

SEEK THE LORD

55 Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without cost! ²Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your wages for that which does not satisfy? Listen to my counsel, and eat what is good, and let your soul enjoy the richest food. ³Incline your ear and come to me; listen to me, and your soul shall live—I will make an everlasting covenant with you, [one that is in accordance with] the unchangeable mercies [I showed] David. ⁴See, I have made him to be a witness to the [Gentile] peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵You will call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you will run to you; because of Jehovah your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has honored you.

⁶Seek Jehovah while he may be found; call to him while he is near. ⁷Let the wicked man forsake his way, and let the unrighteous man [forsake] his thoughts. Let him return to Jehovah, and he will have mercy on him. [Let him return] to our God, for he will abundantly pardon—⁸for my thoughts are not [like] your thoughts, neither are your ways [the same as] my ways, declares Jehovah. ⁹As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts [higher] than your thoughts. ¹⁰As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there again, but water the earth, causing it to flourish and bud so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹so shall [it be with] my word that proceeds from my mouth: it shall not return to me without [having the desired] effect—it will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. ¹²You will go out with joy and be led out in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³The pine tree will grow instead of the thorn bush, and the myrtle tree will grow instead of the briers. This will be for Jehovah's honor, an everlasting tribute that shall not be destroyed. (Isa. 55:1-13)

Introduction

One day a minister preached about the story of the blind beggar, Bartimaeus. He related how Jesus approached this poor, helpless man, and inquired, "What do you want me to do for you?" The preacher pointed out that Jesus certainly knew the man's desire, but He wanted him to express it: Sir, I want to receive my sight.

That story touched the heart of a young man that day. He was deeply moved when the preacher related that episode between the Lord Jesus and the blind beggar. For the first time that young man saw the necessity of actually putting his faith in Jesus—instead of just knowing about God. He learned that just as blind Bartimaeus had to ask for sight, so he had to ask Jesus for salvation. That young man went on to become an Olympic medal winner, but none of his athletic success could even begin to compare with the salvation he experienced that day he realized that it was necessary for him to personally ask the Lord to save him. (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/31/93)

The LORD confronts us with the same truth in the passage of Scripture presently before us: Because the Lord Jesus is gracious and desires our salvation, He invites us to seek Him and receive the blessing of forgiveness and new life that He offers.

I. Seek the LORD, While He May Be Found (Isa. 55:6)

In verse six the call is issued, *“Seek Jehovah while he may be found; call to him while he is near.”* The LORD makes a gracious offer that requires a response; there is the need to respond to the LORD’s call. Quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel, Apostle Paul asserts, *“Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Rom. 10:13.)

There is also a note of urgency: there is a time when the LORD calls—and this is the time to respond, for that divine call of sovereign grace might not continue to be addressed to your heart indefinitely. Consider our Lord’s teaching as it is presented in John 12:35-36a,

Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before the darkness descends upon you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of light.” (Jn. 12:35-26a)

In verse 35 of John 12 Jesus presents a mini-parable. The sun is setting; therefore, do not linger along the roadside. Use the remaining sunlight left in the day to find your way home. Do not allow the darkness to descend upon you while you are still on the road. If you allow that to happen you will never find your way home and you will be lost forever. The message of the parable is this: Exercise faith in Christ, respond to the Lord’s call, while you have the opportunity, do not delay.

Often times we assume that we have allotted to us a life span of 70-80 years of sound mind—but such is not necessarily the case, note the admonition given by the Apostle James,

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” (Jas. 4:13-15)

We must be prepared in the event God should speak these words to us: *“This very night your life will be demanded from you”* (Lk. 12:20b.)

Many times we presume that the opportunity to respond to Christ and His offer of salvation will always be available—but such is not necessarily the case, note what occurs at the conclusion of Jesus’ mini-parable. *“When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them”* (Jn. 12:36b.) Having taught them publicly and

having continuously offered Himself to them as the Messiah sent by God, but without their acceptance of Him, the Lord Jesus now withdrew Himself from the Jewish leaders and the people. By so doing He emphasized the point He had just made in verses 35-36a, namely, the need to respond to the LORD while He is near. It is the LORD who graciously and sovereignly extends the call to believe and be saved; and it is the LORD who has the divine prerogative to withdraw that divine invitation at His own discretion.

Notice that in verse 36 of John 12 Jesus indicates that greater spiritual understanding follows faith, it does not precede it. He is saying, You see the light of God in Me, do not wait until you have the fullness of the light before you will believe. On the contrary, it is by believing that you enter into the light and become *"a son of the light"* (i.e.; a partaker of the light). Jesus is urging us to respond to Him, rather than holding back and waiting for more light (more proof, more assurance.) Sometimes this desire for "greater assurance" arises out of fear; we are afraid to relinquish our life to Christ, but consider our Lord's encouraging promise, *"Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'"* Then consider, too, the testimony of His disciples: *"Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord ... ⁶⁹We have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God'"* (Jn. 6:69.) Sometimes this desire for "greater assurance" is merely concealing a defiant will that has no intention of relinquishing itself to Christ, but is looking for an excuse or rationalization to justify its resistance.

There is always the temptation to put off dealing with the LORD until a later time. The temptation to say such things like: "I shall entrust my life to Christ at a later date, at present I am a child enjoying my childhood; or, at present I am a teenager getting my education; or, at present I am a young man/woman establishing my career and family; or, at present I am in the prime of my life, occupied with my business; or, at present I am newly retired, enjoying my leisure time."

But it is an extremely dangerous thing to put off the LORD's invitation to another time; it is extremely dangerous to put off Christ until a later date, to toy with and resist the grace of God as it is offered to you, to resist the call of the LORD. Consider the warning issued in Proverbs 1:24-26 by the wisdom of God, (whom seems to be a personification of Christ Himself):

But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, ²⁵since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, ²⁶I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you.
(Prov. 1:24-26)

The message of Isaiah 55, addressed not only to Old Testament Israel, but even more so to the Gentile nations at large, is this: Seek the LORD, while He may be found. As the writer to the Hebrews exhorts: *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"* (Heb. 3:15.)

II. Seek the LORD, With Repentance (Isa. 55:7a)

In verse seven, through the prophet Isaiah, the LORD proclaims, *“Let the wicked man forsake his way, and let the unrighteous man [forsake] his thoughts. Let him return to Jehovah, and he will have mercy on him.”*

True faith in Christ goes hand in hand with repentance. When we respond to Christ’s invitation, we must entrust our whole life to Him—we hand over to Him our sins (in deed and thought) in order to take hold of Him and the new life He provides.

Consider this account of two conversions, the one genuine, the other not:

The Hollywood of the late 1940’s was tinsel town at the height of its glamour ... Film stars were larger than life ... Celebrities measured their status by the number of morning headlines devoted to their exploits the night before.

And within this gilded world ruled a short figure with a receding hairline and an abrupt New York accent ...

Meyer Harris Cohen, known to friends and enemies alike as Mickey, mobster, and “number-one bad boy” of Los Angeles ... Born poor in New York City, he had once been a New Jersey punk and strong-arm man. Later he moved to the West Coast and became a self-styled gangster in the tradition of Al Capone, whose work he greatly admired ...

By 1949, Cohen was top man in the Los Angeles underworld ...

Late one night in that same year, 1949, Cohen received a phone call from one of his employees, a man named Jim Vaus. Vaus was an electronics wizard ... He had first worked for the police in criminal investigations, then for Hollywood stars seeking evidence in divorce proceedings, and finally for Cohen and other under world figures ... The gangster invited Jim and his wife, Alice, to come to his home in Brentwood immediately.

In Cohen’s living room, Jim Vaus explained that he had attended something called a Billy Graham Crusade in downtown L.A. and had become a Christian. Mickey ... said he didn’t understand what Vaus was talking about. Jim explained that becoming a Christian involved a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord ...

“I’m giving up everything,” Vaus said.

“Everything” meant Jim Vaus’s renunciation of his criminal life ...

Jim Vaus’s conversion let him to make restitution for the crimes he had committed. He had stolen \$15,000 worth of electronic equipment from the

telephone company and a local radio station. He sold his house and automobile in order to pay back the money. When a notice of his actions appeared in the paper, he received a call from Cohen.

“How you going to get around without no car, Jim?” Mickey asked.

“Well, the buses and street cars are still running.”

“Sure, but look, let me loan you a car.”

“Thanks, Mickey, but no.”

“Why not?” his former boss asked.

“I’m working for a new boss now, Mickey. There are new rules. I can’t take something that somebody got through crime.” ...

Vaus told Mickey not to worry about him, that God could supply all his needs ...

Cohen said, “But if you need me, you don’t be stupid ... you call.”

As it turned out, Mickey was the one needing help ... eventually he was indicted for tax evasion ... In 1951, Cohen was convicted and sentenced to five years in jail ...

Mickey came out of prison in October of 1955 ...

Before Mickey went to prison, Vaus had introduced him to a leading Christian layman in Los Angeles, W.C. Jones ... Bill Jones took Mickey on as a special project after he came out of prison, devoting hours to cultivating their friendship.

Mickey seemed to be changing ...

Seeing this new current within Mickey, and after spending hours with him, Bill Jones urged him to commit his life to Christ ...

Jones ... called Jim Vaus and discussed the possibility of flying Mickey to New York to meet Billy Graham, who was soon to begin a crusade in Madison Square Garden. Vaus agreed to help pay for Mickey’s expenses in New York ...

Mickey showed up two days later at the Graham Crusade in the Garden, along with several bodyguards and a flock of reporters. Speculation was rife. Would Cohen go forward, making public his commitment? ...

No matter what Cohen's motives were for attending, he stayed ... And he was thoroughly uncomfortable, for the Spirit of God was at work; Graham's message seemed particularly appropriate for the disgruntled gangster ...

"You and I deserve hell," thundered Graham. "You and I deserve to spend eternity separated from God ... Oh, yes, the Scriptures teach that you're a sinner. And so am I ...

"Tonight you have to make your choice. Every man, every woman, every boy and every girl, you will have to make your choice ... Whatever is keeping you from the kingdom of God, you will have to make a choice tonight, and if you refuse to make the choice, that very act means you have already made it."

For one wild, impetuous, holy moment, Mickey Cohen wanted to make the right choice. But in the next moment he found himself ... wanting to get out of the presence of God as fast as he could.

After he returned to Los Angeles, Mickey dropped Bill Jones and contacted Jim Vaus less frequently. He began hanging around with his underworld cronies again. This perplexed and upset Jones, who went to Mickey and told him that as a new Christian he ought to be putting as much mileage between himself and his mob connections as possible.

"Jones," Mickey replied, "you never told me that I had to give up my career. You never told me that I had to give up my friends. There are Christian movie stars, Christian athletes, Christian businessmen. So what's the matter with being a Christian gangster?"

"If I have to give up all that—if that's Christianity—count me out." (Charles Colson, *Loving God*, Zondervan Publish. Co. Grand Rapids, MI. pp.81-92)

Consider Jesus' parable recorded in Matthew 22:8-13,

Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²"Friend," he asked, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless. ¹³"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matt. 22:8-13)

Here is the account of someone who failed to appreciate the fact that the baggage of our sins must be checked at the door if we are to be received into the life and fellowship of Christ and God. The guest without the proper wedding attire is

representing the man who understands the dynamics of salvation by grace, the fact that it is received by faith apart from human merit. But he fails to appreciate the purpose of salvation, namely, that it is intended to bring the believer into a new relationship with God, one in which the holy character of God is reproduced in the converted sinner. The teaching of Scripture with regard to the way of salvation and the purpose of salvation is summarized in Ephesians 2:8-10,

It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹it is not of works, therefore no one can boast. ¹⁰We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance in order for us to walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10)

The message of Isaiah 55, addressed not only to Old Testament Israel, but even more so to the Gentile nations at large, is this: Seek the LORD, with repentance. The consistent teaching of Scripture is that faith in Christ and repentance of sin go hand in hand: *“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus”* (Acts 20:21.) This is the testimony of the Apostle Paul with regard to the New Testament preaching of the gospel. The Scriptures also teach that throughout the Christian life, just as there is the need for continuing faith in Christ, so, too, there is the need for a continuing repentance. In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus teaches us to pray: *“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* (Matt. 6:12-13.)

III. Seek the LORD, With Confidence (Isa. 55:1,7-13)

The latter part of Isaiah 55:7 gives the assurance that when we approach Christ with faith and repentance we are greeted with mercy and pardon:

Seek Jehovah while he may be found; call to him while he is near. ⁷Let the wicked man forsake his way, and let the unrighteous man [forsake] his thoughts. Let him return to Jehovah, and he will have mercy on him. [Let him return] to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isa. 55:6-7)

As verses 8-9 indicate, that assurance is grounded in the very character of God: *“for my thoughts are not [like] your thoughts, neither are your ways [the same as] my ways, declares Jehovah. ⁹As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts [higher] than your thoughts.”* Our Lord is moved with compassion towards a contrite sinner; against such a one the LORD does not harbor a desire for vengeance and retribution:

Say to them, “As surely as I live,’ declares the Lord Jehovah, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek. 33:11)

I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Lk. 15:10)

Verses 10-13 provide further incentive for faith and repentance, namely, the certainty of participating in God's promised blessing. Just as the rain sent by God fulfills its purpose, so shall the Word of God be fulfilled, those who come to Christ on His terms shall experience the promised blessing. Those blessings are once again enumerated in terms familiar to the people of the Old Testament era: 1) there shall be joy and peace (vs. 12a); 2) there shall be life in the new creation filled with the joy and song of the LORD (vs. 12b); 3) the blessing of the LORD shall be experienced instead of the righteous curse of the LORD (vs. 13a.) All this shall be to the LORD's honor; it will all be ultimately to His glory (vs. 13b.)

The message of Isaiah 55, addressed not only to Old Testament Israel, but even more so to the Gentile nations at large, is this: Seek the LORD, with confidence.

Conclusion

The divine invitation of Isaiah 55 is extended to *"everyone who is thirsty"* and to *"him who has no money."* That is to say, everyone and anyone who desires the gracious blessing of the LORD's salvation is invited to receive it, with the assurance that it is graciously given by the LORD—the price having been paid in full by the blood of His one and only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The LORD implores us not to foolishly spend our lives and our labors on those things that cannot satisfy the soul, *"Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your wages for that which does not satisfy? Listen to my counsel, and eat what is good, and let your soul enjoy the richest food"* (vs. 2.) On the contrary, we are urged to listen to Him and let our soul delight itself in the fatness of the salvation He alone can provide.

The LORD exhorts us to listen to Him and to come to Him, promising that by so doing our souls shall live, and the LORD will make an everlasting covenant with us: *"Incline your ear and come to me; listen to me, and your soul shall live—I will make an everlasting covenant with you, [one that is in accordance with] the unchangeable mercies [I showed] David"* (vs. 3.)