

While He Is Near

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[0 : 00] Let's turn then to the passage we read earlier on, that great chapter of Isaiah 55.

There are only two kinds of people in the world and there are only two kinds of people in Carlyway and there are probably only two kinds of people here, I imagine there are some fall into one category and some fall into another.

And that is the saved and the unsaved, the saved and the unsaved.

And this chapter and particularly the verses that we're going to be looking at actually have a bearing on both.

Let's read them together, verses 6 and 7. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near.

[1 : 15] 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.

It's a great evangelistic text because as does the whole chapter, it invites anyone to come to the Lord to be freely and to be abundantly pardoned of all of their sin.

But notice the word in verse 7, return to the Lord. Return to the Lord.

Not turn to the Lord, but return to the Lord. And in the first instance, this chapter is addressed to Israel, God's people who have wandered off and gone after idols and are being judged as a result and they are being implored by God to return to him.

To return to their first love, to forsake the wicked ways that they've ended up walking in and to come back with an undivided heart to the God of Israel.

[2 : 54] So it's a message, yes, to the unsaved, to those who haven't yet come to God at all to say, come now because you may not have another opportunity.

But also it is imploring God's own people to turn away from their sin and to return to God assured of this wonderful, abundant, fatherly pardon, the welcome home.

And we stray in our hearts daily and some may be have strayed further than others. But this is a call to us if we are Christians and if we're holding on to any sin or to any bitterness or anything like that to turn from it today.

Assured of God's pardon. Assured of his compassionate welcome home. Sometimes we can stand far off holding on to our sin.

He says, no, come, turn from your sin and come to me and I'll have compassion on you. So this is for all of us today, this message.

[4 : 26] And as you can hear when we read the whole passage, verse three, incline your ear. Verse two, listen diligently to me.

God, not me, is requiring your undivided attention now to his word. It is so easy to wander off in your mind in church, particularly during a sermon and start thinking about this, that and the other thing.

But God is saying, no, I am worthy of your ear. And what I am telling you has eternal significance, not just significance for this week or this month or 2019, eternal significance.

There is nothing more important than this. And God is saying, as we saw in verse six, seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near.

That tells us two things. If you don't know Christ, if you have not closed with Christ for your salvation, if you're not in Christ today, that there is an opportunity to come to him.

[6 : 01] You're being offered the opportunity. Seek him and you will find him. Call upon him.

But you're also being told that offer will not always be available. That offer may not always be available while he may be found, implying therefore that there is a time where he may not be found.

Call upon him while he is near, telling us he is currently near. He is available to you if you would come to him.

But there may be a time where he is no longer near, where he is no longer near. And what we always tell ourselves is this.

I've got time. Yes, I think I ultimately would like to become a Christian. I would like to turn from my sin and come to him and become a Christian.

[7 : 13] But you know what? I've got time. Not today. Thank you. Manana, as the Spanish have a saying, tomorrow, tomorrow, it's always tomorrow and never today.

We seem to think we've got all the time in the world. We seem to operate on the basis that we'll just keep on living, despite the fact that we're aging every time we look in the mirror.

We're clearly, we don't have forever. But it's as if we think we have all the days there in store for us to do the things we ultimately feel we should do.

It's as if our days are in an hourglass. You know what I mean? A big hourglass full of sand and the sand is flowing through into the bottom.

And we think we've got a Sahara deserts worth of sand in the top section. With all the time in the world to choose to come to Christ and have our sins forgiven.

[8 : 26] But how do we know that? What if, in our minds, we've got the Sahara deserts worth of sand and all the time in the world, when in reality that hourglass has just a few grains of sand left in it that are bouncing their way down through the glass and down through that narrow channel into eternity and there's soon going to be absolutely nothing left.

We're often said, oh, we're not promised tomorrow. Well, friends, it's currently 1245 and we're not promised 1246.

The only time that is available to us to repent and believe in Jesus Christ is right now. The past has gone and the future is not ours.

We can't enter into the future. We only have right now and you may never get the opportunity again to come to Christ now.

I have time. No chance. Now is the time. Now is the time. The fact that you are being called now and are under this word now means now is the time.

[9 : 56] The offer is being made now. So now is the time to respond. As the Apostle says, for he says, in a favorable time, I listened to you 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 salvation. This is the day to come to Christ and be forgiven for your sins.

Let's come to the next part, verse 7, because unless you think these sins are trivial, let's look at verse 7.

Maybe you think you don't need to be forgiven. You don't need to come to Christ. It's not a case of I have time. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

[11 : 00] Who does that refer to? Everyone. Everyone.

There is none righteous, not even one. No one can be justified before God on the basis of who they are and how they have lived their lives.

Their sins, as we have seen there, can be in their ways and in their thoughts. But everyone is stained by sin. So this call is to everyone.

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. But maybe you think, yes, I would like to do that.

What you see here is something that discourages you perhaps because you see, let the wicked forsake his way and let the unrighteous man his thoughts and you say, I don't have it in me.

[12 : 04] I don't have it in me to do that. The wickedness in me I can't turn from or the sin that is besetting me so much.

I'm so overwhelmed by it that I don't have it in me to do what is being asked here to forsake my way and to abandon my thoughts.

The thoughts that I have, I can't get rid of them and the ways that I walk in, I can't walk in any other ways. In fact, I've tried umpteen times to turn over a new leaf or to reform myself and it has never worked and I've ended up even in a worse place than I was the first time.

I don't have it in me to turn. And my response to you is you're absolutely right.

You're absolutely right. You don't have it in you. That is a good place to come to to realize you don't have it in you.

[13 : 23] God is not saying here, summon up the strength in yourself to turn and then I'll repay you by pardoning your sins.

God is saying, forsake yourself. You have no power in you to turn.

The good news is this, God has it in him. God has it in him.

If you trust him, you can forsake your ways and your thoughts. The sin that you think you cannot break free from the lifestyle you think, I just can't become a Christian because I can't turn in that way.

Trust God. That's what this whole section from verse 10 to 11 is all about.

[14 : 26] If you trust his word, it will achieve what it's designed to do, which is to change sinners into children of God.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. We so often think we have to summon up something within ourselves to come to Christ when instead we have to trust that he can come to us and that he can forgive us, that he can change us.

What is happening here is we're not trusting God's word. Why would we fail to trust a word that clearly it says here has the full confidence of heaven behind it?

This word has the confidence of heaven behind it that it will achieve its purposes. Why should we think it won't work?

You say I don't have it in me. You're right. God has it in him.

[15 : 48] For sake the idea that repentance is some kind of good work you do and get rewarded for, they turn to God and trust him and he can break the power of sin and of wickedness in your life.

So what we commonly hear are I have time. Now is the time. I don't have it in me. God has it in him.

But what do we also feel when we hear this invitation to come? Come to the waters. Come to the feast.

Come to the abundantly pardoned. What do we commonly respond with then? He won't forgive me.

He won't forgive me. He may have forgiven lots of other people but for some reason we think we're special in a very negative sense.

[16 : 59] He won't forgive me. And at the root of that opinion which so often is responsible for is not coming for is not closing with Christ.

Or if we do know him, if we've made a profession in the past, but we've not been walking in his ways, not to return to him is thinking he won't want to hear about it.

I've even heard a man say that when he was struggling to come to Christ and simply believe this, he won't forgive me.

He said, you know, even if it said in John 3.16, for God so loved and then it was mine name printed in there that he gave his only begotten son, so that my name by believing in him would never perish but have everlasting life, he would assume that was someone else by that name, not him.

It'd be someone else in the phone book with the same name as him that it was talking about. He couldn't believe that God would forgive him until he realized that is a fundamental misunderstanding of both the character and the purposes of God.

[18 : 32] As we see in the second part of verse seven, let him return to the Lord. Yeah. Let him come to the Lord. Why?

Because he won't forgive you because he'll turn you away because maybe there's a chance of forgiveness that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

What's the gospel for? The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The whole point of the gospel messages for saving people, not for telling them they can't be forgiven, but for saying forgiveness is available if you'll simply come to Christ, come to Jesus.

What's the whole point of Jesus coming into the world? The son of man didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. He is a savior.

So both the character, God's compassion, his desire to save and his purposes, Jesus Christ coming into the world are for saving people.

[19 : 48] And so you can't say he won't forgive me because you're fundamentally misunderstanding both the character and the purposes of God.

I have time. No, you don't. I don't have it in me. That's correct. God has it in him. Trust in his word and he will do it.

He won't forgive me if you come, he will because he uniquely in Christ made it possible to forgive because God is just, isn't he?

He is perfectly good. He is light and in him there is no darkness at all. He can't abide sin.

How can he pardon them? How can he abundantly pardon? Because at Calvary his son was abundantly judged for sin out of love, out of compassion.

[21 : 17] God the Father out of love sent his son who went out of love for the world to pay the price for sin so that anyone who comes to him will be cleansed of it.

And the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. That's the abundant pardon that's available. And it's not just a pardon as in your sins are wiped away and then you turn over and you blot your copybook all over again.

A fundamental change takes place in the heart because out of love the Holy Spirit implants new life in every child of God, in every believer.

So I am asking you, have you come? Have you come to the waters? I've got time, no you don't.

I don't have it in me. Correct. God does. He won't forgive me. He will if you come and you trust in him.

[22 : 34] Because you've been invited. If as happened to another he raised up his eyes in hell, who will you have to blame?

Who does the tragedy of all that rest with? I thought I had time. I just thought I didn't have it in me.

I assumed I wouldn't be forgiven so I didn't come. I have an eternity to reflect on the stupidity of that choice.

Then instead look at the picture for those who do come. The end of the chapter will finish with this. 12 and 13.

If you trust in this unfailing word what is the future for you? You shall go out in joy.

[23 : 50] Whatever has been holding you back and weighing you down and entangling you, the chains will fall off and you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace because you have peace with God finally.

This hostility that has existed all your days or even if you already have a relationship with God has gone cold because you have turned away, you'll be led forth in joy and in peace.

Isn't that what you're looking for? Joy and peace. Joy and peace. And the whole creation rejoices at God's salvation.

The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing. And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

That's the sign of the curse being lifted. Cursed is the ground because of you, God told Adam. But when salvation is finalised, when the kingdom is consummated at Christ's return there will be a new creation that is not under a curse and the creation which is currently groaning will celebrate in this way.

[25 : 20] And instead of the thorn, a desert plant shall come the cypress and instead of the brier, thorny shall come up the myrtle.

Signs of Eden being restored. A fertile garden instead of a barren desert is your life a barren desert.

You're being invited into the fertile garden. Everything needful has been done. By Jesus Christ all you have to do is come.

You don't have the currency. So God says come and buy without money. That which is priceless.

When I was praying about what to preach on today this morning during the week it was very much impressed upon me that it should be this.

[26 : 31] I was led to believe someone or all of us in one measure or another needs to hear this and to have it applied to our hearts.

As God says here listen diligently and climb your ear. Actually literally it's listen listeningly. Listen listeningly that intently to what God is saying today.

Today is the day. Today is the day. We're going to close by singing from Psalm 32 and sing Psalms which is a glorious Psalm of repentance and forgiveness.

How blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin whose sins are covered from God's face whose debt is cancelled in God's grace there's no deceit in him.

[27 : 44] The debt can be cancelled for you because Christ has paid the price for sin if you will but trust in him.

Let's sing these verses to God's praise. How blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin whose sins are covered from God's face whose debt is cancelled in God's grace there's no deceit in him.

When I have silence all my bones with pruning wear worn out in each round I felt entrapped thought day and night my strength was stopped as in a summer drop.

Then I lit there my sin to you the guilt that we live within.

I said oh Lord I have transgress and you forgive when I confess you pardoned all my sin.

[30 : 02] So let the Godly pray to you while you are to be found.

Surely when waves of sweeping fasts and mighty waters rising fasts you'll keep them safe and sound.

You are my hiding place oh Lord my true security. You keep me safe and troubled days you circle me with joyful praise when you have set me free.

Let us pray the Spirit and the bride say come and let the one who hears say come and let the one who is thirsty come let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

He who testifies to these things says surely I am coming soon. Amen come Lord Jesus the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.

[31 : 57] Amen.