

# Seek the Lord While He May Be Found

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 27 September 2020

Preacher: Robin Gray

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     now then let's turn to that chapter that we read isaiah 55 isaiah chapter 55 when the church has one of its most basic blessings which is to gather together physically in the same space to worship god to sing praise to him when it has one of these one of its most basic blessings one of its most basic duties actually because this is what the church is called to do removed by god because god is sovereign it's god that has brought this about in his providence his providence is his ordering of all things according to his own definite plan when god removes that from the church and he's saying something isn't he he's saying something to the church when something like that happens because it's not random god is control of is in control of everything and so when he withdraws a blessing from the church he's saying something and what he is saying is repent that's what he's saying to the church he's saying remember the height from which you've fallen he's saying you've forsaken your first love repent and do the things you did at first now when a withdrawal or a chastising like that happens is for the church's good if we listen to it because when god chastises his people it's for their good it's to wean them off the world it's to redirect their hearts and their minds towards their first love again to jesus it's to awaken their zeal for him again is to take them off and where they've been wandering to and get them back on to the narrow way it's for our good that god calls the church to repentance and doing something as let's face it as drastic as what has happened to us this year and should really let us hear god's voice loud and clear but it's interesting as to what has happened largely in the churches over this period in that the tone of repentance has been noticeably absent in the past very probably something like this would have prompted days of fasting and humiliation in the churches as the people of god cried out to god to forgive them for their own backsliding and to forgive the nation in which they lived for its sins against god and would be earnestly seeking god's face again asking him to restore them to the friendship and the fellowship they previously enjoyed and which is manifested in being able to attend the means of grace being able to gather together again to sing to god's praise to partake of the sacraments to be under the sound of the the word but what's been a far more common tone is actually a kind of can-do attitude that says it doesn't matter about covid we can worship god anyway and what god's people need to hear is just relentless encouragement but if all you offer god's people is encouragement in the face of what is

clearly at least at one dimension of it is chastisement is reproof and you're not actually doing them any favors and in fact a church that just continually offers encouragement is just one dimensional it's not biblical because a biblical church has more dimensions to it than that it can do lament it can do repentance as well as encouragement and comfort and there's all there's been this kind of attitude as well that well it doesn't matter we can just move the church online as if that's an acceptable substitute for gathering together physically and in our church buildings gathering together as a people physically together but thinking you can just move the church online is to forget the fact how important physicality our bodies are and to god god came in the flesh he became a human being flesh and blood to redeem flesh and blood and therefore our bodies are important there's an ancient heresy called gnosticism which says the body and material things are evil and it's only the spiritual things that are good that is totally unbiblical the body is good as well it was good when god created it jesus christ has a body and so just thinking well you know covid's not going to stop us worshiping god is to kind of miss the point and go well god has stopped you from worshiping him in a normal way what's he saying and what is he asking us to do and i would suggest that the passage that we read isaiah 55 is a really good passage for us to focus on for a few moments at least if not all week as we consider what's going on in this situation because yes on the one hand we are being reproofed i think as god's people as peter the letter that we were reading not so long ago said judgment begins at the house of god we shouldn't just think this is god inflicting a judgment on the nation for its sinfulness but rather god always has a controversy with his own people first and foremost if they're straying but to balance that with the fact that if we will listen if we will turn god will abundantly pardon god will give us um a wonderful restoration because that's what the picture is being drawn here in isaiah 55 it's this picture of wonderful restoration of forgiveness god will not constantly reprove if we will just but listen to what he's saying to the churches and and humble ourselves before him so that we can then get back into that position of enjoying closer fellowship with him because make no mistake if you can't meet as the body you are not enjoying as close fellowship um with god as you could do because a major way in which you enjoy close fellowship with god is gathering together as his people and particularly as christ's body and partaking of the means of grace together and it's odd that this should be lost on us so many of us in this age it maybe shows how deaf we seem to have become as church after church after church after church just says we're not going to let covid stop us when in fact what god is saying is i've brought covid to stop you so that you'll stop and listen and stop and think about what you're doing so what we have in isaiah 55 is this open invitation

an open invitation to a feast isn't it if you look at the verses it's just this feast and what is so striking about this feast is that god really wants to make the point as he makes this invitation is that this feast is free it comes at no cost to those that have been invited come all you who are thirsty come to the waters and you who have no money come by and eat come by wine and milk again without money and without cost in verse one that's the point that is being made you're invited at no cost but what's the condition who's invited all who are thirsty that is all who are missing god's fellowship and presence all who realize there's something lacking not those who say i lack nothing everything's hunky dory that is not who the invitation is to the invitation is to those who thirst so the first question is then are you thirsty are you thirsty for god are you thirsty for more of god are you thirsty to enjoy god more do you even see that it's god it's that in being in closer fellowship with god that gives you um satisfaction for your thirst and for all your desires you know it's in it's in god that we get our utmost satisfaction our utmost enjoyment and when we don't realize that if we just think god is someone to be obeyed above and beyond someone to be enjoyed is pretty much proof that we don't know god at all if we haven't actually first tasted and seen that the lord is good and enjoyed him before thinking about what it is and to obey and to follow him come all you who are thirsty come to the waters you who have no money that is realize you've got nothing to offer you can't pay god anything for fellowship with himself how much is it going to cost me lord to spend time in sweet fellowship with you you don't have that currency you have to come realizing you have nothing and you will actually get it and listen to it what is being offered here wine and milk without money and without cost come buy wine and milk yet without money gives the sense that it does have a value but that god has actually paid for this feast first of all and he has paid he has paid for us to come to this feast and then there's the challenge in the invitation as well which is why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy that is god questioning have you been going after satisfaction in the wrong things have you been expending yourself and all your resources on things that will not satisfy you in the way that he can have you forgotten that he offers satisfaction way beyond the joys that this world can offer and have you been placing other things above him are other things in your heart above him and he's saying isn't that ridiculous why spend money on what is not bread and labor on what does not satisfy

why i might ask myself that same question why do i go after things that don't satisfy in the way that god does and we weary ourselves don't we this word labor is being wearying ourselves when god is right there to be enjoyed and we spend so much time laboring on what will not on what will not profit us ultimately what's another important aspect in this invitation is that we listen and that's what we all need to do today is listen to what god is saying in verse 3 he says give ear and come to me hear me that your soul may live it's not just oh you should listen because this will add something to your life to make it even better than it is already or you'll get some good advice to make your life more efficient and effective no he's saying this is life and death that you listen to me give ear and come to me hear me that your soul may live and look at the verse above that in verse 2 listen listen to me that is in in the language listen listeningly this invitation will only avail in fact you will only take up this invitation if you are listening because it's repeated so often listen listen to me give ear and come to me hear me god is saying and it's almost as if the church is saying sorry what we need to listen because what we will get when we listen is at the end of verse 2 our soul will delight in the richest of fear this is a banquet beyond our imaginings the banquet that is restoration to god's favor the banquet that is communion with god is the very richest of fear beyond any earthly banquet we can really imagine and this is that our soul may live god is offering us life here if we will but listen and awaken to our thirst sometimes you can not realize you're thirsty and it's only when you start to drink that you realize how thirsty you were and also you cannot realize that you were hungry and it's only when you start eating that you realize just how hungry you were we can pray to god to awaken our thirst our thirst and awaken our hunger feed us with hunger so that we may long to be at that banquet and so that we will be attentive to hearing god's invitation to it so it's an invitation firstly to those who are thirsty and to those who will listen and to those who will realize they have nothing and can simply come and take this for free it's a free banquet but it's also the banquet of a king first thing is it's a free invitation second thing is it's the banquet of a king because in the middle of verse 3 god says i will make an everlasting covenant with you my faithful love god promised to david see i have made him a witness to the peoples a leader and commander of the peoples god made this promise to david the king of israel who we read about in first and second samuel and in particularly in second samuel we read of god making this amazing promise to david and that one will sit on david's throne forever how could that be how could a mere man

sit on that throne forever and it's looking forward to Jesus and so this is this promise being fulfilled in Jesus verse 5 surely you will summon nations you know not and nations that do not know you will hasten to you because of the Lord your God the Holy One of Israel for He has endowed you with splendor Jesus is drawing people from the ends of the earth to Himself and into His church what we see beginning in the book of the Acts of the Apostles is still going on today as those bearing the Gospel take it to the ends of the earth and people are brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ the King the one who is the Son of David who is greater than David who is enthroned and has been endowed with splendor enthroned not on an earthly throne in Jerusalem enthroned in the heavenly Zion above all powers He is summoning people to His glorious feast and so it's an invitation a free invitation to a feast it's the feast of a King King Jesus and it's also an urgent invitation we read in verses six and seven seek the Lord while He may be found call on Him while He is near let the wicked forsake His way and the evil man his thoughts let him turn to the Lord and He will have mercy on him and to our God for He will freely pardon so we hear that this invitation is an urgent call to repentance and as I said before this is in the first instance a call to God's people this verse is often used evangelistically and quite rightly um as a as an urgent plea to people who aren't believers to quickly put their trust in God for we don't know what tomorrow brings and we don't know how long the Lord will be near for so so seek Him now but it's also a call to God's people to come back to Him if we have been in some way straying from God in our thoughts in our hearts in our speech in our actions just in our general direction it's a call to repent and repent means simply to turn and we can see the two aspects to turning in these verses because turning means turning from something and turning to something as well and we see the turning to it's turning to the Lord just seeking His face and turning towards Him often we can feel like we can't do that maybe we feel too ashamed of how far we've fallen or how far we've strayed and we don't want to seek the Lord we want to run from Him but here He's saying run to me come to me while I may be found call on me call out for me while I am near turn to me and in verse 7 we read about what we have to turn away from we turn from sin repentance is turning from sin and turning to the Lord and there's some really bad teaching out there that kind of really emphasizes that this is something you only do when you come to Christ which is far far from it you might

[ 20 : 07 ] ask someone when was the last time you you know you really turn from sin and and turned to christ oh well when i came to the lord but this is something that is done daily done all the time as we catch ourselves in one way or another straying in thought or in word or indeed and there and then turning from that and turning to the lord repentance is an ongoing daily thing that christians are meant to be engaged in turning from sin turning from sin and then it says in verse 7 let him turn to the lord why would we turn to the lord isn't he going to be angry with us isn't he going to say i can't believe you've messed up again no let him turn to the lord and he will have mercy on him and to our god for he will freely pardon there is more grace in god than there is sin in us he is able to this word freely is like abundantly pardon that is there will be nothing left of our sin if we turn to him because he will remove it all from us if we will just listen if we will hear the urgency of this call to turn to seek him while he may be found and to call on him while he is near to forsake whatever it is we've been doing that is displeasing to him and to turn to the lord and he will have mercy on us and he will freely pardon us my thoughts are not your thoughts neither your ways my ways says god because maybe this doesn't make sense to us but it's not for us to make complete sense of it because this is god doing this in his great wisdom his thoughts are so far above our thoughts that they're like the heavens being higher than the earth are his ways higher than our ways and his thoughts our thoughts but this is also a reminder because he's saying there let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts and then he's saying my ways are higher than yours and my thoughts are higher than yours it's reminding us of the holiness of god and the kinds of thoughts and ways that are not acceptable to him for his people to think or to think or to walk in remember how much higher are the thoughts and the ways of god as we seek him we want to walk in his ways and think his thoughts after him and not simply be worldly and carnal in our thoughts and ways we would have them be godly and we would ask god to grant us ways that are like his ways and thoughts that are like his thoughts in our measure as his creatures you might think this sounds amazing this sounds wonderful i want this actually but how can it happen isn't this all dependent on me in some way do i have to make every effort to get to this feast i don't feel like i can actually do it in fact i don't know if i can even turn from these old ways it seems hopeless it seems pointless i wish i could come to the feast but i can't and god says in verse 10 as the rain and the snow come down from heaven imagine that the rain sweeping down and the snow sweeping down from the skies and do not return to it without watering the earth

they accomplish something when they come down don't they they make it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread from the eater that's what rain and snow do they don't return they don't evaporate and go back up into the sky until they've done a job on the earth they water it and make it fruitful god says in verse 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what i desire and achieve the purpose for which i sent it and that is trust me and my word and i will do it just like that rain does a job before it comes back my word when i send it out is not sent out kind of speculatively in the hope it might achieve something god is all-powerful he is sovereign his word will achieve what he says it will and he's saying it will bring you to the feast it will bring you to restoration if you will just listen to him and trust in his word you can't work you can't pay as he said to get to this feast you have to trust that he will do it that his word is powerful and will accomplish the purpose for which he sent it out and if you believe that and if you will return to the lord or come to him for the first time what what's the kind of picture that you can expect um what what does god portray that as being like when you come back when you come back into his presence to enjoy him as you did before or indeed in a way that you've never done yet but now that you have finally come home to the god who made you what will that be like and verses 12 and 13 describe that you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace joy and peace what are we lacking so fundamentally in our lives a lasting joy and a lasting peace and that's what's promised by god in this passage if we'll just come and admit we've got nothing and say i'm i'm here i'm here for the feast we'll get joy and peace and we'll be led forth in it by him and then look at this picture of all creation celebrating the mountains and hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree and instead of briars the myrtle will grow what's this a picture of well it's a picture of restoration isn't it and that's what we're being invited to restored fellowship with god this picture of restoration describes the creation without the effect of the curse on it it was thorns and thistles that came in as a result of humanity's fall into sin but instead we see a picture here of creation being released from that curse and rejoicing again and the trees are as is as if they're clapping their hands

and there are none of these weeds anymore instead it's only beautiful plants and flowers that will grow that's a picture of restoration which we can enjoy now and relish and savor now and just draw such strength and joy and peace from now but it's also a picture of what's to come the new heavens and the new earth a creation a new creation where there is no curse and no effect of the curse that we will see in creation who gets the glory in all of this well we've just seen it's a free feast that he has paid for and that he has done everything necessary to bring us to it's his word that accomplishes it and so at the end of verse 13 this will be for the lord's renown it's god who is glorified in this and it will be an everlasting sign which will not be destroyed all the joys and the pleasures of this life do pass but this joy this pleasure will be everlasting it cannot be destroyed it's imperishable because it's something god has done how can we get this free feast what's the catch surely it must cost us something no it doesn't cost us but it cost christ everything he paid it's interesting that it's just a couple of chapters back in isaiah 53 we read of the cost in isaiah 53 we read he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace the peace which is offered us was upon him and by his wounds we are healed we all like sheep have gone astray each of us has turned to his own way and the lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all he was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth he was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is silent he did not open his mouth by oppression and judgment he was taken away and who can speak of his descendants for he was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people he was stricken he was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death though he had done no violence nor was any deceit in his mouth you see the one who has experienced the complete withdrawal of god's favor of god's blessing so that we can be restored to it permanently permanently so that the feast for us is free if we will simply but listen and turn and come because it goes on it was the lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer and though the lord makes his life a guilt offering he will see his offspring and prolong his days and the will of the lord will prosper in his hand after the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities

therefore i will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors for he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors that is how the feast is free and always will be free because the price the great price has already been paid the sin that prevents us from coming into the fullness and the the satisfying joy of god's display of god's presence has been removed by jesus if we will but turn and trust in him again if we know him let us pray that we would be restored to the joy of our first love and of placing him first in all of our lives but not just that in our churches has the church been laboring on what does not satisfy has it been spending its money on that which is not bread has it been doing what it's not supposed to be doing at this expense of what it is supposed to be doing which is to hold out the word of life to a dying world to hold out the light of life to a world in darkness and to be utterly focused and zealous in doing that has the church forgotten the God that it's supposed to reflect out into this world a gracious



God and a holy God and not reflected that sufficiently not lived in that way you know as we come to think about what we need to repent of it's easy to look at others but in any call to repentance it starts with yours truly no person could call others to repentance without first feeling the weight of that upon his own soul or he would be an utter hypocrite and a Pharisee and particularly as a minister or a church leader it's often with the leaders that these sins come in in the first place which make Christ chastise his church and so the soul searching the self examination and the desire to be granted thirst again and to come to the waters and forsake everything else for the sake of getting to that feast and delighting in God first and foremost that that must be brought home to me and to my heart before I expect it to take place in anyone else's and so it's a word to me as to anyone else is to be found on our knees more in the coming weeks asking Lord make me thirsty and then remind me of the invitation to the feast where all my thirst will be quenched make me hungry and then remind me that I'm invited if I will but listen and turn to come to be fully satisfied in you

[ 35 : 59 ] Lord let me mourn over whatever is in me that has offended you but then bring me to a knowledge of it and grant me the repentance that will lead me away from it and back into fellowship closer fellowship with you lead me in the way everlasting rather than there's nothing wrong here God isn't saying anything to the church that we might not want to hear at the moment because it'll just be a downer and a pain let's just get on with it and tell ourselves the church is doing great right now and there's nothing wrong we have no need of anything and aren't we doing well with all this technology but rather to listen to what the spirit is saying to the churches that we might be truly blessed through listening because chastisement is always for our good if we are in Christ

Jesus let us listen let us thirst and then let us come and buy wine and milk without money and without cost let our souls delight in the richest of fear which can only be found in the presence of God through close communion with him amen amen through