rest stop, returning to Nazareth. After they realized Jesus was missing and returned to Jerusalem they found Jesus not just practicing but living the lifestyle of the saved and righteous. Jesus was surrounded by God's adult children. As Jesus taught and questioned, he demonstrated that as was said about Samuel in our Old Testament text, Jesus was continuing to grow in stature and favor with God and God's people. Jesus knew that he was God's child. He told his mother that He needed to be in his Father's house.

We know from reading the New Testament that throughout his life Jesus continued to live the lifestyle of the Saved and Righteous. We see him baptized by John the Baptist, tempted in the wilderness by the devil himself. We hear Jesus preach a message of love and forgiveness. We see Jesus heal the sick and raise the dead. We encounter Jesus as he chooses and teaches his disciples. We are given the privilege of sharing his conversations with God, even to that agonizing prayer in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prays for the cup to pass from him, but that God's will be done not his. We experience the agony of Jesus' death on the cross

and the exhilaration of his resurrection. Jesus was without sin or blemish and so is the winner on the saved and righteous.

So, what does this mean to us in 2018, soon to be 2019? We are part of the most wonderful exciting reality show. We are intimately involved in lifestyles of the saved and righteous. The bad news is that we don't play the game very well. If this was dancing with the stars we would trip and fall on the first waltz and have to slink off ignominiously. If this was survivor, we would be thrown off of the boat before it ever got to the island. From the moment we take our first breathe on this earth to the moment we die, we are sinners. Try though we may to be good people, living the way God wants us to live, we fail again and again!

Thankfully, even though we know our weaknesses, we do try. God knows that we try. Here at Zion we contribute to a variety of God's missions. We support the food pantry. We fill the stockings of the needy at Christmas. We support our baptismal promises through education. We ship bandages overseas. We make soup for shut-ins. We serve coffee after church. We build houses in Jamaica and travel to other corners of the world. We welcome everyone into our sanctuary. Our list of Christian activities could go on and on! Zion is a bastion of Christian responses.

All of our trying, all of our energies, will not earn us salvation. We can claim that we live comparatively righteous lives but a comparatively righteous life does not equal salvation. And when we compare ourselves to others, we must remember that Christ cautioned us about complaining about the speck in our neighbor's eye and not seeing the log in our own. We need to remember that our sins include not just what we have done, but also what we have failed to do. Our sins include both our thoughts and our deeds. No matter how hard we try we can't earn salvation. For all of his positive attributes, Samuel didn't earn his way to heaven. For all of his spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ, Paul didn't secure his way to heaven. There is nothing that any of us can do to warrant salvation.

The only way to win on the reality show Lifestyles of the Saved and Righteous is through the grace of God our Father who sent his only Son, Jesus the Christ to die for us. Jesus took our sins upon his shoulders. When He died and rose from the dead, he took every black spot from us. He made us pure and Holy. When Jesus

ascended into heaven God sent us the Holy Spirit to give us faith and guide us to our salvation.

Through the grace of God, We are winners on the reality show that is our life. Our outsides are clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Our insides are filled with tolerance, forgiveness, thankfulness, gratitude, wisdom, and song. We are bound to our fellow life travelers in perfect harmony by the peace of Christ and the love that is in our hearts.

As we leave this sanctuary today, let us dance with the stars and raise our voice in praise (as the psalmist did) because Christ our Big brother has utilized his unique talent and made us the survivor and the big winner on Lifestyles of the Saved and Righteous. Our prize is not fame and fortune but eternal life in paradise. Christ died for our sins and rose that we would have new life. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Lord God, we pray that we live our lives as you intend. Help us to keep our values, beliefs and moral senses as reflections of your will. Bless the leaders of our nation and the leaders of all nations. Remind them that their power is temporal and Jesus' power is eternal. Make them aware that it is your world and they are simply caretakers. Guide them to work together for the good of your people. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray that you may bless those elders who have had and continue to have an impact in our lives. Give them comfort and security so that they may continue to share their wisdom with us. Be with them where ever they may be. Keep them alive in your holy spirit. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray today for those in our community with special needs, those who are experiencing an illness, Especially we pray for _____ May they feel your healing power. We pray for all those who mourn the loss of a loved one, especially we pray for the family of _____ - May their friends and family feel the comfort of your loving embrace. We pray for all of the concerns we hold silently in our hearts and pray for all those dear to us that we name now in our hearts. Give them your peace. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We ask that you be mindful of the requests on our prayer wall. Be with those who raise their voices to you throughout the world. Answer our prayers in such a way that we feel your comfort. Lord in your Mercy,

Hear our prayers.

We thank you today for being with us. We thank you for making us whole with your gift of the Holy Spirit and your promise of eternal life. We ask that you keep us on your path, and protect us from those who would lead us astray. Keep us mindful of our failings and our need for grace. Make us humble servants who are dutiful sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, growing daily in faith, washed in the blood of the lamb. Lord continue to make us winners in the reality show Lifestyles of the saved and righteous. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. (Who taught us to pray) Amen.