

Isaiah 55:6-13 (NKJV)

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.

10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater,

11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

12 "For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.

13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign *that shall not be cut off.*"

What does God think of you?

I will ask this again.

What does God think of you?

What we think of ourselves doesn't matter much at all. But what God thinks of us matters intensely.

We have an amazing capacity to cover our tracks, to explain away our selfishness, to empathize with our resistance to what God clearly says. We are experts at ignoring those things we do that are contrary to what God clearly says. We have excuses. We have reasons. We have stories. We have rationalizations. We have gathered people who will back us. We have a pocket of resistance we can **fall into** where we are very confident that we are ok. But none of it matters one iota. The question that matters is what does God think of us?

How are the "least of these" benefiting because we are breathing?

How are people being disciplined around us?

How are people hearing the gospel and seeing changed lives?

Where do we believe God simply because God has spoken? Where do we believe Him even though we hurt, we see reason to fear, we see reason to despair, we see reason to sin, we see reason to give in to temptation? This is really the crux of the matter.

I am speaking to me first this morning, but I hope you are getting in on this conviction.

All of us live in a world that we don't want wildly interrupted. At least that is true if you are like me. But we live in a world that **should be** wildly interrupted. Everything is up for grabs. How we spend our minutes, how we spend our dollars, how we approach relationships, how we deal with our sexuality, how we approach our security, everything. All of it should be submitted to the Lordship of Christ.

The simple question always comes down to the single question. Will you submit this thing to what Christ says? What you eat? What you think? What you say? What you do? What you want? What you expect? What you think is fair? What you think you must have? What you cannot live without? Do you see what I am saying?

Our scripture this morning challenges the core of everything that we are.

6 Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.

This is way more than an appeal to ask God for the things on your checklist that would make your life more comfortable. This is a call to ask, **"God, what do you want from me? At the core of who I am as a person, what do you want?"**

Christianity has never been the process of praying a single prayer. It has always been about doing serious business with God.

Why do we need to seek the Lord? Well we start in verse 1 and we see that we are thirsty. And we see in verse 7 that we are thirsty because we are wicked. We can point out here that the problem is never on God's part. There is never some change **He** needs to make. There is never some need on his part that he is hungry to fill. No. All the adjustments must be made on our side.

We have some desperate needs that need to be filled. And our perceptions about **what we truly need** are about as hokey as **the ways we often seek to meet those needs**. Our world is just wave upon wave of people who are broken and who are trying **every fix but the one that really works**.

So here Isaiah calls out to us to try the water that will satisfy our spiritual thirst, it is the key that will unlock our restless hearts. Seek the Lord. Now what does that mean?

I like how brother Ortlund describes it.

To "seek" the Lord is to stop dawdling and to become intentional about him, setting highest value on him, removing everything that keeps us from him, hearing his Word without back-talk, opening up to his will with no preconditions, budgeting our money for his cause first—the ever-widening circle is endless. Seeking the Lord is a whole-life realignment with Christ. We stop treating him as a religious garnish on the side. He becomes our continual feast, our defining center. And the time to move in his direction is *now*.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

Have you ever caught yourself wanting the answer to **being more like Christ** to be complicated and difficult to understand? Because if the Christian life is **complicated and difficult to understand** then maybe we aren't living for Christ because we just don't get it? Maybe we just have not discovered the elusive secret yet. But that isn't the problem at all. If we have a Bible and we have read it, **ignorance of what God wants** is very rarely our core problem. **Willingness to obey** is usually the core problem.

Living for Christ, while it may involve **difficult to determine** decisions from time to time, is usually exceedingly simple. It is as simple as asking the question, what does scripture say that God would want me to do here? And then doing it for the glory of God. Or to put it in terms of one of Brad's favorite hymns, Trust and Obey. Seeking the Lord is getting serious about letting **God's opinion of us** to be the most important factor in our lives. It is the abandonment of what is most comfortable for us, or what makes us feel the best, or what gives us the most advantage, or whatever angle we have on anything in front of us, and saying Lord, I surrender this to your will. I will do what pleases you. And I will do **nothing other** than that which pleases you. I will do nothing that I cannot thank you for while I am in the process of doing it.

Now when I say this is not **difficult to understand**, I am not trying to say that this is not **difficult to do**. To live for Christ truly does require picking up Christ's cross daily and following Christ. When we say **no** to all the things that **our flesh craves and we feel like we need**, we are saying yes to God and no to flesh. That is an exhibition of death. And our feelings can give us messages that are **as** excruciatingly clear **as** they are entirely deceptive. They will say, "you can't do this. God doesn't require this. You are the exception to this rule. God won't mind." And one day we will stand before Christ and see our lives and our actions in perfect clarity. That is called humility. We do well to face the hard realities now so we can bring our lives into the conformity of God's will.

Living the Christian life is as simple as basking in the salvation that God has granted to us, grasping the new identity He has given us as His child, and then doing the next thing that we believe will most please our Master. It really is nothing more than living in the context of a relationship with a Loving Lord. Is that what you want to do? Really? **Is that what we want to do?** Well then, all we must do is **do it** and tell the truth about it to ourselves and others. We know we can't do it alone. But if that is really what we want to do, we are surrounded by gifted people who want to help us. But we will need to tell the truth.

Now look at the gem revealed in this verse. **God may be found.** God is near. At least for now. If you are hearing this message, this is true for you.

Scripture says **2 Corinthians 6:2 (NKJV)**

² For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Today is the day to yes to Christ. Maybe it is to say yes to Christ for Him to save you from your sin. Maybe it is the day to say yes to Christ in some habit you have continually said no to Christ. Maybe it is a day to say yes, that you will do that thing you have suspected for a long time that He has wanted you to do. He is near, today. Don't put it off until tomorrow. We don't know that tomorrow will be the day that the Lord is near. But we know He is **today**. The emphasis is that our opportunity to change, our opportunity to respond, our opportunity to obey is today.

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.

There is the problem, isn't it? Wicked people have their own way and unrighteous people have their own thoughts. This is saying the same thing twice in two different ways.

I hope by now we recognize that **we** are the wicked and the unrighteous. It isn't the abortionist doctor or the pornography producers. It is you and me. And we are told what to do about it.

We need to forsake.

The word for forsake means to loosen, to relinquish, to permit. It often means going away to a new locale, or to separate oneself from another person. Do we see what this is saying? It is saying that today is the day to give up **our ways** or **our thoughts** that are contrary to God's stated will. Today is the day to relinquish **our rights to things that are not good for us**. We have paths that we prefer- our habits, our lifestyles, and we have thoughts that we prefer,

our way of thinking about our lives that are less than Godly. We know them. They are **bad fruit** streets that lead to self pity, anger, resentment, bitterness, hatred, despair, lust, anxiety.... I am trying not to leave any of us out of this list. Which is your preferred path or thought?

Now why? Why should we do this?

For one simple reason. You cannot entertain the bad fruit streets and enjoy the Lord at the same time. We aren't just being called away from the bad things. If we were, that would have no power at all. It would be like the "Just say no" campaign years ago. No. God gives us more than that. He always gives us what we most need. Our drive, deep in our souls, is that we must have something to say **YES** to. We must have some positive incentive to drive our behavior. And praise God we have such a thing.

Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

The most powerful incentive we have to change is that we are being called into the relationship of all relationships. We are called to restore our relationship with the **author and lover of our souls**. We are called into the relationship that our hearts ultimately crave for. We aren't **just** to forsake our sinful ways and actions so we are better citizens or more moral people. We are to **return to our Savior**. And He promises, and this is no small thing, He promises to remove the unmovable obstacle in our relationship with Him- our sin. When we tell our stories of each of us coming to God, the stories all sound a little different. But if we were to tell it from God's perspective they would all be the same. God granted us repentance. **2 Timothy 2:25 (NKJV)**

²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

We need the faith that comes as a gift of God. And we need what is on the back side of that coin. We need that repentant state. So we responded, maybe not even understanding what we were doing, and God showed mercy and provided the perfect pardon from all the horrible things we had done to Him. That is what all of our stories have in common. That is the story of all of us who meet at the foot of Christ's cross.

When you and I forgive each other we often have to go through a **process**. The pain of the hurt from what was done to us surprises us and we have to revisit it and think it through from the perspective of **God's forgiveness to us**. But when God forgives, it is an event. When we bring our sin to Him it is more of a legal case than an emotional one. And the legal penalty for each and every one of them, even the ones we discover that we were unaware of, the legal

penalty has been paid. And that is what God's abundant pardon is based on. So it is reliable. God has no needs. So there is never any danger that we have hurt Him so badly that He cannot find it in His heart to forgive us. It is already paid for. The price is already paid.

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.

We come back to the thought we started with this morning. How does God see you? It matters little how **others see you** or even **how you see yourself**.

What really matters is how does God see you?

Do you see the wonderful contrast here. First we are called to forsake **our** ways and **our** thoughts. Now God responds by letting us know why. We cannot maintain **our** thoughts and **God's** thoughts at the same time. We cannot maintain **God's** ways and **our** ways at the same time. They have nothing in common. God's are completely superior all the time.

Have you ever read scripture, then looked at your own life and concluded that God **could not mean what He said** because you cannot imagine doing what He said, because it is too hard for you to do what He said? Because it is impossible, in your opinion, to do what He said? That is an example of God's ways not being our ways and God's thoughts not being our thoughts.

The hardest part in understanding the Bible is removing the part of us that tells us what the Bible could not mean. It is hard to get rid of that voice in our head that thinks we know what the Bible says even before we read it. And when we do read it, we read it through the sieve of what we expect.

That is the wrong way to approach God.

Look at how you interpret life events. Do you see them as **arranged for your benefit**, even when they involve great pain and what appears to be meaningless suffering? Or do you evaluate them through **your** thoughts and **your** ways and draw conclusions **about God**? Do you see the difference?

There is so much we don't know. There is so much we simply cannot figure out. We cannot conceive of a good reason. And it is at that point we either **trust in God's character** or we **choose not to**. It really is that simple. Are Gods ways above our ways, or **can we evaluate God's ways by our thoughts**? They cannot both be true, and we are always choosing one or the other in the bad times.

I liked what Sarah said in our small group. She says that everybody suffers. We all suffer. And that is the truth of it. We are all handed life situations or emotional turmoil that we would prefer not to have. Even people who seem

to have it all together you will find are suffering with some burden they carry. Perfect marriages are not perfect. Perfect families are not perfect. Sin has damaged everything.

And when it all comes crashing in we all make decisions. Some of those decisions will be based upon the belief that **God's ways are greater than our ways**. And those paths will lead to peace and joy and contentment. Some of the decisions will be based on **our dissatisfaction of God's choices**, an innate belief that our thoughts are better than His ways. And those paths will lead to the long lists of the fruit of our sinful natures. And none of those fruits are worth having.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NKJV)

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

With all this said- how much do you think you know? And the answer that **you say** doesn't count. The only answer that counts is what your life does when you don't get what you want from God. That is where your true theology comes out.

10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater,

11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

Have you ever considered where God put his people? There is something interesting about the promised land. Rivers were not the most notable feature of the land. The Jordan was about the best they had and even it was hard to reach. The land was completely dependent upon God. If it rained, the people lived. If it didn't, they died. The people were supposed to live dependent upon God.

Now we are still talking about about God's ways not being our ways. And this is how God describes His ways. Just like the water that God provides produces a wonderful life giving result, so does the Word that God has given.

Do you see the beauty of this truth? God is comparing His Word to the rain and snow He provides from heaven. All of it is accomplishing good things for

His people. What this conveys is that God's wisdom revealed, is always reaping good results in the lives of His people. God is always intending good things for those He loves.

God's word is compared to all kinds of good things in scripture. Food, water, everything we need. That is God's intent for us. That is God's word's effect on us. It is another example of how God's ways are superior to ours. We can intend all kinds of outcomes. Sometimes they work. Sometimes they don't. We give our best guess and give a try. But that isn't how God does things at all. Every effort of God is completely effective for what He intends it for. **It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.**

Guys, have you ever said something to your wife and it had a completely different effect on them than what you intended? I hope every husband is smiling. We are not 100% effective with our communication. But we can be confident about this. If we are speaking God's word, it will have the desired effect. In the people of God it will have a good outcome. Over time it will accomplish positive things. If we are speaking to an enemy of God, it will have a different outcome, but even **that** is not a bad thing. It may elicit rage. But so be it. That is what light does to people who hate light. It will have exactly the effect that God wants it to have. God is never surprised by the outcome of what He does. He knows and intends every result.

Are you sometimes surprised at the results of revealing truth to people? That is ok. God is not. And if it is His word you can be confident that it is doing what it is supposed to do if you are speaking the truth in love.

¹² "For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.

¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign *that shall not be cut off.*

The salvation that God is going to provide is far bigger than just you and I. The Word of God **prospering** is going to have an effect on all creation. Everything that is not being destroyed is being renewed. Look at all the wonderful changes. Instead of thistle bushes strawberries will be growing. That is the picture we get here.

When we buy into **who our God really is**, when we trust **the effect that He will have in our lives**, when we react as if His ways **really are** superior to our ways and His thoughts are **a billion times smarter** than the conclusions we can pull together, what we find is Joy and peace. The path is simply full of

these things. The path to our destination is full of it. And the ultimate destination is **nothing but** those things that our soul craves for today. And then all creation joins in.

Mr Ortland says some things too good to pass up. He says, **The gospel is not a little psychological uplift; it's tomorrow's world headlines today. Let's believe it.**

Think of the glory of this reality. It is almost too much to comprehend. **And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.**

God is doing what He is doing for His own glory. He is doing it as a stamp of His wonderful grace and mercy. And it is an absolute certainty. **Nothing or no one** can interfere with God's word not accomplishing what God desires. And one more closing word from Mr Ortland.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

Peter Kreeft helps us grasp the practical boldness of this hope for everyone to whom God gives it:

Now suppose both death and hell were utterly defeated. Suppose the fight was fixed. Suppose God took you on a crystal ball trip into your future and you saw with indubitable certainty that despite everything—your sin, your smallness, your stupidity—you could have, free for the asking, your whole crazy heart's deepest desire: heaven, eternal joy. Would you not return fearless and singing? What can earth do to you if you are guaranteed heaven? To fear the worst earthly loss would be like a millionaire fearing the loss of a penny—less, a scratch on a penny.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

So friends, in light of all we saw this morning, how will we live. What changes will we make as we bank on God's ways being greater than our ways and His thoughts being greater than our thoughts? I think that is worthy of some intentional thought this afternoon.