

Seek the Lord While He May be Found

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[0 : 0 0] Now, can we turn again to Isaiah 55, and I want to read four of the verses.

Now, seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God that he may abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God comes to his people in the guise of a street vendor. He lifts his voice above the clamor of the marketplace or the street and shouts out to Israel, come, come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, come, he who has no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without price. Listen diligently to me. Eat what is good and delight yourself in the riches of food.

The Holy One of Israel is pressing his people to come to him. And in verse 6, he's saying to them, come and seek me. Now, the wise men who came to Jerusalem at the birth of Jesus, they came asking for the one who'd been born king of the Jews. They were seekers. And similarly, the Greeks who came to Philip and said, we want to see Jesus, they too were seekers. But you could call them first-time seekers, because they'd never met or seen Jesus before. But the word that God speaks through Isaiah is spoken to the covenant community, to people who had met and had heard the Lord speaking to them. And similarly, to us today as believers, this is a word that we constantly and continuously need to hear that we are to seek the Lord. We sang from Psalm 29. And in that Psalm,

David remembers that God had said to him, you said, seek my face. And David immediately says, your face, your face, Lord, do I seek. And it's this determination that we should have to seek God.

[4 : 0 2] To seek him early and to seek him late. To seek him in our younger days and in our latter years. To seek him when the lines are falling for us in pleasant places. And to seek him when we are surrounded by an encampment of evil enemies. To seek him whatever the circumstance. That's what we're told.

And the seeking of the Lord God is so beneficial. You said if you have faith, you believe in God. You believe that he exists. And you believe that he's the rewarder of those who seek him.

And so we, today as we come to this passage, may we encourage one another to be lifelong seekers.

And in a sense, yeah, we've found him. We've found the Lord as his people. But there's a sense in which we're not satisfied. Because what we have of him is great, but we want him more.

Now the first thing I want to observe is, seek the Lord whenever you can. The double statement, seek him while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. And it's an exhortation to seek him at every available opportunity. But I want you also to notice that God here is sovereignly providing special times in which we seek him. There will be occasions in our lives, maybe you can remember this well, in which it's as if God opens a way for you to seek him in a special manner. He gives you opportunities. He comes near to you so that you can seek him.

[6 : 41] And it's, sometimes it's just a passing moment, maybe when you're reading the word at home, or in church when the word is impressed upon you. Or an occasion when it seems that through the word, it's as it were, you're taken up to the third heaven. And you're just so elated by being with him.

And it's as if, if I can use another analogy, it's as if there's a kind of spring tide in your life.

And God comes to you and he inundates your soul with more of himself. It's the Lord giving you that opportunity to seek him further.

And when he does that, you want to take the opportunity at the flood and go with it. And with gratitude, say to the Lord, I want you more.

Do you remember Jacob? He'd been taken off for years and years from his homeland. And he needed so many lessons to learn, so many chips to be knocked off him.

[8 : 04] And God trained him in Haran, the faraway place. And then he came back and he crossed the Jordan back into Canaan. And he was alone one night and a man met him.

And this man wrestled with Jacob until dawn. And as the day was breaking, the man said, let me go.

And Jacob said these interesting words, I will not let you go until you bless me. And when God gives us these moments when seeking him is so fabulously real, we need to pursue them with that kind of mindset.

I will not let you go until you bless me further. And so I say, if you know what I'm talking about, and you can recall such days in your life, do bank them into your spiritual memory.

They've been given to you to raise you up for better and further service. Well, seek the Lord while he may be found.

[9 : 33] Seek him at every opportunity. And seek him specially when he gives you these extraordinary moments to come near.

The second thing I want to observe from these verses is that seeking involves forsaking.

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him. And to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Let the wicked forsake his way. Can I preface this with something that I think is important?

[10 : 44] You will find that there are times, maybe days, maybe weeks, when God is actually very difficult to come near to.

And there may be numerous reasons for that. Exhaustion. Conflict in spiritual warfare.

Weariness from doing good and serving Christ. Anxiety. Persistent illness.

All of these things may be reasons why God is somehow hard to seek. Elijah, you may remember, probably had all of those conditions.

When he walked off into the desert after the conflict on Mount Canaan. He was desolate.

[12 : 02] He was in a state of deep depression. And the Lord had to especially come near to him. So all of these are reasons why you may at times find it hard, hard to seek the Lord.

But there is one barrier that invariably impedes our seeking the Lord.

And that is our sin. And so, if you could turn over a page or two to chapter 59.

And the first two verses. Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, or his ear dull that it cannot hear.

God doesn't. God doesn't. God is saying, I haven't gone offline because I've become incapable of approaching you.

[13 : 22] Not a bit of it. Verse 2. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. And your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Now, I simply want to put this statement and then we'll move on from this. But when we treasure sin and cosset it in our hearts, it will necessarily cut off our contact with God.

And we won't be able to seek him. Child of God though we are, this will be a barrier. He shuts his ear, he says, to willful, persistent sin.

Now I move on to the third observation from these verses. And it is that seeking God is seeking to understand him.

Seeking God is seeking to understand him. Verse 8. For, an important word.

[14 : 56] For, my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For, my thoughts, I'm not your thoughts, but my thoughts, I'm not your thoughts, that it makes me utterly unreachable.

That it makes me so far from you in your ways and your thoughts, that you cannot actually reach me. And it is indeed true that God's ways are at such a distance and a height that we'll never fully understand them.

Paul says, How unsearchable are your judgments, how inscrutable are your ways. Who has known the mind of the Lord?

And we do acknowledge that we creatures, we creatures are a world apart from him.

[16 : 44] And when we get to know him, we really only get to know what he calls the edges of his ways. But that is not why he gives us this verse.

I'm quite persuaded of that. Because he's not saying here, my thoughts are bigger than your thoughts, and my ways are bigger than your ways, by a factor of infinity, and so that shows you're never going to get near me.

Absolutely not. What he's saying is, yes, my thoughts and my ways are far, far higher than you.

They're a stratosphere above your thoughts and your ways. But I want you, I invite you, I plead with you to start looking at me in the way that I look at myself.

I want you, says the living God, to see me with my viewfinder. And he's saying, when you seek me, don't seek me from your human perspective, but seek me with the way that I show you how to see me.

[18 : 12] Let me explain how we can apply that from these verses. At the beginning of verse 8, Paul says, for, he's just told them that we're to forsake our ways and our thoughts, and he now says, for, my thoughts are not your thoughts, etc.

And there are two reasons why we need to connect the two verses. The first is, that in seeking to understand him, we're seeking to understand his holiness.

He's pointing us and saying, you need to see my, my transcendently holy ways, and my perfectly sinless thoughts.

And you need to see how they contrast with yours. And you need that to be a way of bringing you back to me.

Amen. Let me try and illustrate how God does this in our lives.

[19 : 32] Maybe there's something that we know is not right.

And it's our real intention to put it right. But we say to ourselves, well, I want to leave it for another day, for a more opportune moment.

And the Holy Spirit comes, and he shows us that that needs immediate attention. But how will he do that, most pressingly, in your life?

Well, I want to suggest from Isaiah 55, that the way he'll do it is by showing you the immense height of his holiness.

holiness. And when you see the absolute purity of God, and the stunningly majestic beauty of his, of his, of his holy ways, that, that will be the motive to delay no longer.

[21 : 08] And to run to him for help. Similarly, you know, I can say that there are times in my life when the Holy Spirit has put his hand on some area that was a festering poison, an attitude that I scarcely knew was there.

And the Spirit came with the holiness of God to expose that festering poison.

It is his greatest means of motivating us to return to him and to seek him more fully.

His ways of holiness that are higher than ours by infinity when we get to understand that.

It is our motive for change. But there's something even better here. Seeking to understand and to get to know God is seeking to understand his divine compassion.

[22 : 43] compassion. We need to see how magnificently superior is God's understanding of his holiness.

How magnificently superior it is to our understanding of God's holiness and his compassion. We live in a world where compassion is in short supply.

Slowness to forgive is everywhere in nations, in neighbourhoods, families, and sadly even in churches.

And we're even suspicious of people who talk the language of compassion. And I guess we therefore find it hard to see God's compassion in the way that he sees it.

Because we're so programmed to thinking of compassion on such a small scale. And when God offers us compassion, something in us is suspicious.

[24 : 24] and we find it hard to believe that he genuinely is compassionate to us in our sinfulness.

And when we come to the cross and it's explained to us that there is demonstrated the love and compassion of God, even then we hold back and we ask, is God really ungrudgingly compassionate to me, a persistent sinner?

sinner? What do we so often do when we want to repent and to turn back to God from our sins?

Do we wait until we're suitably motivated? Do we wait until we're sure we're serious about wanting to get rid of that sin?

Well, the way is this that we first of all go to that cross to see the magnitude of God's compassion for us and his willingness, his willingness always to forgive.

[26 : 14] And to see that God in his staggeringly great love is saying to us, at the cross of Jesus, I offer you abundant pardon.

I absolve your sins. I cancel them through the blood. I discard them into divine forgetfulness.

You truly are forgiven. and we need to see that the first place to go in our returning to the Lord is always to the cross, the place of compassion.

Not to our mood or our signs of repentance or our contrition, our sorrow. The first place to go is to the cross of Jesus Christ, where the immeasurable greatness of his love is placarded.

And that doesn't come easy. We seem to be slow to take it in. On this, I love to go back to that prayer in Ephesians 3 of Paul's, when he prayed for the people.

[27 : 49] And he prayed for them that they might have strength. What are you going to pray for your closest friend tomorrow morning, who's on your desire to pray for, your spouse, your children, your dear family, your neighbour, the one you're pleading with to the Lord?

Well, here's something worth praying. That they might have strength, power, in one of the translations. power for what?

Power that they might comprehend and know the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ.

Christ. Now, it's an unusual thing that Paul should be praying that they might have power. You wouldn't think that to receive compassion and mercy and the love of God requires strength on my part.

and I tell you, it most certainly does because, I say again, it doesn't come naturally to us to take in and absorb the love of Christ and it's because that love of the Lord God is so much higher than anything we could have imagined, higher than the heavens, that we do find it hard to comprehend.

[29 : 52] So, I urge us all in seeking the Lord, seek to understand him better and most especially in the love he has.

One last thing, is anyone here still a first time seeker? Is there anyone here who hasn't yet found Jesus Christ?

Well, can I just say this to you? You too must begin at the cross because it's at the cross that the great barrier between you and God is taken away and you will never start to look for him until you've been to that cross where he says that our sins were carried in his body on the tree.

That is your starting point. God will be to you and you'll never turn you will never turn you away.

He says you who with all your heart do truly seek me you will surely find me.

[31 : 23] And the final thing I want to say is this you'll be surprised at this that if you're seeking him ever so strongly you've got to know that he's seeking you even more strongly.

And he gives you opportunity he gives you a glorious opportunity to find him. And I want to say to you don't let that opportunity pass you by.

Now is the time to come to Christ. I plead with you if you're still a first time seeker not yet come into Christ.

don't delay. Stop Stop lay.