

# A Message for All

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read, Isaiah chapter 55, and let us read again at verse 6.

Isaiah 55, reading at verse 6. 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, for he will 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.

I suppose it would be true to say that the great activity that any person can be involved in or engaged in is the activity of seeking the Lord.

[ 1 : 05 ] Wanting to know the Lord. Wanting to know more of the Lord. And time spent seeking the Lord is never, ever, ever wasted time.

If you are somebody here tonight who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, let me assure you that if you spend time seeking the Lord, it will never, ever, ever be a waste of time. Even although you may miss something, even although other people may say it is a waste of time, even although the devil may whisper, and he probably will, that it's a waste of time, it most certainly is not.

And equally for those who have already come to know the Lord, that seeking of the Lord doesn't stop. Sometimes we tend to think that once a person is converted, once a person is saved, that that's the end of seeking the Lord.

That you just seek the Lord, and then once you've found him, you stop seeking the Lord. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. And all believers in here tonight know that it's not true, that we stop seeking the Lord once we've found him.

[ 2 : 17 ] And we continue to seek him in order to know more and more and more of him. Now, this prophet, as we know here, the prophet Isaiah, has been often termed the gospel prophet, because in his prophecy and in his writings, he gives such a clear view of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His view of Jesus is so graphic, and of his presentation of what Christ has done, is so quite extraordinary that you would almost believe that Isaiah had been alive during the life of Jesus, and had been witness, not just to his life, but also a witness to his death.

That you would almost think that Isaiah had been there at the time when Jesus was put to death, because his prophecy is so powerful, so graphic regarding the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as we know, this chapter opens with one of the great gospel invitations, where we are invited over and over and over again. There's a threefold invitation to come to all who thirst, come to the waters, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

And it is speaking here about the great blessing that the gospel brings. The blessing of peace. The blessing of satisfaction.

[ 3 : 47 ] These two things are joined together. You cannot have really the one without the other. Because satisfaction and peace, they really, really go together.

And I believe tonight that throughout this town and this island, and indeed throughout all the nations of this world, at the very heart of what people are searching for, they're searching for peace.

They're searching for satisfaction. That's what people want in life, isn't it? They want to be satisfied. Well, this is what the gospel offers.

This is what Jesus offers. And if you've sat here over the years and you've said to yourself, I've heard that over and over again, have you done anything about it? Don't close your mind to it.

Don't close your soul to this wonderful truth. Just the fact that you've heard it so often doesn't mean that I just switch off.

[ 4 : 48 ] Because this is life. This is what life is all about. Because people are searching and struggling and striving to find peace and to find satisfaction.

But far too often, they're searching in the wrong place. And so Isaiah says, Come, come, come. Nobody can ever accuse the Lord of being mean with regard to the offer of salvation.

The offer of salvation is there for everybody who will hear it. And at the end of the day, this is the great truth. And you know, the wonderful thing about the gospel is that it is suitable for everyone. That makes it unique. It is suitable for every single person. Now, you cannot say that of other things. You cannot say it, for instance, of music.

There are some people you can play the most beautiful music in the world. And some people will not appreciate it. Some people are tone deaf. And that music is irrelevant.

[ 5 : 55 ] It means nothing to them. There are other people who are color blind. And you could hold out some of the most beautiful artistic work. And again, it doesn't really mean that much to them.

Many people don't possess gifts so that they're equipped for every conceivable craft in this world or to be able to compete and play in every game.

People do not have gifts that are going to bring them to achieve and all the sort of different human attainments in this world. But this one thing, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is suitable for every person. It doesn't matter whether a person is old or young. It doesn't matter what they've done, where they've been. It doesn't matter their background. It doesn't matter their skin color.

It doesn't matter whether they live in a palace or the prison. This gospel is suitable for everyone and transforms people's lives. Every person who has received Jesus Christ, their life has been transformed by the power of Jesus.

[ 7 : 06 ] And that's what makes this gospel unique. Because right throughout this world, there have been people from every conceivable nation, from every background, people who have done the most horrendous things.

And tonight, they are shining lights for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is unique in this sense. And so this is a message for all to hear.

Now, we're told here at the beginning here, Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Now, in order to seek the Lord, I suppose there are different things that we could say that we have to do.

But I'm just going to confine it, in a sense, to what it is saying here. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Seek him. How do we seek him? Well, we seek him by prayer.

Maybe you're saying to yourself, Oh, well, that immediately poses a kind of a problem for me.

Because when I hear this, that you've got to pray, I say to myself, Well, I'm not very good at prayer.

[ 8 : 13 ] I don't have a great theological knowledge. I don't have maybe the right format. I'm not too sure how to string the right words together in order for me to address the Lord.

Well, it tells us here how to seek him. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him.

So this seeking involves calling. Now, that explains something. It explains itself. We use that expression frequently in life, that we're going to call someone.

For instance, if we're going to phone, how often we're going to phone somebody, and you'll say, Oh, hold on. I've got to make a quick call. That's it.

You dial up, and you speak to somebody very briefly, but you've called. We have to, if there's an emergency, we're told to call 999.

[ 9 : 17 ] Now, we don't just dial 999 and don't say anything. When we dial 999, we are making that call in order to tell what's wrong, so that there's somebody listening.

So you see, straight away, when it tells us that we are to call upon him, we get the idea that we are to call to the Lord.

And it can be, we can take a long time calling, or it can be incredibly brief. I would imagine an emergency 999 phone call is very brief.

You don't have time to explain an awful lot, because you are wanting the emergency services to deal with the situation as quickly as possible. But the fact is, you're still speaking, and you're telling what's wrong.

And that's what the Lord is saying to us we're to do. He says, I want you to come, and I want you to tell, I want you to call upon my name. I want you to call to me, and tell me.

[ 10 : 20 ] And if you, and that's what the Lord wants, he wants us to be honest with him. If you're confused about the whole thing of salvation, tell him. If you feel hurt in your heart over things that

are happening in life, tell him.

If you feel that there's a great sense of injustice in your life and in your circumstances, tell him. If you feel that you just can't figure things out, and you're confused even by who he is, tell him.

The one thing, don't remain silent. This is what the Lord is saying. Tell him. Call upon him. And it tells us that we are to seek him and to call upon him.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. So when can he be found? Well, call upon him while he is near. Now, of course, in one sense, the Lord is always near because his presence, we know, fills the whole earth.

but there are times when the Lord is nearer to us than at other times. I believe, for instance, that one of the times that the Lord is nearer is in the time of our youth.

[ 11 : 35 ] I believe that's one of the reasons why the Bible says, remember your creator in the days of your youth. Now, in some ways, don't put an awful lot into build your, whatever, just on statistics, but those who have done research into when people become Christians, they find that the larger number or the largest number come in the first third of a person's life.

And then that the next will come in the second third of their life. And that the least number will come in the last third of a person's life. So it's very obvious from the fact that the majority of people come to faith in Jesus Christ in the earlier part of their life.

Now, I know that there will be many in the church here and they will say, well, it wasn't in the first third, it was in the second third of my life that I came to the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, that's wonderful.

And there will be some who will say, you know, it's actually been in the latter part of my life.

And that again is wonderful and we give thanks to God for his grace. But the fact remains that more come when they are younger. So may I say specifically at this moment to the young people, to those who are in the earlier part of their life, this is a time when the Lord is near to you.

When you are more sensitive, more impressionable, where you are more, as it were, where I know that the natural heart is enmity against God and yet, it is a time when the greatest impressions are made.

[ 13 : 31 ] So please do not harden your heart if you're here as a young person tonight. Do not harden your heart under the gospel, but be thankful that you are in the place where Jesus can be found when you are young.

again, another time when the Lord is near or specifically near is often in a time of trouble, a time of loss, bereavements, accidents, troubles, these kind of things because one of the things, I'm sure we're all conscious of this, is when troubles come close to us, it's often a time of a reality check of life.

It makes us stop and rethink life through. And I'm sure many of us have been at places and points, kind of crossroads in our life, where we've been forced to stop and to think.

We've been maybe hurtling along and life's been fine and all of a sudden, bang! And something's come really close to you and really shaken you to the core and it's a time when you say to yourself, you just realize life isn't just what I thought it was.

and sometimes impressions are created and you feel a drawing to the gospel and you're aware of your own vulnerability and you're aware of your own the fact that you say to yourself, you know, that could have been me.

[ 15 : 02 ] I could have been in eternity now and where I have been? Have we ever stopped and asked ourselves these things? I'm sure we have. Well, that's a time when the Lord is near.

He's speaking to us. And if there's anybody here tonight and they're in that kind of situation and they're conscious that the Lord is speaking to them, please do as our text says, seek him while he may be found because he will be found while he is near.

Call upon him while he is near. And again, the Lord is here near right now. Right now. How can we say that?

Because we are, he has his own promise on it that where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is there in the midst to bless. This is one of the gospel opportunities. When we prayerfully open God's word, when we read it, when we open it out and preach it, we are conscious, we are aware that the Lord is here.

he is just like in the time when he was passing by. Remember going through Jericho, making his way to Jerusalem. And Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, he heard Jesus was passing by.

[16:18] That was a time when Jesus was near. It was a time when he could be found. And Bartimaeus saw this as an opportunity even though he was blind and he began to cry out.

Well, people told him to be quiet. But he didn't. He didn't stay quiet. He continued to shout, Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy upon me.

He did exactly what this text is telling us to do. And Jesus stopped. And we know the rest. Jesus opened his eyes. And Jesus will do the same if we call upon him.

So we are to call while he is near. Don't leave it to some other time. And may I say to anybody in here tonight whose heart is soft under the gospel and is saying to themselves, oh, I'm going to leave this for some other time.

Remember, you and I have no guarantee that there will be another time. We always want to think to ourselves that there will be.

[17:32] And particularly if you're young, and particularly if you're in health and strength tonight, you probably think and you hope that you have many years, and I do hope that you have.

But we don't know. Life is so uncertain. So don't put it off. I believe that if we could hear the testimony, if we can call it that, from some souls in hell tonight, that some would be saying, just as the rich man who was there, and he had that testimony about his missed opportunities and his brothers and all these things, that there would be some saying, you know, there was a day when my heart was so soft under the gospel, I was so touched, but I was always putting it off for another date, for another time, and then one day, time ran out.

Please don't play with your soul. But then we're told in verse 7, continuing this theme of seeking the Lord, we're told that seeking the Lord also involves something else, forsaking wicked ways and wicked thoughts.

In other words, if we are serious about seeking the Lord, then we have to turn from the ways that are offensive to him, and even the thoughts that are offensive to him.

You see, when a person begins to seek the Lord, the Holy Spirit is working in a person's heart. And one of the things that the Holy Spirit does, yes, along with revealing Christ as Savior, reveals something of ourselves to ourself.

[19:33] And we begin to see some of the things, maybe, in our life that are wrong. And we become, as it were, convicted. We have that. You and I know what it's like to be convicted in our heart over certain things.

It might be something you're doing, something you're saying, some particular action, some particular thought, might be some particular idol.

And you know that it's between you and the Lord that it's keeping you from the Lord. The closeness that you had with the Lord is not there anymore.

before, and there is this conviction growing in your heart. This is what it is. This is keeping you back from me.

That's what the Lord is saying. Is he saying that to any of us in here tonight? I don't know what it may be. There might be lots of things. But that's part of what the Holy Spirit does.

[20:34] Convince us, convicts us of certain things. So in order to truly seek the Lord, we've got to deal with these things. if we deliberately and defiantly refuse to deal with these things, then we cannot be seeking the Lord.

We cannot. You cannot seek the Lord at the same time as consistently refuse to deal with these things.

If there are faults and you're aware of them in your life and you are not seeking in any way to deal with them, then you cannot truly be seeking the Lord.

I suppose it's almost in the same way as you might have an alcoholic saying, you know, I really want. And many an alcoholic does say that and means it. But just for instance, there's somebody saying, and he's saying, you know, I really want to get sober.

I want to stop drinking. And at the same time, that person as he's saying that to you, is buying a couple of bottles. and you speak to that person and you say, well, do you want to get sober?

[21:45] And this person is saying, I want to get sober above everything in this world. That's what I want. And yet at the same time, he refuses to separate from the crowd that he drinks with, refuses any form of health, refuses to change or break any particular habit that is part of his whole drinking day and life, won't deal with any of the issues that could in any way try and prevent or to break in some way.

And then you say to Israel, well, this person is saying one thing, but it's very obvious from the way that he's carrying on that his words don't mean anything.

Because if he was serious then he would say, well, right, I will try and move away from these people because they are part of the influence, they're part of my life. In order to break this habit, I've got to move, or I've got to move to another place, or I've got to do something different, or I've got to get some form of help.

And it's the same principle here. We cannot be saying, I am seeking the Lord, and at the same time, involving yourself exactly as we always did with everything that is keeping us back from the Lord.

If the Lord is convincing you, convicting you of anything, and you're refusing to in any way deal with it, then that is going to be a hindrance, A, to you coming to faith in Jesus Christ, and B, as a Christian, developing and growing.

[ 23 : 32 ] we have to deal with these things. And so we find that it says, 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.

Not just his way, but the thoughts. See, God takes note of all our thoughts, and our thoughts can be a massive hindrance to our growth and grace.

Don't think for one moment that our only block to developing and growing as a Christian is our actions, our activities. Our thoughts have a huge part to play about who we are.

As a man, as a person thinks in his heart, that's a real you. How do you spend your day? Are your thoughts bitter, resentful, anger?

Do you look at the good things in people or the bad things? Do you spend your time judging? Are you misrepresenting people in your mind? Are there murderous, envious thoughts?

[ 24 : 37 ] If so, I am fully persuaded that the Lord has convicted you of your thought life often enough. Have you dealt with it? Because we're told in Philippians what we're to do, and of course, you cannot just make a blank mind.

What you've got to do is substitute what is wrong and fill these things with as good. Think on the things that are lovely, that are peaceful, that are of good report.

We're told about that in Philippians. And then we're told, let the wicked forsake its 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.

God, for the actual reading of this, where it says that the Lord will have compassion on him, has the idea that the Lord has actually been dealing in a form of chastisement, and that the Lord is saying, look, I want you back.

And it's like, just in the same way as a parent may be disciplining his or her child in order to restore them to a correct way.

[ 25 : 51 ] And that's what the Lord does with us. You know, the Lord loves us too much just to let us go any old way. It is a sign of not loving. It's just to let someone do whatever they want to do.

A parent who really loves their child, who wants the best for their child, will set out the way that they should go, and will try and guide them in that particular way.

to just allow a child just to go any way they want all the time, doesn't really show the correct concern that there should be.

And that is what the Lord is showing to us. Because he loves us. And we see the compassion of the Lord because he wants us to return. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him.

Maybe you're saying to yourself tonight, ah, I've gone too far away. I don't know where you are tonight. You might be so close to the Lord. You might be far away.

[ 26 : 56 ] You might never have come to the Lord. I don't know where you are. But here is the call. Here is the invitation. Here is the welcome. And don't for one moment think that because of who you are and what you've done and where you've been and all these things, that you've kind of blown it spiritually.

And that the Lord has no place for you. You remember the prodigal son and you remember the father. And what was the father doing all the time? The son was away in the far country wasting everything.

And he had become a total down and out with nothing. What was the father doing? Watching and waiting. Scanning the horizon. Waiting day after day for the return of the son.

And when the son returned, what did the father do? Was he looking out for the big belt? Not at all. Ran to meet him.

And he gave the greatest celebration possible. That's love. And that's what the gospel holds out to us and for us.

[ 28 : 07 ] A love that cannot do enough. And just finally, verses 8 and 9, very, very briefly. This God who welcomes us back and who will abundantly pardon, goes on to say, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord, and so on.

Now we often quote this, and rightly so. We often quote these words, verses 8 and 9, when we face some difficult year, where there's been, say, something hard in our life, something we don't understand, and we say, ah, well, God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts.

Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher, and his thoughts are ours. While that is absolutely true, and it's right for us to quote at a time like that, because that is a fact. But I think in order for us to understand what we have here in its context, verse 8 talks about the ways and the thoughts of God, over against the ways and the thoughts of the unrighteous, in verse 7.

You see, there are two ways, and there are two thoughts. There's the ways and the thoughts of the unrighteous, and the ways and the thoughts of the righteous. So, I believe that part of what is being said here is that in order for us to be brought into the ways and into the thoughts, although at one level we can never be, but in order that our ways and our thoughts will be more in keeping with God's ways and thoughts, we must forsake the unrighteous ways and the unrighteous thoughts.

[ 29 : 59 ] Just as the apostle says about our mind, let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus. That our mind should be moving towards, and it's not, sometimes we say to Shalom, it's not blasphemous saying that our minds are going to become like God's mind.

Well, let us remember that the purpose of God with his people is to shape them and to conform them to himself, to his son Jesus Christ. And so that our ways will be more in keeping with God's ways, that our thoughts will be more in keeping with his thoughts.

Of course there are things we won't understand, because his ways are in the deep, they're past finding out. But, having said that, if we are living in an unrighteous way, and if our thoughts all the time are unrighteous, we are as far from the ways and thoughts of God as the heavens are from the earth.

But the more that our mind and our life is in keeping with God's way, with God's word as is revealed here, the more we are being conformed to the way and to the mind of God.

And I believe that that is what is being taught primarily here. And that is what we are to seek, so that we will have that. And there's so much in Scripture which is showing us.

[ 31 : 40 ] The Apostle Paul was often talking about this mind, the mind being, moving in the direction so that we will be imitators of Christ.

that is what we are to seek. And if we truly seek the Lord and forsake the wicked ways and the wicked thoughts, this is the way that we will be led.

So let us seek him. Let us call upon him. And let us ask for the heart of repentance. You see, through sorrow for sin, biblical repentance is so different to remorse.

biblical repentance draws a passion to the Lord. Biblical repentance draws a passion to the Lord. David is a classic example. David had so sinned, but he was so sorry for his sin. Did his sorrow for his sin drive him away from the Lord?

[ 32 : 42 ] No. It drove him to the Lord. And you will find that in Psalm 51. You can almost see David as close to the Lord as ever he was.

Here is a heart that is broken and thrown absolutely upon the Lord. That's biblical repentance. Seeking to turn away from and seeking the Lord.

Remorse is found in the likes of Judas. Judas also saw that he sinned. But his remorse didn't take him to the Lord.

It took him away from the Lord. That's the difference. Remorse will take you away from God.

Through repentance will draw you to the Lord.

Well may we seek then, seek the Lord and seek the spirit of repentance because here is in this chapter we have all the very heart of the gospel.

[ 33 : 42 ] let us pray. Lord our God we give thanks for this word that is set out before us so clearly.

This word which gives the great invitation to seek the Lord while he may be found and to call upon him while he is near. Lord may we all face up to our own obligations, face up to where we are before the Lord.

We pray to bless us and to keep us and to guide us day by day. Oh Lord we pray for guidance and direction in all the different situations that we face in life.

We thank Lord of the Presbyterian Tuesday and those who have to make decisions regarding calls that have been made. We pray Lord for Reverend Dr. Ian D.

Campbell and Reverend Ian McCaskill who have decisions to make. And we pray to guide them and direct them in these things. Oh Lord watch over us and bless us all and take away our sin in Jesus name we ask it.

[ 34 : 53 ] Amen. Amen.