

God's Promise to the Wicked

Isaiah 55:6-9

Intro: Tonight, as we prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper, I wanted to come back to the great gospel invitation that we find in Isaiah 55. If you remember, a few weeks ago I preached on Isaiah 55:1-3. There we have the repeated invitation, "Come" – repeated 4 times in vs 1, then again in vs 3. "Incline your ear and come to me."

But what exactly does it mean to "come to God"? Just say a prayer? Make some promises? Perform some acts of penance? The prophet Micah asked that question poignantly in Micah 6:6–7 (ESV)

- ⁶ "With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

People the world over come before their gods making some sacrifice, offering some incense, making vows and taking pilgrimages. How shall we come to God?? Here, in verses 6-9 we have a wonderful gospel answer.

I. The Invitation

"Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;

There are two commands and one qualification: Seek him. Call upon Him. Now.

A. Seek

To seek, in the biblical sense is "not to look for something lost but to come with diligence to wherever the Lord is to be found." (J. Alec Motyer).

The seeking which God desires is a yearning to know the God of Scripture. It denotes a longing for God. A hunger for fellowship with God.

Psalm 27: 4 "One thing I ask, this is what I seek – that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire within his temple."

What a sad commentary on Israel. How is it that God, their covenant God – who had redeemed them from the slavery of Egypt and rescued them time and again – how is it that God needs to tell his own people to seek him?

Isaiah 1:3 The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib,

but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”

Jeremiah 18:15 But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods;

How gracious of the Lord to invite his forgetful, rebellious children back to the table of grace and the banquet of blessing. In Isaiah 55 God is inviting them to come and eat what is good, to come and find life. And the road to God is always the same – a determined intention to seek Him. No one finds grace without first finding the Lord.

The Bible is full of assurances that as we seek the Lord – we will find him.

Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Matthew 7:7–8 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Isn't that a wonderful promise?! In **Isaiah 45:19** the Lord says, *“I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain.’* In other words, God is not inviting us to a fool's errand when he commands us to seek.

“None ever sought the Lord in vain that sought the Lord aright.”

B. Call Upon Him.

To call upon God means that we come to God, as God, to worship and to ask him for his help. Calling upon the Lord is the defining mark of a child of God. It distinguishes the children of God from the children of men.

Genesis 4:26 To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

In other words, as the community of mankind began to form, some began to gather to acknowledge God as God, to give him the honor worthy His name and to call upon His mercy and help. The primary parts of calling on the Lord are worship and request.

Worship:

Psalms 105:1 Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!

Request:

Psalms 18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help.

The Bible is full of invitations to call on the Lord and promises of help for those who do.

Psalms 50:15 Call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Psalm 86:5 You, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

God invites us to call upon him in our trouble, in our sin, in our helplessness. He promises to help! He magnifies the glory of his grace and love by answering all who call upon Him.

C. Now.

God adds a note of urgency to his invitation.

Seek ye the Lord, ***while he may be found.***

Call upon him ***while he is near.***

There is a time to seek the Lord and call upon him. There is a window of opportunity – and that window will not remain open forever. The time to seek him is while he may be found. While he is willing to be gracious. The time to call upon him is while he is near – before he removes himself.

There was a time for the people of Noah’s day to enter the ark. There was a time, as Noah was building, as he called people to repent, there was time for them to seek the Lord and call upon His name. And everyone who sought him would have found him. Everyone who called upon Him would have receive his saving help. But no one did. And then the rain began, and the door of the ark was closed. Then they called for help. They banged on the door and pleaded for Noah to let them in. But the time had passed.

There is an urgency in the gospel invitation. Don’t delay.

There’s an old story told about three apprentice devils who were taking their final exam in front of Satan. The exam was simple: “What deceitful message you are going to whisper in the ears of people so that they end up here in hell?”

The first said, "I will tell them there is no God." Satan said, "That will not delude many, for they know there is a God. His evidence is everywhere."

The second said, "I will tell men there is no hell." Satan answered, "That’s not going to work. He’s given every man a conscience, he’s written his law on their heart. They know there must be a hell for sin."

The third said, "Then I will tell them there is no hurry." “Go”, said the Devil. "You will ruin countless thousands."

The Lord wants us to know that there is a time for seeking the Lord – and that time is now.

2 Cor 6:1–2 We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, **now** is the favorable time; behold, **now** is the day of salvation.

This is the day of grace.

What then, must we do so that we do not receive Gods' grace in vain? We must repent. Verse 7 is a classic text on the doctrine of repentance for it shows precisely what repentance is – turning away from sin and turning to the Lord.

II. The Path - Repentance

Repentance is God's call and command to this world. As we studied last week Sunday night – God has accomplished the work of redemption. He made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. God has made a way for our escape from the judgment that we deserve. But the only way that escape can be found, experienced is by repentance.

A. Turning Away from Sin

:7 "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;"

Remember, the Lord is not speaking here to the pagan world. He's speaking to his people. To the covenant community. They were the wicked God was pursuing in love.

- Let the wicked forsake his way – his own way.
- Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts – sin does not reside simply in what we do but also in our thoughts: our angry thoughts, our selfish thoughts, our lustful, covetous, ungrateful, bitter, unbelieving thoughts.

B. To the Lord

"Let him turn to the Lord."

Notice the beauty of this text. We tend to think of repentance as a matter of turning from sin to obedience. But that's not how we read it here. Repentance is a turning from sin to the Lord. It is turning to a person, to our God. And it is turning to Him in order to receive compassion and pardon!

"let him return to the LORD, *that he may* have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

God's invitation to sinners is not to stop sinning and start obeying. The invitation is to turn from sin as a lifestyle that only brings death and to turn to God for a pardon that only brings life.

Let him, the wicked man, the unrighteousness man – the man who has is full of iniquity and trespass and sin – let that man turn to the Lord and he will have compassion on him! Think of it! The Lord will have compassion on the sinner!

We can imagine having compassion on someone who is sick, someone who is grieving, someone who is experiencing the wounds of sin. But we don't usually think of showing compassion to the sinner. We can imagine showing compassion to victims of crimes – but the criminal should get justice. The perpetrator should pay. Here in Isaiah God promises to show compassion to the guilty, pardon for the wicked, grace to the perpetrators of cosmic crime.

Now that will offend some people! It offended people in Jesus' day. They believed the Messiah was going to come and bring justice! He was going to come and punish the evildoers. He was going to punish the wicked Romans and give freedom to the oppressed people of God. And in the eyes of men – he failed.

Even John the Baptist, languishing in prison under the wicked and unjust rule of Herod sent his disciples to ask Jesus – are you the Messiah or should we expect another?

What people **wanted** was a victorious king who would finally make right all that was wrong, punish the wicked and establish justice on earth.

What they got was a crucified servant who died for the wicked.

What they got was the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world.

What they got was Christ dying for sins, once for all – the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God.

What they wanted was justice for the wicked people. But what God us in Christ was compassion for sinners, abundant pardon for the wicked people. (Romans 5:6)

Romans 5:6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the **ungodly**.

There is a scandal and an offense in that message. It offends our legal pride. But you see – we need to submit ourselves to God's gospel and God's thoughts, and God's ways.

Isaiah 55:8–9 (ESV)

- ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares 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.

There is a great comfort in this. Why should God show favor to me? There is no reason for it. None at all. But just because it doesn't make sense to me doesn't mean it isn't true. His thoughts are not my thoughts and his ways are higher than my ways. The only way we will ever find true comfort and transforming joy in the gospel is if we allow God to be God and set his own terms. Until we accept that he exercises his sovereignty in having mercy on whom he will have mercy. Until we allow God to show his grace by sending his own precious Son to die in our place and for our sake – so that we might become the righteousness of God. Until we allow that God is pleased to abundantly pardon the wicked – for free, for those with no money.

“Grace cannot prevail ... until our lifelong certainty that someone is keeping score has run out of steam and collapsed.”

The only people who can be saved are those who admit this. Oh the infinite grace and glory of God that he should save a wretch like me!

This is a gospel for sinners. God himself invites you to come to him. God himself promises you that he is ready to shower you with compassion and lavish upon you abundant pardon.

So come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.

You who have no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without cost.