

Seek the Lord

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[0 : 00] What I will have you to God's blessing, and we turn it back to the portion of Scripture, which we read in Isaiah chapter 55. We can take our text today from verses 6 to 9 of that chapter.

Isaiah 55, verses 6 to 9. Seek ye the Lord when he be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man in his thoughts.

And let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. Well, the prophecy of Isaiah, the context behind it, is quite difficult, and there's quite a lot of things going on in this book.

But to sort of generalize a wee bit, to give us a wee bit of context. When you're reading the book of Isaiah, the first 29 chapters of that book, are really speaking about how Judah, not Israel, this is after Judah and Israel had split away from each other, but the two thrives, which are now called Judah.

[1 : 26] Had they gone against God, God had been so good to them. He brought them into the promised land. He gave them everything that they had desired. He gave them a king. He gave them food.

He gave them prosperity. Where Judah was located, if you were traveling from the south to the north, or the north to the south, you had to go through it. So, there was there lots of opportunity. For the people of Judah to make money, and that's what they did. They prospered in worldly things, much like Scotland has today. And that's not a bad thing in itself. But it's what came along with that prospering.

You see, when they got money, they forgot about God. When they got the things that they'd been looking for in the world, they thought they forgot about the spiritual things. And so, although they kept up the formality of worship in the temple, their hearts weren't breathing in it.

And the Bible that they were reading, they weren't really putting into practice the words which were in it. And so, you found that although there were many rich people in Judah, there were also many poor people.

[2 : 38] And the rich people didn't really seem to care for them. And justice had really gone out of the window. It wasn't a strange thing for a man to bribe a judge in order to win a court case or anything like that.

There was much evil bringing in Judah. And so, because of their evil and because of their allegiances with other worldly, idolatrous nations, God said that the day was coming when Judah would be brought into captivity.

What I mean by that is this. They would be taken out of their land. They would be taken out of their country, Judah. Their country would be destroyed. Their temple would be destroyed. The walls of Jerusalem would be knocked down.

And they would be taken up northwest to Babylon. Basically, they left to be slaves. Just as they were in the Egyptians before Moses took them out. So, what they had been taken out of in Egypt, because of their sin, and because of their unthankfulness to God, they would be put back in Babylon.

Just because they were in the way. And perhaps even worse than they were in Egypt. And yet, when you read in much of the prophecy of Isaiah, especially from, say for example, chapters 14, chapter 55, 56, you read here of the mercy of God towards that people.

[4 : 04] You read of his grace, how he's provided a saviour, a saviour who we read of so clearly in these chapters. Especially in chapter 53, one who was to be sent to save these people, to bring them back out of Babylon, and into their own land again.

And he was telling them really that, although your land has been burnt up, and although there remains nothing in it, they are going to make it a fruitful land again.

If you but believe. And so he tells them about this saviour in chapter 53, and in chapter 54, he tells of the blessings that will come from this saviour.

And here in chapter 55, we have the great offer to partake of these blessings. And so at the beginning of this chapter, we read, O everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.

Come ye, and ye that have no money, come ye by the meat, ye come by wine, and not without money, and without price. And what he's basically saying is, if you put a desire for spiritual things, see that you come.

[5 : 14] But the text that I want to look at today, is another invitation to sinners, not only those who have thirsted this time, but anybody who falls into the category, being a guilty sinner.

And so I just want to walk through these verses, and let the Lord speak to us in his word. So we read, Seek ye the Lord, when ye may be found, call ye upon him, and he is near.

What are we being asked to do? Well, first we would be asked to seek after God. And what does it mean, to seek after God? Well, Jeremiah tells us that, you shall seek me, and find me when you search for me, with all of your hearts.

And so to seek after God, is to search for him, with all of their hearts. And I'm sure that some of you as adults here, have perhaps played hide and seek, with young children, whether that be family children, or long children, or whatever.

And you know, you've been doing it quite half-heartedly, perhaps better things to do. But if you remember, what it was like, when you were a child yourself, and you were the one, looking for the other children, and how important it was, to find these children.

[6 : 30] It was the most important thing, that you could do at that time, to find them, to seek them, to search for them. Well, you see, that's the kind of enthusiasm, that's required here, when we are seeking after God.

We are to not stop, until we find him. But where are we to look for God? Where are we going to find him? We're to find him in the means of grace.

What are the means of grace? Well, the means of grace, are just the means, or the instruments, by which God imparts grace, to his own people. So the means of grace, are the things, by which God converts his people, and blesses them.

And so, what are the examples, of these means of grace, are, the word of God, is a means of grace. Prayer, is a means of grace. Having fellowship, for the Lord's people, is a means of grace. Attending the public, worship services, as a means of grace. And so, if you are seeking after God today, then see that you seek for him, in the means of grace.

[7 : 39] See that you are often, in the word of God. See that you are often, praying through him. And that you make every effort, to attend every worship service, in this building, and in any other building, that you can.

Because it's in these situations, that God promises, to meet with his people, and to bless them. But we're also called, upon, to call upon God.

We read here, seek the Lord, when he will be found, to call upon one who is near. I believe, this is talking, of one of these things, of grace. Namely, prayer. Now, in 2nd Chronicles, chapter 7, God says to Solomon, and he says, that my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn away, from their wicked ways.

Then I will heal from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. And so here, as scripture speaks today, we have a promise, from the God, who cannot lie, that if we but humble ourselves, turning away from our sin, if we seek after God, in prayer, if we ask, for him the things, of our hearts, the things, which are according, of his will, that he will, be gracious to us, and that he will hear us.

And so here we are, called for us, not to neglect prayer, but to call upon God, asking that he accept of us, in Jesus Christ. Because you see, nobody ever came to Christ, for that prayer.

[9 : 16] Prayer is as natural, to the Christian, as crying is, to a baby. And so Jesus, himself, calls us to pray, to ask for things of God, ask, and it shall be given to you.

Seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asks, receives, and he that seeks, finds, and him that knocks, shall have the door opened to him.

But notice this also, that we are to seek God, and we are to call upon him, while he is near, and why it needs to be found. And why did he add, these caveats?

Well, the first thing, I'm going to learn from this, is just this, that God is near today. He is near today, in the gospel. We are still in the day, of his patience, and of his mercy.

We are told that now, is the accepted time. That now, that today, is the day of salvation. And God, continues to call us, while we are in, this day of grace.

[10:21] While we are on mercy's ground. And so, I would speak with you today, to seek after him, and to call upon him, while it is yet day. Because the second thing, that we can learn from this, is just this, that, these words, also strongly imply to us, that the day is coming, when he will no longer, be found.

And neither, will God be near. And you know, this is the one, of the most forgotten truths, in the church today. If we keep on, recollecting, the call of the gospel, that that opportunity, will be taken away from us.

And you know, it's the day, was the most successful trick, to tell us, that we have plenty of time, to become Christians. And so you find many today, perhaps even in this building, of what they say is, says, well, I'll become a Christian, when I'm old, but I'll become a Christian, when this happens, when that happens.

Or just a few more years, in the world, just a few more years, to enjoy the pleasures, of what this world, can offer me. And yet, the solemn thing, the solemn thing is this, that although we have, many promises, in this Bible, that tomorrow, is not a promise to us.

In fact, tomorrow, you could be in eternity, and be with you. And you know, there's no hope, and I lost eternity. There's no gospel, preached in hell. In hell, the day of mercy, and grace, is gone.

[11:49] But you know, there may also, come a time, in your own life, when your heart, becomes, incurably pardoned, to the things of God. So that even though, you might find, a desire in your soul, just now, to be a Christian, there's no guarantee, that you're going to have, after a year's time, or in 10 years time, or in 20 years time.

Remember when Paul, preached the gospel, to Felix, he was in prison, and Felix, allowed him out, into his court, to preach the gospel. And you know, Paul preached, with great power.

And Felix trembled, because he said to him, was this, he said, go your way, for this time, when I have a convenient season, I'll call for you. What did that convenient season, ever come for Felix?

Well, we don't know, but certainly, when he left, two years later, he left, the apostle Paul in prison.

And as far as we can see, he had no, word of the gospel, which had made him tremble, when he first heard it.

Because you see, there's many, who was king Adruta, say, you almost persuade me, to be a Christian. And yet, these almost persuaded people, so many of them, to become hardened, by the peers of this world.

[13:10] And, in a number of years, times, as I said, they've got no word, with the gospel. Because God's spirit, won't always strive with man. We have it here, in the world of God, that the day is coming, when he will be a Pharaoh, and he won't be found, the day of patience, will be over.

And perhaps, you might be living, and the day of patience, will be over. God has offered the gospel, to you so many times, and you've rejected it. His spirit, won't always strive with man.

My friends, you see, the gospel is urgent. The gospel isn't something, that you can just mull over, for a few weeks, and think about it. It's something, which requires, your urgent attention, your urgent, careful attention.

Why? Because you don't know, in time of July, how long the offer, is going to last for. Well, as we go on, to verse 7, we read, the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man, is brought.

And here we see, that a call to repentance, in verse 7, goes hand in hand, with a call to faith, in verse 6. The famous Baptist minister, in London, C.H. Spurgeon, said, that there is no saviour, for a man, who won't forsake his sin.

[14:32] And you'll ask a song of truth. The wicked, must forsake his way, and the unrighteous man, his thoughts. But you might be saying, to yourself today, well, I might not be perfect, but I'm not wicked.

And I certainly, wouldn't call myself, unrighteous. I know I'm not perfect, but surely I'm not these things. But, you know, we have to, exegete these words, to see what they're really saying, in the context.

And the context is this, that this isn't talking about, who you are in your own eyes. It's not even talking about, who you are in the eyes of other men, and other women. It's talking about, who you are, in the eyes of God.

And you know, in Psalm 14, we read that God, looks down from heaven, and he sees that all, have gone aside. They all become filthy.

There is none, that does good. No, not one. And so, we learn, we're all wicked. We're all unrighteous, in the eyes of God.

[15:36] Because the world, we have morality, and changes. What's right today, might be wrong tomorrow. And certainly, what was wrong yesterday, seems to be right today. But God's view of morality, doesn't change.

God himself, doesn't change. We've all fallen short, of this standard. We've all sinned, and fallen short, of this glory, and therefore, we are all wicked, and unrighteous, in his eyes.

And you know, it's only the man, or the woman, who understands this, who will truly repent. But you know, praise God, that he has come, not to call the righteous, but to repentance.

Well, what is repentance? Well, as we have it described, to us here, it is described to us, as a forsaking, of our way. Let's be especially, talking about sinful things.

The sinful things, that we do, we must let them go, we must forsake them. So that if you think, nothing of telling, a white lie, as you've worked, to get on, if you're greedy, or, if you decide, for life is after money, well, you must train yourself, to act differently.

[16:50] The drunk, must be dull, his bottle. The man, who swears, or blasphemes, must drain his tongue. The adulterer, must drain his eyes. The liar, the cheat, and the thief, must forsake his habits.

Because, the seeker of God, must forsake his ways. He must have his life, be formed, with the help, of the Holy Spirit of God.

But you know, if we left it at that, there would be many people, who would justify themselves, and say, well, you know, I've done most of these things, and I look pretty good, on the outside. But you know, this change must be inward as well.

We must also forsake our thoughts. And you might be saying today, well, surely my thoughts can't be sinful. Surely my thoughts, won't hurt anybody. Ah, but remember what Jesus says to us.

He says, that whosoever, even looks after a woman, looks on a woman, to lust after her, he has already committed, a dull thing with her, in his heart. And in another place, we read that, the man who hates his brother, does say he's already committed murder.

[18:02] Because you see, our ungodly ways, they grow, out of the seed, that's planted, by our ungodly thoughts. Most sins, are premeditated sins.

And you know, God knows, our thoughts. He knows our thoughts, from afar off. He knows when we sit down, and when we rise up. He knows the words, in our mouth, even before they come out.

He knows everything about us. And do you not think, that your sinful thoughts, your bad thoughts, offend God, just like you offend them, with your hands, and with your mouth?

I can tell you this, that they're just as dishonorable. And so, we must train our thoughts, with the aid of the Holy Spirit. We must turn our minds, from these evil thoughts, and see to be perfect, even as our Holy Father, in heaven, is perfect.

But you know, repentance, wouldn't be true repentance, without a 180 degree turn, from what is bad, to something else. And so, when we turn, from our ungodly ways, and our ungodly thoughts, what are we going to face?

[19:16] Well, in the text here, we see, that we turn, to God. Because, you see, we by our sin, we've distanced ourselves, from God.

We've sinned against Him, and it's if, we've run away from Him. But now, we're invited, in forsaking our sins, to return, or to return to God.

Now, what if the prodigal son, who went away, into a distant country, and spent all the money, that he'd taken from his father, and, spent it all, in things of this world, and then found himself, at the end of it broke, with nothing, but the pig's food to eat, what if that prodigal son, and said, well, I'm going to reform my life, I'm going to get a better job, I'm going to quit my grandkids, and my adult, and all

these things.

What if, what if he'd done that? Would he have been a good man? Well, I can tell you this, he might have looked good, but that prodigal, had to return to his father. He had to return.

And so it is with us. It's not enough for us, just to forsake their habits, to seek to look good, we too, must return, to God, we must return to our father.

[20 : 34] Because you see, there's plenty of people in this world, and they break addictions, they break bad habits, and they do go down to God. But what did they fill that empty void with?

That empty void, which was filled with their sin. I'll tell you this, quite often, they fill it with other sins, different, more subtle sins, sins like pride, and self-righteousness, sins like arrogance.

Remember that Jesus tells a story about a man who managed to get rid of that devil out of his house. And he swept up his house, and everything looked great. But you know, he wasn't on his guard.

And that devil came back with seven other devils, and went into his house, and made a life mess of it. So that the last state was even worse than the first state, because he hadn't turned to God.

You see, true repentance avoids more than turning away from what's wrong. It's an embracing of what's right. It's not only a forsaking of what's bad, it's a turning towards what's good.

[21 : 43] And that's what we're called to. But you might be sitting here, even as a Christian, but perhaps not, and saying, well, who's sufficient for these things? How can I forsake my pet sins?

How can I live without these things? What have I failed? Ah, but you see, when Jesus Christ saves us from the punishment of sin, he also saves us from the love of sin.

He doesn't only make you happy, he also makes you holy. And that he changes your nature, and he makes you a new creature in Jesus Christ.

And although the Christian is always going to struggle to his side of eternity, yet, when he looks into his heart of hearts, he or she finds that his real delight is to do what's right in the eyes of God, to do good, and to hate sin.

Well, what's our great incentive today to come to Christ? Well, is it not his gracious character? As we read on in verse 7, we read, and he will have mercy upon him, but compassion upon him, and to our Lord, for he will abundantly pardon him.

[22 : 59] But what is this compassion? What mercy is? Well, mercy or compassion is a deep sympathy.

For some, we use an unlawless state than ourselves, and we have real desire to alleviate that suffering or that difficulty that they're going through, even if they don't deserve it.

And how does God show mercy to those who are to deserve his wrath and his curse? Well, he does so by setting aside the consequences of our sins.

So, the Bible tells us that if we confess our sins to him, that he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Because you see, because Jesus Christ has made atonement for his own people, God is able to put our sins behind him to look at them no more. Because reconciliation has been made through sacrifice, God is able to cast our sins into the depths of the sea.

[24 : 07] They are to be remembered no more. That's mercy. But you know, as far as mercy, we read that he will abundantly be pardoned and in the original languages can mean that he will multiply pardons towards us.

And you know, this multiplication of forgiveness is something that's largely foreign to our culture and to be admitted to ourselves today. Forgive somebody once, yes.

Forgive them twice, well, okay. But if somebody keeps on sinning against us, surely there comes a time when we can turn our backs on them and to lead them to it.

Well, Peter, struggling with the same question, went to Jesus and he said to him, Lord, how many times have suffered you with my brother? Is seven times enough?

Ah, but what Jesus said to him and says, well, no, Peter, not at all, but 70 times seven. What he was saying was, Peter, my forgiveness is without limit, and therefore your forgiveness must be without limit.

[25 : 14] And he knows there are not comfort in this for the Christian today, that the forgiveness of God is without limit, that we who have abundantly sinned, who have multiplied our sins against him, that we will have these multiplied sins met with multiplied pardon.

Is that not a wonderful thing for the Christian today? Surely we can say that there is no God like this God. Surely my God was right to say, who is a God unto thee that pardons iniquity and passes by the transgression of his heritage?

He retains not his anger forever because he delights in mercy. my friend will this no matter how deep your sins are, no matter how you are offended God by trampling his law under your feet, no matter how abundant and numerous your shortcomings, we are God in heaven who delights in mercy and who graciously receive all of those who come to him with faith and in repentance. Because there's no sin so great, no sinner so wicked, that God will not save him if he becomes. That takes us on to verse 8 where we read God saying for my thoughts are not you thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways saith the Lord. We have verse 9 here illustrating what is said in verse 8 where we read that even as the heavens are higher on the earth so God's thoughts and ways are higher than earth.

[26 : 54] And you know there's nothing as obvious to us today than the heavens and the skies are higher than the earth. And what God is saying to us too is this that there should be nothing so obvious to you that my ways and my thoughts are about yours.

Well how is this? Can we give a few examples of how God's ways and thoughts are about ours. Well the first one is this just what we've been talking about his ways and his thoughts are about ours in the way which he forgives abundantly in a way that is foreign to man in a way that is unthinkable to man because as we spoke it is a great moral gap between God and man and yet God through Jesus Christ has bridged that God so that as we sang earlier as the heaven is high above the earth so great is his mercy towards them that fear him the mercy of God is on an unimaginable scale this is a mercy which is foreign to Muslims it's foreign to Hindus it's foreign to all the societies of this world a mercy which is without bounds and you know when the Christian here today when you realise how sinful you are especially as a

Christian when God shows you the darkness of your heart it's then that you can say to yourself well this mercy is truly without bounds and surely the thoughts of God and his ways are higher than mine but secondly his thoughts and ways are above ours in the way that he orders his works of providence now what is providence the catechism asks what are God's works of providence and answers are this God's works of providence are his most holy wise and powerful preserving and governing of all his creatures and all their actions so that just as God made the world in creation God preserves the world by his providence he is a God who has poor ordained whatsoever comes to pass there's nothing in this world that happens without God knowing it without God planning it in advance well how does this work out in practice for the

Christian well in Romans chapter 8 we read that we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to them who are recalled according to his purpose and so the Bible reminds you today and me with you that if you're in Christ if you're a Christian that God is working all things together for your good despite the difficulties he will work all things for good now this is not difficult to believe this does not seem to many of us like a contradiction in God if he's working all things for my good then why the illnesses that I'm struggling with why the troubles in my family why the bereavements why the depression why all the difficult things why am I surrounded by troubles on every side well I can't explain to you the intimate details of your problem what I can say to you is this that the

Bible tells us that God wouldn't allow difficulties into your life he wouldn't allow evil in your experience that he couldn't take good out of it when we go back to college in September we'll start learning Hebrew and when you read the Hebrew Bible instead of reading an English Bible from left to right you read it back to front you read it backwards from the right to the left and you know sometimes out of providences just like Hebrew Bibles have to be read backwards and it's when we look back on what's happened in your lives these difficult things these great trials it's then that we'll say the Lord worked after my good through that great difficulty which perhaps I'll never get over he has drawn me nearer to himself and he has made me he's taught me to we know Jesus Christ more and more because you see God's providences will always fulfill his promises well very quickly then in the light these high and holy thoughts and ways of

[31 : 37] God how are we who are wicked and unrighteous unrighteous how are we going to seek to reconcile ourselves to the way that he would tell us to live surely we must reconcile ourselves to his ways and to his thoughts but we are to do so by repentance as we have heard or to know that repentance isn't just something that we do when we're converted it's a life walk it's a daily exercise

in our experience how then is a Christian the one who loves Jesus how is he to live how is he to reconcile his ways but what does Jesus himself say he says if you love me keep my commandments and yes he's speaking about the New Testament commandments but he's also speaking about the whole word of God he's speaking about the law of God especially as we have it summarised in the ten commandments and you know the believer today is to make these ten commandments this rule of life not just kind of them not ancient of them but all ten of them and you and me with you we are to read these commandments we are to study them and we are to ask God seeking and relying on their faith at all times but in our own strength we are to ask him

Lord how would you help me to live how would you help me to fulfil this commandment and you know if it's the desire of our saviour who did so much for us that we keep his commandments surely we should keep them as a sign of our respect and our honour and our love for him because you know God has given you through Christ today he's given you all things he's made you to be a courier of the son Jesus Christ he's given you an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled he's given you himself he's given everything to you but you know that God who's given you everything he asks that you give everything to him in return that we would do so Amen let's pray gracious and ever dear God we confess our sin and our shortcomings we confess that we are wicked and unrighteous by our very nature and yet we call upon thee this day to have mercy upon us and to multiply pardon to us in our situation to meet our sins help us to humble ourselves and to call upon thee and to know that we have in thee a God who delights in mercy a God who loves his own people and invites sinners sure and worthy to come to him in the gospel bless them all that we have said and done correct anything that we have said or done on this and we pray that we have all the glory in Jesus Christ

Amen we can conclude our worship by singing again into God's praise and this time from Psalm 130 in the Scottish Sopper we find that in page 421 in Psalm Lord from the dead of thee I cry in my voice Lord you are here unto my suffocation voice give an attentive ear Lord you shall stand with no Lord you shall not in equity but yet with thee forgiveness is that fear it will be as need I wait for God my soul you'll wait my hope is in his word more than they that for morning watch my soul wait for the Lord I say more than they that you watch the morning like to see because I have hope in the Lord for with him mercy is free and plentiful redemption is ever friend with him and from all his iniquities he is there shall be even the whole sound to God's praise

Lord from the depths to the end my voice Lord you like to hear Lord from the dead to thee I die my voice are you thou hear unto thy suffering may might make haste o Lord h.

her h. I. I wait for God, my Lord, I wait for God, my hope is in His words, more than He that for a pouring lot, my soul is not the Lord.

[37 : 44] I say, Lord, that may not be lost, the Lord may die to see.

Let Israel open the door, for with His mercy's feet.

On plenty of redemption, His love will be, and from all this iniquity, He is enough noTER2021.

Gracious Lord, we will as now as we depart one from another Depart not from us, but bless us and grant us thy Holy Spirit And forgive us for our sin, for Christ's sake, Amen