

⁶ *Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.* ⁷ *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.* ⁸ *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.* ⁹ *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Text: Isaiah 55:6-9 A 5/28/17 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 John 8:12-20 Psalm 130 Resp. Psalm: 25
Hymns: 207 (1, 4-6), 376, 388, 777 (WS)

REPENT, AND BE FORGIVEN

Fellow redeemed in Christ,

Jesus taught the parable of the prodigal, or wayward son. A father had two sons. One son asked for his inheritance early, and his father gave it to him. The son traveled far away and wasted all his money doing bad things. When he finally came to his senses he told himself that he would go back to his father, tell his father he had been wrong and ask his father to forgive him. He felt unworthy to be received back as his father's son, so he would ask his father to let him be one of his hired workers. When he returned to his father and expressed his repentance, his father welcomed him back with open arms, forgave him, and took him back, not as a hired man, but as his son.

God is like that father. Sometimes, in different ways and to varying degrees, you and I are like that wayward son. When we sin and stray, in His love God calls us to repent and assures us that He forgives us.

At the time Isaiah wrote the words of our text, the majority of the children of Israel had forsaken God. Isaiah told them, *“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.”* Most of God's people had forgotten Him, but God had not forgotten them. *“God is not willing that any should perish,”* the Scriptures say, *“but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9). Isaiah says that the Jews had become sick with sin from the tops of their heads to the soles of their feet (1:6). They had done one thing after another after another in disobedience and defiance of God and His Word. Yet God wasn't ready to give up on them completely. He gave them the chance to come back to Him before it was too late.

The Lord does the same thing with us. *“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.”* Never take God for granted. If we don't hold onto our salvation in Christ, we will end up losing it! Scripture says, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked”* (Gal 6:7). God is not some foolish old man who everlastingly tolerates abuse and neglect from His children.

“Seek the Lord.” In the original text, the idea here is like saying, “Keep beating a path to God's door!” “Frequent it!” “Demand access!” *“While He may be found”* is literally, *“in His letting Himself be found.”* The emphasis lies not upon us and our seeking so much as it does upon God and His willingness to be found (P. D. Nolting). Continually seek our Lord who is allowing us to find Him. Those who refuse the opportunity can lose it.

“Call upon [God] while He is near.” The Lord says, *“In all places where I record My name I will come to you, and will bless you”* (Ex 20:24). We seek and find our Lord where He has

recorded His name – that is, in His Word, the Bible. John 1:1 calls Jesus “*the Word*.” Jesus said about what Moses and the other Bible writers wrote, “*They testify of Me*” (Jn. 5:39). Every time we hear what the Bible says or read it or think about it, God is there; and there is where God allows us to find Him.

The Lord warned the Jews through Isaiah, “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.*” God’s people had watered down parts of His Word, added to other parts, and just plain ignored other parts; all to justify themselves in their own minds. They had been living in sin, failing to serve God as He had commanded in His Word. They also worshipped false gods of the world. The Lord told them to forsake that kind of living and that kind of thinking. They needed a complete change.

We fall into sinful ways if we start questioning and ignoring and watering down God’s Word. It’s often not so much a conscious decision as it is a gradual becoming comfortable with error and sin. There is where the danger lies! If we let ourselves, we can stray far away from God.

Because God is perfect and holy He can’t ignore our sin. We constantly sin, day after day, and God must constantly call us to repentance. Our human nature is attracted to sin like a moth to a flame, so we have to watch ourselves. God warns against the “*thoughts*” of “*the unrighteous man*.” “*Thoughts*” here in the original conveys the idea of emptiness and calamity. We may think that our thoughts and plans are good. But if they’re not guided by God and His Word, they’re empty and they will lead us into trouble.

The Lord tells us to “*forsake*” sinful thoughts and ways. “*Forsake*,” that’s a strong word. Turn away from those things and activities our flesh loves that are wrong, repent of them, and leave those things behind. We can’t come back to those things later and tell ourselves, “It’s OK; I don’t think this is a problem for me now.” God told His rebellious people through Isaiah, “*Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of My sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!*” (Is. 1:16-17a). God will help us to unlearn sinful ways we’ve gotten ourselves into, and learn to live in ways and do the things that are good for us and pleasing to Him.

The Lord called out to His backslidden people, “*Return*.” “Repentance” in the Bible often carries with it the idea of turning completely around, one hundred eighty degrees, and going in the opposite direction. God told the Jews to turn away from their sinful ways and come back to Him.

Our text is addressed to people who had hardened their hearts toward the Lord and wouldn’t listen to His Word. By the grace of God, that is not the case with you and me. We also are sinners, yet we do love God and He is important to us. What we get from our text is a healthy fear of our own capacity for sin.

“*‘Come now and let us reason together,’ says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*” (Is 1:18). God spoke those beautiful words of hope and forgiveness through Isaiah. Those very same sin-hardened people who received such strong rebuke from God were also offered the promise of forgiveness by Him. God assured them, “*Seek the Lord.... Let the wicked forsake his way, ... let*

him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Peter tells us, *"You were as sheep going astray, but have now been returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"* (1 Pet 2:25). Whenever a sinner turns to the Lord and repents, God graciously forgives. We have been promised, *"God will have mercy on him."* God cherishes and gently soothes the troubled sinner with His reassuring grace. God had also assured His people through Isaiah, *"O Israel, you shall not be forgotten by Me. I have blotted out your transgressions...; return to Me, for I have redeemed you"* (44:21b-22).

The repentant sinner is promised, *"God ... will abundantly pardon."* *"Where sin abounded,"* Scripture says, *"grace did much more abound"* (Ro 5:20). Jesus' death and resurrection have won for us God's abundant *"pardon"* for all our sins! *"Pardon"* in the original has the primary idea of lifting up and lightness. When we try to ignore or excuse our sin, it weighs on our mind and conscience. We come to Jesus in repentance, and He lifts off our burden of sin and guilt. The psalmist says: *"When I kept silent"* (when he refused to face up to his sin and repent of it), *"my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long."* (He was weighed down by his guilty conscience). *"For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me.... I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin"* (32:3, 4a, 5).

This seems too good to be true, but it is true! *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says 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."* It seems hard to believe that all we have to do is tell God we're sorry for our sins, and He forgives us. It can't be so easy! (Actually, our salvation wasn't easy at all! Jesus had to live a completely sinless life; and He had to bear our sins and our guilt and our punishment on the cross.) The jailer, deeply troubled by his sinfulness before God, asked, *"What must I do to be saved?"* He was told, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved"* (Ac 16:30-31).

If something seems too good to be true, it usually is. But that is not the case with the Gospel! Paul says, *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"* (1 Cor. 2:9). Human reason tells us we have to do enough good things to make up for the bad things we do so we can go to heaven. And we're afraid we might not make it. We could never conceive of salvation apart from duty and fear. That is why God has given us His Word, to reveal to us that we're saved simply by believing in Jesus Christ! Jesus' *"It is finished!"* means **He** did everything that had to be done to save us.

When a sinner turns to the Lord in repentance, we're told *"[the Lord] will have mercy on him."* In the original God's *"mercy"* includes not only God's feelings of love and concern for us sinners, but also what God has done for us in Jesus. God's *"mercy"* means not only that God has pity on us sinners, but also that He forgives us and saves us for Jesus' sake.

Like the prodigal, or wayward son, you and I by nature tend to wander and stray from our Heavenly Father. But God gives us hope in Jesus. Seek the Lord. Call upon Him. Forsake sin. **REPENT, AND BE FORGIVEN.** Believe it. It is true! Amen.