

# Isaiah 55:8-11

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us turn now to words we'll find in the Old Testament in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 55, and we may take up our reading from verse 6.

Isaiah 55, reading from verse 6. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man 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. And the words from verse 8. 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 are your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down in the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

[ 1 : 20 ] So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me, boy, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

A few weeks ago, if you recall, we attempted to study this chapter, well-known chapter, 55th chapter of Isaiah.

And we have reached the seventh verse, and I want to resume our studies this evening.

Let's just try to tie together a few loose ends from the preceding verses, in which the Lord through the apostle brings to our attention our present opportunity, which is to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near.

The inference is very clear, that while the opportunity presents itself to us, we should avail ourselves of it.

[ 2 : 49 ] Then he goes on to bring before us this pressing requirement, that if we are to seek the Lord and call upon him, that we are to forsake our ways and our thoughts and to return unto the Lord.

In other words, as the verses before us here tonight will indicate again, the Lord says before us clearly the way in which we are to return to himself.

We are to renounce our own way of thinking, and our own way of acting, with reference to the salvation that God offers to us.

He makes it very clear here, that if we are to return in faith to him, it must be by renouncing, whatever it is, be it thought or action, that stands between us and himself as our Savior.

Now that's very clearly enunciated in verse 7. But for our particular purpose tonight, we move on to look at the precious promise that is given to all who thus return to the Lord.

[ 4 : 19 ] He will have mercy upon such, and our God will abundantly pardon. Now this is a great encouragement for every one of us here tonight.

The Lord extends to us this two-fold offer of promise, mercy and pardon. Now of course, as you appreciate, there is a difference between mercy and pardon.

When the Lord speaks and offers mercy to us, he speaks to people who recognize both the guilt and the misery of their sin.

You know what, in that marvelous answer to the question, what is the effectual calling, the Shorter Catechism reminds us of this, that the Holy Spirit convinces us, in our effectual calling of both sin and misery.

It isn't just that we are sinners, it isn't just that we are guilty as sinners before God. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

[ 5 : 36 ] But sin has so affected us, so influenced us, that we cannot, of ourselves, return unto the Lord.

We just can't do it. The gospel bids us believe, and we know that there is no salvation, unless we believe. But we can't believe, that is our misery.

And here God comes to the sinner, with his gracious and glorious offer, I will have mercy, on him who returns.

He will forgive our guilt, and he will enable us, he will strengthen us, to respond to himself.

Mercy meets us, in the depth of our guilt, and in the depth, of our misery. And that's not all. He will abundantly, pardon.

[ 6 : 41 ] Not only will he have pity upon us, not only will he relieve us, in our misery, not only will he forgive, but he will also, pardon.

Now I think you would agree that, pardon introduces us, to the idea, surely of the basis, upon which, God will have mercy.

It answers the question, how can God, forgive me, as a sinner? I have no claims, upon his mercy. I know that I'm a sinner.

But how can God, forgive me? How can he extend, mercy to me, and remain, what he is? How can that mercy, be real?

He will abundantly, pardon. It suggests, the ground upon, which sin, is forgiven.

[ 7 : 44 ] He extends to us, a free, and a just, pardon. On this basis, that God himself, in our nature, took our place, took our sins, upon himself, took our place, took our misery, died our death.

God was in Christ, reconciling the world, unto himself. This is the great, message of salvation. The great, offer of pardon, is extended, fully, and freely, to every, sinner, who comes, because Christ, took the place, of the sinner.

So the Bible, speaks in these terms. God is just, and the justifier, of him, who believes, in Jesus. Paul again, in the same letter, puts it another way.

Who will lay anything, to the charge, of God's elect? It is God, who justifies. Who is he, that condemns? It is Christ, that died, yea rather, that is risen, again.

You know, that pardon, may be extended, without any basis, at all, being given, for the extension, of that pardon. But when God, comes to us, with the offer, of pardon, he makes it, abundantly clear, that he himself, can extend it, justly, and offer it, justly, and offer it, freely.

[ 9 : 23 ] Because at the heart, of the gospel, of grace, is this, great fact, that in the history, of this world, God, came in our nature, took our sins, and died, our death.

He will, pardon, and that's not all. He will, abundantly, pardon. There is an abundance, in this part. There are many ways, in which you could, consider this. Think of it, from the point of view, which the apostle says, how shall we escape, if we neglect, so great salvation. Think of the planning, that would do it.

Think of the source, from which it flows, from the throne, of God on high. Think of the blessings, with which it comes. Think of what it cost him, to give himself, for us, that pardon, may be extended to us.

Think of its value. Think of its fullness. Think of its freeness. Think of its copiousness. The rivers that flow, from the presence of God, to you and to me tonight, he will, abundantly, pardon.

[ 10 : 44 ] Now that's the precious promise, that verse 7, brings, to our attention. Now, we come to the words, of our text tonight.

For my thoughts, are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord, far as the heavens, are higher than the earth, so are my ways, higher than your ways, my thoughts on your ways.

Far, as the snow, the rain comes down, the storm from heaven, returns not thither, but watereth the earth, makes it bring forth, and bud, give seed to the sword, bread, feet, and so shall my word be, that goeth forth, out of my mouth.

It will accomplish, the purpose, for which I have sent it. Now, looking at the context, I think that we are warranted, to believe, that we are to consider, these words, as addressed, to people, who may have thoughts, about returning, in penitence, to the Lord.

And who may very well, be confronted, with the possibility, of God, forgiving their sins. And who may be, asking questions, as to the way, in which, God, will forgive their sins, and pardon.

[12:10] And so we have this, encouraging assurance, which I think is, also accompanied, with a warning note. My thoughts, are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord.

Now, there are two ways, which I would like, to approach, these words. The first, I will deal with, very briefly, because, I dealt with already, in the, when we considered, verses 6, and 7, of this chapter, a four-minute ago.

There is a warning note, struck here, and I think that, it is along, these lines, that these words, are addressed, to counter, the way, that some people, think, concerning, forgiveness, and salvation. for example, that they can, come to the Lord, take salvation, and continue, thinking, and living, the way, they always did.

Now, verse 7, gives the rub, to that argument. There is no way, in which, we are allowed, to think, or to act, like that. Sin, and salvation, from that point of view, are, are irreconcilable, because, you and I, are confronted, with this, that on this issue, we must, make a choice, there is no other way.

[13:57] Salvation, is not, negotiable. There is no movement, on both parties, here, on the part of the sinner, and the part of God. This is not, this is not like, a negotiating principle, between people, who are at, who are at loggerheads, like you have, for example, the present royal strike, where you have one party, making this stand, and another party, making the other stand, and the only way, in which you are ever, going to get reconciliation, is that both parties, must move, from their own grounds, and meet.

The Bible, has allowed you to think, that you as a sinner, and God, as a saviour, can come together, and meet halfway.

We've got to come, all the way. We've got to meet, God's terms, and God's demands. Let the wicked, forsake his way, and the unrighteous man, his thoughts.

And if you have, any other thought, of salvation, God says, you must give it up. Your thoughts are not mine. My ways, are not yours. You may think, that salvation is attainable, in that way, but I say to you, that it isn't.

You must come to him. Come now, says the Lord. Let us reason together. Though your sins, be as scarred, they shall be white as snow. Though they be right like crimson, they shall be as wool.

[15:28] God has provided, salvation for us, through faith in Christ, and to avail ourselves of it, we must come to him. That's his thought, and that is his way.

But then secondly, as I indicated, there are people, who have very serious thoughts, about availing themselves, of the salvation, that God provides, that God offers.

But they are obsessed, and very often oppressed, with fear. For example, the fear that God cannot, forgive their sins, and that God will not, forgive their sins.

And I think, it is in that light, that these words, are particularly to be understood, that they are given here, to meet the doubts, and the misgivings, and even the despair, that some people may have, concerning, their return, or their coming, to God.

For example, you are here tonight, you know that you are a sinner. You have become victor, of your sin, for quite some time. God has been speaking, to you in various ways.

[16:54] And there is this pull, this tug, on your, on your heart strings. But you have got problems, even as you are sitting, in church, things may be alright, but then you go home, and you go to work, and the doubts begin, to arise, in your heart.

Will he pardon me? What about the character, of the sins, that I have committed? Or perhaps, it may have been narrowed down, to one particular sin.

And you are obsessed, with this great sin. I remember, one man telling us, at the Kirk session, some years ago, that he laboured, under this fear, and this belief, for years, that he had, committed the unpardonable sin, and that God, would never, forgive his sin.

And he was kept, in bondage, with that thought, and with that fear. Others perhaps, obsessed with the number, of sins, that he committed.

How can God, forgive these sins? And the problem, very often, with people like that, is this. That as they think, like that, the devil, will so, use these thoughts, that he will move them, into an entrenched, position of, unbelief.

[18:25] And they make, unbelief, a merit, for not coming to God, and a pillow, for not coming, by saying, what's the point, what's the point, of my coming, when you think, of the kind of person, I am.

The sin, that I have committed, the sins, that I have committed, the number, that I have committed, and the years, that I've lived, committing them.

Well, says the Lord, these may be, your thoughts, but they are not mine. He will abundantly pardon, he will have mercy, upon, the penitent.

Others, perhaps tonight, are discouraged, from coming to the Lord, not only because, of what they have done, to themselves, but maybe, what they have done, to others.

The way, their sins, and their practices, have not only, marred their own life, but marred the life, of others. And I think, of many people, with whom they used, to associate, and who were responsible, for, bringing their lives, almost a brink, of ruin.

[ 19 : 42 ] How could God, forgive them? Well, God says, that he will. These are, his thoughts. What about, the feeling that you have?

You've been so unfaithful, when you think, of the many promises, you made, and the many vows, that you gave. There are many times, you sat in this church, or in some other church, or somewhere else, and you resolved, from now on, my life is to be given, to him, and it wasn't. And you've proved, unfaithful, to what you said. Your heart, has been so disobedient. There have been so many, backslidings, in your life. There's a great distance, he developed now, between you, and God.

What's the point, of coming? Well, my friend, you've been, thought under your feet, because God says, you come, and you will receive, forgiveness, and full pardon.

Let your sense, of unworthiness, not keep your back. You may say, I am unworthy, God agrees, but unworthiness, is no barrier, to the exercise, of his favor.

[ 20 : 56 ] You're not good enough. None of us is. But let that, not keep you, from coming. That's not his thoughts. After all, he came, not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Your lack of knowledge, you're so ignorant, of the things of God. Very well then, come that you may obtain, knowledge, from him. Your heart is so hard, you've got such a sense, of hopelessness, in your own life.

These may be your own thoughts, but they're not his. And finally this, and perhaps this is the most crucial, of all.

You don't doubt, that God forgives sins. You know, that he forgives sins. You've seen it, in the lives of others. You've seen lives, restored, by his grace.

You've seen the wonder, of his grace at work. Perhaps, in your own home, in your own family. With some people, that you work with, or study with, or associate with, in one way or another.

[ 21 : 58 ] Of course, yes, are given then. God has been good, and gracious to them. Ah, yes. But the great problem is, will he do that, for me?

You see, isn't it strange, how we can believe, the general, the truths, of the word of God, generally, but when it comes, to applying them, to ourselves, that's another matter.

Will he forgive me? Of course, he has saved these people. But will he do it for me?

Well, you remember this. Unless you come to him, your sin will never be pardoned.

I know there are many difficulties, there are many impossibilities, on your side, and these are the thoughts that you have, determining the way that you live.

[ 23 : 01 ] There are no such thoughts on his side. There is nothing impossible with God. And these words, as someone puts it, bring before us, the magnificence, of God's forgiveness, and God's pardon, so that you, tonight, can say with another, it is no secret, what God can do.

What he's done for others, he can do for you. Your thoughts, are not his. His ways, are not yours.

Let not these thoughts that you have tonight, concerning yourself, and there are many other things I could have raised. Don't let them act as an obstacle, you're coming to it. And remember, he has provided the way, clearly, the way of salvation, is clearly set before you, his way, through faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Never mind thinking about, oh, if only I could be better tonight, if only I could pray more, if only I knew the Bible better, if only I could come to the prayer meeting, if only, if only, the way is through faith in Christ, and you, are to come.

And look at what, look at how he illustrates this. For he says, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts, than your thoughts.

[ 24 : 41 ] You know, I think the idea here is this, that there's a great distance between heaven, and the earth. I suppose today, it's measurable, in human terms.

I suppose, simply, we could tell me, the discipline, between tennis, at night, and the heavens, as we see them. If we were to tell me, the distance wouldn't mean very much to me.

How many million, billion miles, I have the foggiest idea, but it wouldn't mean very much to me. All I know is this, that there's a fantastic distance, between us here, and the heavens above.

The great, the sheer greatness, of the distance. And there's one thing certain, I know, that I couldn't make my way, from here tonight, unaided, to that particular point, that they can measure for me. And that's the point here. What may seem impossible, for you, is not impossible, for God.

[ 25 : 51 ] His ways, his thinking, so much greater, and so much higher, than us. Who could ever, says the apostle, who could ever have devised, such a scheme, of salvation?

There was no man, no body of man, into whose mind, the thought, could ever have entered, that God, could save the world, the way, in which he determined, to save it.

Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath entered, the mind of man, what God hath prepared, for them, that love him. when he's speaking there, of the provision of salvation, from all eternity, the record of which, we have here, in his world, tonight.

And you don't have to, exercise, any great, spiritual, mountaineering experience, to reach him. This is the wonder of it.

God, he, has come to us. He has come, in his own son, into the history, of this world.

[ 27 : 01 ] Therefore, my friend, think of the greatness of it, the wonder of this provision, and let not the sheer greatness, and the abundance, and the freeness, of this mercy, deter you, from coming, to receive it.

Don't doubt, its reality. Don't linger, and haggle, over the terms, that he has, that he has presented. Don't question, the reality of this, this mercy, and this pardon.

It is so great, not only the height, from which it comes, but the depth, to which it reaches.

And there is no sinner, and I make bold, to say this night, surely in the authority, of the word of God, there is no sinner, within these four walls, tonight, who is beyond, the reach, of the greatness, of this mercy.

this pardon, and this forgiveness. How far away, do you feel yourself, from God tonight? Where have your sins, led you?

[ 28 : 23 ] Where are you? Well, my friend, this is the great message, of hope, and encouragement.

God, can reach you. There's a final thought, here I want to deal with, in verses 10 to 11. And I'm going to put it, like this. that the forgiveness, and the mercy, and the pardon, of God, are brought, to us, in the word, of his grace.

There is a very, and an inseparable, connection, between the mercy, and the pardon, the forgiveness, that is provided, for Christ, and the word, of the gospel, that brings us together, yet again, in this building, tonight.

For he says, as the rain, comes down, in the soul, from heaven, and returns, not to the, but watereth the earth, and maketh it, bring forth, and bud, that it may give, seed to the soul, and bread to eat it, so, shall my word be, that goes forth, out of my mouth.

It shall not return, unto me, why? It shall accomplish, that which I please, it shall prosper, in the thing, whereto I sent it. Now, why should he, introduce, his word here?

[ 29 : 46 ] Unless, it is to assure you, and me tonight, that this is what the word, comes to us with. And moreover, this, is how the word, operates.

He illustrates it. It's wonderful, how the Lord, as it were, condescends, to our understanding here, and shows us, how this works.

He has spoke, with the grace of the mercy, and the pardon available, and here it says, look, he says, consider the discipline, you and heaven. And this mercy, comes to you from there, it is so great, and greater, than that distance.

It can reach to you, and cover your sins, no matter how great, and how numerable they are.

Moreover, he says, the word, comes to you, with this offer.

And this is how it operates. Look at this, he says, the rain falls, from the heavens, and waters the earth. The snow falls, from heaven, and covers the earth.

[ 31 : 00 ] And you ask yourself, why does it rain? Why should there be snow? Because it is all part, and partial, of God's purpose, for the earth, bringing forth fruit.

The earth needs the moisture, that is in the rain, and in the snow. And he says, that is how the word comes. It comes from him, and it flows down, it falls down, into your heart.

It moistens, and softens, the heart. So that in the purpose of God, it may accomplish, that which he has determined, for it.

And this is our great encouragement, my great encouragement, as a preacher of the gospel tonight. Week after week, after week, sermon after sermon, after sermon, chapter, chapter after chapter, to the same people, year in, year out.

And you wonder, is the word of God, having any effect, whatsoever? and we know, from himself, that it has.

[ 32 : 21 ] Now how does it operate? Well I suppose, that in Stornoway, amongst other places, there are times, when you and I, complain about the rain. We don't nowadays, complain so much, about the snow.

We don't see it so much, as we used to. Covering the earth, for weeks on end maybe. And as the rain falls, maybe a drop or two, maybe a shower or two, perhaps when you don't want it, maybe a veritable downpour, very often you have, for days and days, the moon is flooded, the fields are covered, and people look out, and they wonder, and they shake their head, and they feel so uncomfortable, they complain, this is not, how they would want it to be.

But then you see, it is also necessary, in God's purpose. When the harvest comes, they see then the purpose, of the rain, and the snow, in days gone by.

This is how the word of God operates. Perhaps, my friend, just a drop or two, from time to time, perhaps you felt uncomfortable, didn't want this, maybe you shook it off.

Perhaps a shower, here and there, dropping into your heart, into your mind, into your consciousness. Perhaps with some, it came as a, real downpour, and you felt, uncomfortable.

[ 34 : 01 ] You wished it wasn't like that, but you see, the word was doing business, with your soul. And over a period of time, you recognized, the reason for it all.

So that you may come to him, and bring forth fruit, to the glory, of his name. I think that is a, fortunate illustration, satisfies me, because I think, this is how the Lord works.

with, his own word. Look at you here tonight. Look at how the world, has been doing business with you, for so long.

Look at how, this has affected your life. And look now tonight, at what you see, you felt uncomfortable, and you wish that, that wasn't the case, but now you see, that it was so necessary, and you thank God, that the word came to you, and that the word spoke to you, and that the word penetrated, through the hardness, and the indifference, of your heart, and your mind, and your conscience, made you think.

Until under, it's irresistible power, you were brought, in faith, and penitence, to himself.

[ 35 : 26 ] Oh, my friend, I don't think there's a minister, on the face of God's earth, who would climb up, pulpit step, if he thought, that the blessing, of the world, was in his hand.

That which enables him, to climb, two, three, four, ten steps, into a platform, like this, is that he knows, what God, can do, with, and through the word.

This, is his encouragement. Not his own ingenuity, not his own earnestness, not his own pleadings, not his own abilities, or his own oratory.

They are nothing. God works, with, and through the word, and we are put as, miserable, instruments, in his hand.

It will not, return on to the boy. Now I know, I take it, that here it is the word, in the hand of the spirit, in its saving activity. I know, I know, the word of God, hardens, as well as softens.

[ 36 : 43 ] We are either, a saver of life, unto life, or a saver of death, unto death. The word of God, comes either, thrilling the soul, or it comes, condemning the soul, to a lost eternity.

I know that. But in the saving activity of God, in the life of the sinner, he comes, and he uses, the word.

And I ask you tonight, this, has the word, had this effect, upon your own life? And, take this with you as well. This really, helps me.

So, shall my word be, that goeth forth, out of my mouth. You see, it is so, as you'll get a picture, of God, where in heaven above, the rain is sent, and the snow is sent.

And he knows, that he has a purpose, for sending that, for the good of the world, and the good of the people in it. In the course of time, that snow, and that rain, has operated, with other things, so that, seed, is given to the farmer, to sow, in the next process.

[ 37 : 59 ] So that bread, comes to your table, and to mine. And that's the way, it is of the word, he says. And the idea here, is this God, is as it were standing, watching his own word, falling into the heart.

Knowing that, it is going to accomplish, the purpose, which he has sent. You think of this tonight. Think of the millions of words, that have been spoken, since man entered into this world. Think of the millions, and the billions of words, that have been written. The way that people, communicate with themselves. the things they say, the things they sing, all the billions of words, in the world tonight.

God, seeing it, and accomplishing the purpose, for which he has sent it.

God, oh, what a wonderful thought, and what encouragement, that even as you listen, to the gospel tonight, God in heaven, is watching, and guarding, and guarding, and guarding, his own word, falling into your heart.

[ 39 : 23 ] Hence, the importance, of giving it to it. the importance, of doing, what it commands you. And the importance, of acting, upon, what he brings, before you, in it.

I think it was Dr. Shedd, who used the illustration, once of the, told the story, rather, of the, the, missionary, who gave a gospel tract, to a young man.

Perhaps some of you, have received them, on the streets of Stornow, from time to time. If you walk, through the castle grounds, you'll see many, a gospel tract, thrown on the ground. No doubt, they were handed, to someone, on the street there, some Friday, or Saturday evening.

Well, this missionary, gave a tract, to a young man. And the missionary went, he threw it, into the fire. But he knows, that as a tract, curled up in the flames, he noticed, as I, lighted on the words, that were written, on the tract.

Heaven and earth, shall pass away. My word, shall not, pass away. And as these words, turned to ashes, in the fire, so Dr. Shedd said, so they turned, to fire, in his heart.

[ 40 : 48 ] And he found, no rest, till he found, rest, through faith, in the Lord, Jesus Christ. It is for that purpose, that God, has sent his word, to you, to bring you, and to bring me, to faith, in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christ. And you know, God will be next week, when we come to consider, the last two verses, of this chapter, you will see, again as it is brought, before us in pictorial language, this marvelous imagery. You will see, the effect, that that word has, as it accomplishes, God's purpose, in the life, of the individual.

The wilderness scene, with which the word, with which the chapter, begins, is changed, into a glorious scene, of fruitfulness, and beauty, as fruit, is brought forth, in that arid, desert soul, of man, to the glory, of God, as the gospel, is blessed, savingly, to his heart.

Well, my friend, as it comes to you, yet again tonight, from himself, albeit, to a very incompetent channel, nevertheless, you ask yourself this, have you, have you, been led, in faith, and penitence, to experience, the forgiveness, and the abundant, mercy, of the God, who speaks to you.

[ 42 : 46 ] As I said earlier, whatever your thoughts, may be tonight, as you consider, coming to it, let none of them, obstruct your progress, he will receive you, and he will abundantly, pardon.

Let us pray. O Lord, O God, have mercy upon our soul, and bless us as we, lift our heart to thee, at the end of this service, do thou touch us, in thy mercy, so that we might respond, in love, and in penitence, and in faith, to thyself.

Part us this night, with thy blessing, and forgive our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.