

The Whole Duty of Man

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[0 : 0 0] as a young man I used to sit back at night and look up at the stars and ask myself why am I here what is my place in this vast universe I'm sure many here have done that maybe some still do to lose one sense of wonder at God's creation would indeed be a sad day when we're out for a walk my wife rightly chides me for walking with my head down rather than looking up at the stars and the trees for all now that I'm old I still ask the question what is my place in this vast universe and why am I here at times like these the answer to the first catechism comes to mind man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever we never forget what we learned first and that was one of the first things I learned but for all that when looking up into the night sky perhaps we need something a little more solid to think about why am I here and what is my place in this vast universe we all ask that question at times although he was writing two and a half thousand years ago

Isaiah's answer in chapter 55 verse 6 forces our head upward beyond the stars to seek for a higher reality than this seek the Lord while he may be found for all that we may try to find an answer to the question of meaning and significance in this universe we will never find it our meaning cannot be found here it can only be found in the infinite and eternal wonder and beauty of God which brings me to the central theme of this verse and this sermon the whole duty of man is to seek God the whole duty of man is to seek God and when I say man here I mean of course human beings not just the male gender the whole duty of man is to seek God that's the central driver of Isaiah 55 verse 6 when we look up into the night sky or when through difficult life circumstances we are brought to see our own weakness we are forced to say that the whole duty of human beings is to seek meaning in life outside of ourselves and over the ocean of time Isaiah

Isaiah says to us you will only find that meaningless significance in God it's my intention this morning to open up this truth that the whole duty of man is to seek God and I want to do it in three stages first by way of explanation second to highlight two objections and third to present you with some encouragements the whole duty of man is to seek God my duty your duty seek the Lord while he may be found let's begin with explanations explanations we live in an age of arrogance where everything written before the year 2000 is relegated to the dustbin of irrelevance we are after all homo sapien the man who knows but we Christians have no right to this historical snobbery given that during his earthly ministry Jesus didn't do insta or or x and yet he continues to turn the world upside down fundamentally you know human beings haven't changed since the days of Isaiah our search for meaning and significance remains and Isaiah tells us that the whole duty of man is to seek God is to seek God and from this verse Isaiah 55 verse 6 we want to explain this truth in three ways first of all our duty is to seek our duty is to seek our species is called homo sapien the man who knows we know exponentially more than any other species on planet earth sometimes I wonder though whether we should be renamed homo sapien the man who knows the man who knows the man who knows the man who knows the man who seeks the Latin word from which we get our English words quiz question inquisition words which involve searching for an answer it is deeply embedded within the human psyche to search for answers that's why at difficult times we resort to the most fundamental of human questions why why we would not ask the question why unless the search for an answer was part of who we are we are made to seek that which we do not yet know everyone seeks that which they do not yet know or have not yet experienced from the moment of our birth we're explorers into the world into which we have been born we're seeking our mother's love as infants as teenagers we're seeking our place in this world as adults we're seeking security and belonging and so on we are always seeking something even if that something should always remain elusive and hidden if ever we should stop being curious it's a sign that there's something wrong even for those of us who are

Christians who believe we have found our deepest answers in the cross of Jesus Christ and are therefore satisfied in our relationship with him we are seekers after a deeper experience of his love and his presence and his grace we are seekers and that's why when we look into a dark sky and want to know more we instinctively know that the answers we're looking for aren't to be found in this universe our duty is to seek when Isaiah commands us to seek he's commanding us to do something that's woven into our DNA something our creator has programmed us to be homo quesitor the man who seeks answers many here this morning are professional students pursuing truth in particular academic disciplines but everyone here is a seeker everyone here is pursuing the ultimate truth which alone can satisfy our deepest questions our duty is to seek by way of explanation second our duty is to seek the lord it is to seek the lord nearly one and a half thousand years ago the north african bishop saint augustine wrote these famous words lord you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you 600 years ago the german mystic thomas akempis wrote these words about god my heart cannot rest or be fully content until rising above all gifts or every created thing it rests in you my heart cannot fully rest or be content until it rests in you what we're seeking is something we can't see the proof of this is that religion is common to every human being on planet earth even those who deny its value from the earliest days of human existence we have instinctively known that the answers to life's deepest questions aren't to be found in what we can see but in what we can't see they lie beyond the stars but that's not enough it's one thing to question it's another thing to ask the right question it's one thing to search it's another thing to search for the right thing the point both saint augustine and thomas akempis make is that our hearts will only find answers and satisfaction as we find them in the christian god they're simply repeating what isaiah said all these years before seek the lord our quest is not to seek a thing but a person the lord he has revealed himself to us in the old testament as the god of holiness love righteousness and compassion and he ultimately reveals himself in the face of jesus christ whose eyes shine with love whose face is transfigured into glory on the mountain whose body hangs lifeless upon the cross this is the god we seek after as human beings we do not find answers in the cross on which jesus died but in the jesus who died there we don't find satisfaction in the philosophy of god but in the reality of god we don't find rest in the question of his existence but in the enjoyment of his salvation he has made us for himself and we can find rest no one else but in him because in god there is infinite wonder and beauty eternal forgiveness and blessedness unchangeable love and compassion he is a universe of discovery and yet we see him in the face of jesus and by faith in him we rest

and have peace our duty is to seek the lord third by my explanation our duty is to seek the lord while he may be found while he may be found it is not that the lord is moving to where he cannot be found it is that various situations occur which hide him from us the sun remains fixed in the sky even today even though on cloudy days it's rays obscured from us our duty is to seek the lord while the clouds do not as yet obscure him well it's just to change the metaphor in his famous parable of the sword and the seed Jesus tells us about some of these clouds which may obscure the face of God and hindered our search for him they include the evil lies of Satan the troubles and persecutions of this life the cares of this world the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things when these distractions deaden our search for the God in whom alone we can find meaning and rest it's as though the clouds have hidden him from us over the years I've met many people I've known many people who were clearly searching and showed a great interest in Jesus Christ but as time went on other things got in the way they are now further away from God than they ever have been for them meaning in life now consists in their new car in their career or in the sport their children play on a Sunday morning for still others devastating life events drove them away from God rather than drawing them to him that inquisitive spirit which once interested them in deeper truths has gone and is replaced by a fascination with the immediate and the material so many people so much loss they have forfeited the wonder of knowing God for cheap imitations and it's so tragic the whole duty of man is to seek God to seek him among all others to whom he cannot be compared to search from against the backdrop of human pressures and pleasures and pains to seek him with a greater passion than that with which we love our wives and our children it is to be driven to love him as we see him in the glory of his son Jesus who even even for us died on the cross the whole duty of man is to seek God the second we want to explore a couple of objections a couple of objections by nature you know we don't like to be told that we don't like we don't exist for ourselves but we exist for God our society wants to reframe

[12:37] Isaiah's truth that the whole duty of man is to seek God with the lie that the whole duty of man is to seek his own happiness the whole duty of man is to seek his own happiness our minds and our hearts conjure up many objections to Isaiah's command that we must seek the Lord while he's near there may be many objections to this but let me suggest just two which some of us this morning may be thinking the first is this I don't feel the need I don't feel the need earlier I quoted both St. Augustine and Thomas a campus to the effect that ultimate rest and meaning and satisfaction is found in God and in God alone but some will object that they don't feel the need for God that their lives are already restful and that they're full of meaning and satisfied without him they've got wealth family and lives full of pleasure they want to argue that they don't see the need or the relevance for faith in a God they cannot see and they cannot touch and that's a powerful objection today it was far less an objection 200 years ago when infant mortality was high and poverty was rampant but for most of us as Phil Collins would say every day is another day in paradise people don't see their need of God because their lives are filled with other things now we may answer this in many ways but chief among them is this it still doesn't answer the question about ultimate meaning it still doesn't answer the question about ultimate meaning a rich man looks up into the sky and a poor man looks up into the sky and they both ask the same question why am I here a man may have everything and nothing at the same time our ancestors the Picts were so called because they covered their bodies in blue paint but underneath that paint Picts were the same as Gauls were the same as Greeks in the same way wealth family and pleasure are but a thin covering of blue paint concealing inner emptiness at Christmas our children used to play with the cheap boxes in which their expensive presents were wrapped rather than the expensive presents themselves to say that we are ultimately satisfied without

God is to settle for the box and not the diamond within the reason we're satisfied with what we have without God is that we've been deceived into settling for far less than we ought to and for what God made us as human beings we've been deceived the second objection is this I don't have the ability to seek God I don't have the ability to seek God some brought up in churches like ours will post the objection that by virtue of our sinful natures we are unable and unwilling to seek God why does Isaiah command us to do something which to the natural man without the Holy Spirit is impossible to do now this is a mischievous argument because it contains the truth and it contains nothing but the truth but it does not contain the whole truth it is not for us to stand in

God's place after all Isaiah will go on in verse 8 to say my ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts it is not for us to stand in God's place judging the mysterious secrets of his hidden will it is for us to listen here and obey his revealed will which is here clearly stated seek the Lord while he may be found God will by no means be held responsible for our unwilling or disobedience to our duty if there is within anyone here today a desire to seek after God a desire to seek after God it's a sign that God's Holy Spirit has begun a work of grace in your heart and it's for you to respond in faith and trust and later on later on after you found God you'll realize that all the time it was him who was seeking you and not the other way around don't let the deceitfulness of this world's wealth or a willful misunderstanding of theology keep you from seeking the

Lord while he may be found from experiencing the powerful truth to which Thomas Akempis pointed all those years ago my heart cannot rest or be fully content until rising above every created thing it rests in God well third having explained what it means the whole duty of man is to seek God and then posted two objections which we've answered I want to close with encouragements by presenting the following encouragements as to why we are to seek the Lord while he may be found to make it our top priority today once for all to answer that question of ultimate meaning significance purpose and satisfaction to fulfill our duty which is to seek God the first is this seek him personally seek him personally by nature human beings are social we're made for relationship and that's good if our relationships will lead us to doing good things with others but it's a bad thing if the relationships we have with others stop us from doing good things just because it goes out of fashion to brush one's teeth and none of our friends brush their teeth doesn't mean to say that we should stop brushing our teeth

Isaiah lived in a day where the entire nation of Israel was walking away from God where everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes not what was right in God's we live in a similar age just because everyone else is content to live in ignorance and darkness doesn't mean we should be also God's personal command to each of us here today is this seek the Lord while he may be found though no one else should join us in seeking God we must do our duty and seek him personally second seek him wholeheartedly wholeheartedly in what is perhaps one of the most famous verses in the book of Jeremiah God speaks to the prophet and says you will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart the pursuit of meaning and significance isn't a hobby we pick up and lay down at will if Jesus is who the Bible says he is if he did die on a cross and rose from the dead on the third day and if salvation is that important we must devote our lives to the pursuit of God

[20 : 05] I suspect that many of us myself included are rather half-hearted in our discipleship our hearts are too much distracted by the world around us with its attractions and its anxieties we cannot think we shall be successful in our search for God if we are half-hearted when it comes to faith in Jesus Christ it's all or nothing it cost our Lord everything to die on the cross shall it cost us any the less to believe in him third seek him scripturally seek him scripturally the question becomes where shall I find God where shall I find God we started today by talking about the night sky you won't find God there you won't find God in anything in the created order we won't find him in here we won't find him in organized religion or in good works we won't find him by meditation nor by mindfulness we'll find him in and through the pages of the Bible for it's there he's chosen to reveal himself to us we'll find it in the

Bible stories and songs its proverbs and its poetry but supremely we'll find it we'll find him in the Bible's portrayal of Jesus Christ the Jesus who was God in the flesh the Jesus who came to find us for God we'll find it in the Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us on the cross and we will find it in the Jesus who rose on the third day to new and never dying life if you want to begin seeking God today seek him in his word the Bible fourth encouragement seek him prayerfully seek him prayerfully in Hebrew poetry an important line is often expanded upon or explained in the next line so we have Isaiah's call seek the Lord while he may be found immediately followed by call upon him while he is near this is Isaiah's way of telling us how we may seek the Lord not only are we to seek him in the pages of the Bible but we are to seek him by calling upon him another word for prayer ultimate meaning is not to be found in a Buddhist style emptying of one's mind rather it is to be found in filling one's mind with prayer to God most everyone's conversion story consists in how they found God while they were praying it was as they prayed that the light came on in their minds and they finally knew that they had found him sometimes as it was in my case it was as someone prayed along with me sometimes as it is in many other cases it was as they prayed alone but it was as they called out to God to save them from their sins and give them new life and meaning through Jesus

Christ they found him seek him prayerfully and then last of all seek him urgently seek him urgently earlier I spoke of how we are to seek the Lord while he may be found and how it is that other things can get in the way of our seeking God which stop our search but there is another reason why we must seek the Lord without delay right now Jesus tells us that a day is soon coming when he shall return and on that day people will no longer seek God for they shall see him with their eyes but if any should not have found him by that point their fate will already be sealed they will forever be cast out from his presence and all the beauties of love hope and peace that is why we must seek the Lord here and now while he may be found we must seek him for we do not know when Christ shall come again let us not make plans to seek him when we are ready we seek him while he may be found many young people relegate religion to their old age thinking that they'll think about

God when they're older but perhaps they never get older perhaps they die young others when Christ shall come again shall say to him if you just give him me a little longer but it will be too late the whole duty of man is to seek God as the battle of Trafalgar was about to commence in 1805 Lord Horatio Nelson signaled to all the ships in the British fleet England expects that every man will do his duty now let's put England to one side this isn't about a country it's about us our whole duty as human beings is to seek God as a young man I used to look up into the night sky and ask myself what is the meaning of my life having now been a

Christian for many many decades I look up into the night sky with an even greater wonder than I did when I was young but I know that the answer to the question of meaning isn't to be found in this universe it is only to be found in God today right now sitting right where you are will you take this step of seeking the Lord while he may be found good dead so .

[26 : 16] .