

Seeking the LORD

Rev. D.W. Tuinier - *Isaiah 55: 6-7*

Sing: Psalter 415: 4 – 5

Sing Psalter 89: 1 - 2

Read: Isaiah 55

Sing: Psalter 403: 1 – 3

Sing: Psalter 187

Sing: Psalter 74 1 - 4

Congregation, let us open God's Word to the book of Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 6 and 7, where we read:

“Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near; Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

In this sermon, we will consider the theme we find in this text:

Seeking the LORD

We will consider 4 points by way of asking 4 questions:

1. Seeking Whom? The LORD!
2. Seeking the LORD — How? *“Seek ye the Lord”* and *“call ye upon Him.”* *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD.”*
3. Seeking the LORD — When? *“While He may be found; while He is near.”*
4. Seeking the LORD — Why? *“And He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”*

1. Seeking Whom? *The LORD*

At the time the children of Israel were in exile in Babylon - a well-deserved punishment, a righteous judgment of God - a large portion of the people felt very

much at home in that heathen land. How sad! They refused to repent. Rather, they rebelled against their punishment. They were stricken, but they did not grieve. It didn't have any effect on them. At least there did not appear to be any true repentance and returning to God. They continued on the broad way to destruction despite God's chastening hand. They hardened their hearts.

What a serious warning for each one of us! Woe unto them, woe unto us if we do not repent! If we forsake the Lord we will experience that griefs and sorrows multiply. That was the case with the children of Israel, and it remains the same today.

However, there will always be a remnant according to God's electing grace. Israel's remnant mourned in the foreign land of Babylon. Deprived of God's house and His blessed statutes, deep despondency filled their hearts. Anxious questions welled up within them. Would they ever be able to return to their native land? Or would they have to die here in this strange land of Babylon?

Isaiah, the prophet of the Old Testament, was privileged, as God's messenger, to encourage these people. God had not yet forsaken His people, even though they deserved it. There was hope and expectation from the Lord's side by way of true conversion and genuine repentance, through the sacrifice of His only Son.

Our text depicts a glorious gospel truth. Calvin wrote in his commentary that the God of the covenant earnestly and emphatically urged His people in Babylon to repent. It was a compassionate and loving call to make use of the day of grace and not to despise this offer of salvation. *"Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near."*

God Himself comes very close to His people and encourages them to wake up and seek Him. But is this not strange? Shouldn't that 'seeking Him' come naturally? Is He not our Creator? Were we not created perfectly? Were we not created to serve Him? To live in Him, through Him, and with Him, to His honor? Has He not created us to live eternally unto Him? Then ought we not to seek Him?

But the terrible result of our deep fall in Paradise is that we do not seek Him, but rather, we always seek ourselves, robbing God of His honor and glory. We are determined to seek our own glory and honor. We have consciously cut

off all affiliation with our Creator. We have turned our necks and backs to Him, never to return again on our own. What a sad picture! We see here the depth of our spiritually dead state and lost condition.

However – Oh, eternal wonder of God's good pleasure! - from eternity God has thought out and prepared a way of salvation whereby dead sinners can be made alive.

The children of Israel had been exiled to Babylon because of their sins, and were not deserving that God would ever have anything to do with them again. But God is so compassionate and full of lovingkindness and tender mercy that He calls out to them, “I can be found by all those who seek Me, no matter how ungodly you are.”

He will confirm that He will: *“Teach His ways to those who seek, With a contrite heart and lowly”* (Psalter 415:4).

“Seek ye the LORD” - He is the God of the oath and the covenant. He is the faithful and unchanging Covenant Jehovah from eternity. He is the God who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush as the I AM THAT I AM. He wants to reach out to fallen children of Adam, who themselves would never begin to seek after Him. He seeks their eternal salvation. It is His initiative. His love to sinners is eternal, one-sided. That is why God's church sings: “Through Thee, through Thee alone, whose presence goes before us.”

Congregation, should it not deeply grieve and distress us that God is seeking us, but that by nature we do not ask after Him? God has no pleasure in your death, but rather that you would repent and live. Do you realize the seriousness of these words? It is not the message of a mere human, for then you may have an excuse for not listening. But this is the divine word of God! Do you realize the seriousness of it, and the responsibility it brings to each one of us? God will one day require it of you. What answer will you then have to a thousand questions?

Or will you be left speechless? Will you be able to answer even one question? Then take this warning to heart! Receive this urgent admonition. Submit yourselves to the word of God; bow before Him!

“Seek ye the LORD while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near.” Young people, present your baptised foreheads unto the Lord. Beseech Him for His mercy and for the working of His Holy Spirit, so that you may learn to seek Him with your whole heart. *“For whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord”* (Proverbs 8:35).

Let us turn our attention to our second point:

2. Seeking the LORD – How?

Our text actually mentions the same thing twice. ‘Seeking’ means the same as ‘calling upon’, and ‘while He may be found’ is the same as ‘while He is near’. The urgent call to seek the Lord would have been unnecessary if we had remained near to our Creator. But we have become seekers of gold rather than seekers of God. We pursue our own vain glory. We focus on that which perishes instead of seeking that which will never perish. The Apostle Paul draws a true picture of our condition when he states in Romans 3:11, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”

If God thus urges us to seek Him, it is evident that we have lost God. I wish I could bind on your heart how terrible it is to lose God. To lose God is to lose everything. He is the ‘Source of Life’. To lose God means death. The children of Israel also experienced this. They departed from the Lord to serve their own idols. They went totally astray, separated from God. But although the children of Israel wanted to get rid of God, He did not get rid of them! That is why He draws near to them and says, “Seek ye the LORD” and “Call ye upon Him.”

Congregation, what causes someone to begin seeking? Only the realization that he is missing something. Yet, missing something and seeking something are two different things. I can be missing my wallet with several hundred of dollars in it without even knowing it. And because I don't know it, I don't search for it. But what a shock it is when I need to pay for something I've bought in a store and I cannot find my wallet! I will try to think back to where I last used it and

where I may have lost it, or of the possibility that someone may have taken it out of my pocket.

When God works such a lively conviction of missing in someone's heart by His Spirit, he or she begins to earnestly seek. Do you know of such a missing? Have you experienced this in your heart and life? Has it become a vital reality for you that you have lost God through your deep fall in Paradise? Our relationship with God has been severed; our sins have made a separation. Sin has alienated us from the living God. And it is all my guilt.

The experience of this brings much grief to the soul, a godly sorrow in the heart, worked by the Holy Spirit. It occupies all of your thoughts. You wake up with it in the morning and go to bed with it at night. It fills you with anxiety. And deep in your soul there is a longing and a yearning for the Lord. You desire to know and worship Him. You begin to anxiously seek Him so that you may find Him. And you don't give up until you have found Him.

Why does a person begin to seek for God? Because God begins to seek for you. The Holy Spirit makes you such a seeking one. We can read of this in God's Word, in Isaiah 65:1, *"I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not."*

This seeking is the fruit of the one-sided work of God's grace. It is the result of His seeking. This drawing love makes one as the bride in the Song of Solomon: *"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me"* (Song of Solomon 3:1-4).

This is an illustration of a seeking soul. Do you feel your need for God's saving grace? For His love and His blessed coming to your soul? No, in that case

you will not remain passive, but you will begin to seek and pray earnestly. Then you begin to understand what the psalmist sings: *“To God for help will I repair, To God will I direct my prayer”* (Psalter 209:1)

This true seeking makes you feel the urgency of your need so that you begin to call out to the Lord, beseeching Him for His mercy. Tears will flow. You will storm the throne of God's grace. It is as with a young child who has lost his mother. He cries out for his mother in anxious panic and is not to be comforted until he sees his mother again. Do you know something of this, congregation?

Does this seeking still exist today? Are there still true seekers of the Lord? Is this not our greatest need - that we don't realize and experience our lost condition? By nature we do not see our deepest need: that we must be saved from our lost condition. That's why we do not cry out to God from the depths of misery. God alone can and will send salvation. God in heaven calls unto us, also by means of this sermon, *“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon him while He is near.”*

If someone becomes a true seeker of the Lord it will be noticeable in his life. He or she will no longer live in the ways of sin and wickedness. *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord.”*

We all travel on a way, a way that leads to death. It is essential that we come to realize this, for if we do we will also become aware of the ungodliness and ugliness of our life, a life without God, without hope, and without Jesus Christ. We will become restless. Our friendship with the world ends and we begin to seek God, crying out to Him by day and night. We desire to separate ourselves from all sin, because we see that the end of sin is death. We will flee from our ungodly and wicked ways. And why? Because we come to realize that sin makes a separation between God and our soul. Our sins are an offense to God; our sins dishonor Him. We come to realize that God is so worthy to be served and a deep desire to love Him grows within. But when we realize that we fail terribly in

serving and loving God, we are filled with deep sorrow. Though we try so hard to root out all sin we are brought to see that from our side it is hopeless. Even our very thoughts testify against us and will condemn us in our very existence. All what we are in and of ourselves, even our thoughts, is altogether filled with iniquity. We are lost, and we realize that we will also go lost eternally. We come to understand what David, the man after God's heart, said in Psalm 51:12, *“Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit.”*

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord.”

“Return unto the Lord” - here is true conversion, a coming to your senses, a turning away from sin and a returning to the LORD. In our natural state we stand with our backs to God. We are travelling on a way which takes us further and further away from Him. But if by God's grace your heart is renewed, you will be turned around completely. He will turn you 180 degrees, so that in principle you are again turned to God. You are converted. You begin to seek the LORD. You cry out to Him. You can no longer bear to go on in your previous life of sin. You desire to live in such a way which is pleasing to the LORD. You begin to earnestly seek the LORD. You break off with the world and its lusts. You desire to live holy before God because He is so worthy. You feel your need for converting grace, for the first time and daily by renewal.

Our theme for this sermon is - Seeking the LORD. In our first thought we meditated on whom we should seek. In our second thought we considered how to seek the Lord. Now in our third thought we will consider when to seek the Lord.

3. Seeking the LORD — when?

Our text instructs us further, *“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near.”*

Regarding this, John Calvin aptly says, “The Lord appears unto us when we hear the Word of the Gospel. We need not to go far away to look for Him, nor go

to great lengths to find Him, as unbelievers often do. He reveals Himself to us in His Word so that we will draw near and approach unto Him.”

God can be found. When? Now! Today! Today is the day when He may be found. It is now the acceptable time, the day of salvation. For how long yet? We do not know. That is why it is so serious. There is nothing as certain as death, and there is nothing as uncertain as life. When death comes - and who knows how soon it will come? - the time to be saved will have ended. Then the Lord can no longer be found. Then it will be forever too late.

Therefore, beloved, seriously consider your life. Seriously consider the state of your precious, never-dying soul. Redeem the time. Your life can so suddenly and unexpectedly come to an end. And then what? Oh, hear the Word of the LORD, “Seek Me while I may be found, call upon Me while I am near!” Do not postpone it. Do not wait for a later time. You do not know if you will receive a ‘later time’. Procrastination is the thief of time. Oh, do not leave for tomorrow what you must do today. That is why this earnest, prevailing, loving word still comes to you today. Who knows? This may be the last time you will hear it.

“Seek ye the LORD while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near.” It is not yet too late for you. The Lord is still waiting to be found. He is still willing to be entreated. He is still near you. As long as you are living, He is near. Do not think that He is far away. Do not think He does not hear you when you call. Do not think you have wandered so far away that now you can never find the LORD. He is near. He can be found. He is not far from any of us, for is He not omnipresent?

The Lord is especially near when we open and read the Bible, the Word of God. Does He not say in Matthew 18:20: *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them.”*? The Lord is present under the administration of His Word. Young people, He is present when you read your Bible. He is present when you have Catechism class. Even at a young people's evening, when God's Word is opened, He knocks on the door of your young heart: “My son, My daughter, open unto Me!”

The Lord comes near during special circumstances in your life, such as at the death bed and graveside of your loved one. Oh, how near He comes, when you need surgery and are on the operating table! How close He comes when you are involved in a serious accident, or if you lose your job. Or if things go so differently in your life than what you had anticipated.

The Lord is near in times of sorrow, but also in times of prosperity. It is especially at times when you experience the Lord's blessing hand over you that He is near. It is precisely His blessings which give reason to seek and call upon Him. This is what the apostle means when he writes in Romans 2:4, *“Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”* How near He came to us when the angel announced the Christmas message of His birth to the shepherds in the fields of Ephrathah, *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:11). He could not have condescended lower. He could not have come closer. During His whole life the Son of God was near to us in His human nature. He became one with us, He became equal with us humans in all things, sin excepted.

Consider how on the cross at Golgotha He was even near a murderer, who in deep anguish cried out, *“Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom”* (Luke 23:42). This man called upon Him, sought Him, and just minutes before his death, he found Him! What an encouragement! But remember, we read of such a last-minute conversion only once in God's Word. Therefore do not wait to begin seeking the Lord. There may come a time that you are so consumed with bodily pain and sorrow that you simply can't focus on the matters which concern your soul.

And do not say that you cannot begin to seek the Lord on your own. That may sound pious, but it is very ungodly. Have you ever actually tried? I am afraid not. True seekers indeed come to know that salvation from their side is impossible. Yet they continue to seek, and cannot stop until they find the only and true rest in the Restgiver. Matthew Henry writes in his commentary, *“Make use of Christ as your Way, the Spirit as your Guide, and the Word as your rule.”*

Come faithfully under the preaching of the Word. This is where the Holy Spirit works, through the means. This is where people become a missing people, where missing people become seekers, and where at God's time seekers become finders.

Who are they? Whom does the Lord call? Whom does He invite? Those who begin to seek and to call upon God? No, not the good people, not the righteous ones. Not at all. Rather, the ungodly ones. You do not need to go to prisons or nightclubs to find them, although these people are also ungodly. But the ungodly one of whom we are speaking is someone who is a stranger of God, someone who is cut off from Him. By nature this is a picture of all of us outside Paradise. We are also ungodly in our religion. Without God, subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself, as we confess with our forefathers in the Form for the Administration of Baptism.

Ungodly ones are invited. They begin to seek because they have been shown their ungodly existence. They recognise themselves in the wicked and unrighteous man of our text. They know themselves to be unrighteous. Although God graciously keeps them from practically indulging in it in their lifestyle, yet they experience that they are unrighteous within. Sinners are earnestly and sincerely called. The devil attempts to deceive you. He whispers that you are too wicked, that you have sunk too deeply into the miry clay of your unrighteousness. Congregation, do not believe him. He is a liar. His desire is to fill you with despair. He also plagues God's children by making them fearful through vexation of spirit, anxiousness and uncertainties. Do you know why? He does not let go of his prey easily. He does not want you to seek God and to call upon Him. He is afraid of people who seek God.

If you have seen yourself to be such an ungodly and unrighteous one, then this gospel message from God's Word will be as water for your thirsty soul. It will be as balm for your wounded heart. Keep courage! "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Habakkuk 2:3).

The Psalmist sings: *“With joy the meek shall see my soul restore, Your heart shall live, ye saints that seek the Lord; He helps the needy and regards their cries, Those in distress the Lord will not despise.”* (Psalter 187:3).

Before we continue, let us sing from Psalter 187, all verses.

Seeking the LORD. Our first thought was whom we should seek. In the second place we considered how to seek the LORD. In the third place we considered when to seek the LORD. We will now pay attention to our last thought:

4. Seeking the LORD — why?

Our text ends with, *“And He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”*

Psalter 233 says, *“Abundant mercy they shall find, Who call on Thee with all their heart.”* Is that you? God promises through His servant Isaiah that He will have mercy on you. *“And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”*

“He will.” - It is firm and sure. You may not and must not doubt it. You can depend upon it, *“For He is not a man, that He should repent”* (1 Samuel 15:29).

“He will.” - *“Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?”* (Numbers 23:19). He is the true and unchanging God, Whose Word is Yea and Amen. *“Blest be the Lord for evermore, Whose promise stands from days of yore”* (Psalter 243:15).

“He will have mercy.” If you reach out to someone to help or comfort him or her, you take pity on that person and have compassion on him. The Good Samaritan had compassion on the injured man as he lay on the wayside. To have compassion, to look down in mercy, to surround with love, has all to do with mercy. It is something you can never earn. God does not have compassion on you because you are seeking Him. It is all of grace, and of grace alone. Your seeking Him is of grace. Your calling upon Him is of grace. It is also of grace when you may find. God crowns His own work when He shows mercy to a seeking soul.

He will show mercy. He pours out His grace, His love, His favour and His communion. He abundantly pardons. The record of your sins reaches up to heaven, your debt is great, and you have nothing with which to pay. Nevertheless, God forgives. He acquits. He casts your sins behind His back. He is ready and willing to forgive. He forgives and forgets.

He abundantly pardons. He does not forgive only one time, not seven times, but seventy times seven times. He will abundantly pardon. Though your sins abound, His grace does much more abound. This means He forgives abundantly and repeatedly. *“He will abundantly pardon.”* For what reason? How can that be? Does God turn a blind eye to our sins? Does He abandon His law? No, from eternity He has found a way by which there can be forgiveness with Him for sin and guilt without ceasing to be God. That way of salvation is in His Son, the Son of His eternal love. His name is Jesus. He is the Savior of sinners. Outside of Him we cannot exist before God. Outside

of Him God is a consuming fire and an everlasting tempest, in whose presence none can stand. But in and through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, God pardons abundantly.

Isaiah prophesies a few chapters back about the suffering Servant of the Lord: *“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows”* (Isaiah 53:4). He is the one and only, perfect and complete Savior, who has paid for the sins of His people, bearing their punishment and making reconciliation for their sin. His is the chastisement, theirs the peace. His is the curse, theirs the blessing. His are their sins, theirs His righteousness. Blessed exchange!

The prophet continues in Isaiah 53:5, *“But He was wounded for our transgressions.”* That is why the whip scourged His back. He was wounded: the crown of thorns pressed on His head. Nails pierced His hands and feet. He was wounded in His body, but also in His soul. His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. And so the Lord pardons, abundantly, for Christ’s sake.

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). He was bruised. He bore the punishment. His life from the time of His birth to the time of His crucifixion is summarized in Isaiah 53:10, *“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him.”*

By faith Isaiah was given to see the Source of salvation; salvation comes from God. He was granted to glance into the stillness of eternity. In that eternal Council of Peace a voice was heard, the voice of God the Father, *“I have loved thee with an everlasting love. But how shall I put Thee among the children?”* But then another voice was heard, the voice of the Son, *“Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me. I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within My heart”* (Psalm 40:7-8). He would deliver His church in a way of truth and justice. He would establish reconciliation on the grounds of satisfaction. He would do what no other human being was able to do. Where there was no way He would open one, a new and living way through His precious blood. In that way He would exalt the honor of His Father, carry the punishment, pay for the guilt of His church and atone for their sins. It pleased God to bruise Him.

“Truth springing forth the earth shall crown, And righteousness from heav’n look down” (Psalter 232:3). Zion’s paying Surety is also Zion’s anointed King. He is risen. Death, grave and hell are swallowed up in everlasting victory. Dead sinners are made alive through His Holy Spirit. Through His Holy Spirit they become a missing, seeking, and ultimately, a finding people.

Oh, what an eternal wonder it will be if you may find Him, though it may be through much strife and many temptations. God again and again sets all your shortcomings before you, so that you by renewal cry out unto Him Whose work is perfect, from the depths of misery. Oh, what a blessing to lose everything of yourself. Oh, what gain there is in Him, who is a complete Savior. Isaiah says of this, *“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that*

her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Amen
