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## SEEKING THE LORD.

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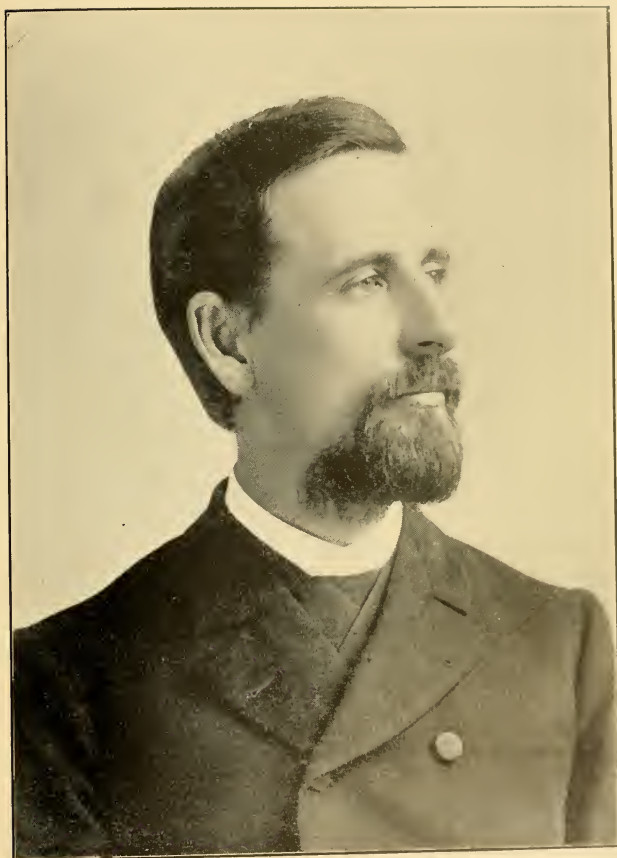
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“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.”—ISAIAH lv. 6.

THE fifty-third, fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth chapters of Isaiah should be studied together. They are closely and logically connected. In the fifty-third chapter, the great foundation truth of redemption is laid. The hope of Israel and of the world is in the suffering Messiah, who “was wounded for our transgression” and “bruised for our iniquities”; on whom the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all.

The fifty-fourth shows us the church built on this great foundation. “I will lay thy stones with fair colors and lay thy foundation with sapphires.” She stands as the House Beautiful with her chamber called “Peace” that always looked to the sun-rise. There can be no such church except as built on the suffering and death of him who made “his soul an offering for sin.”

Then, in the fifty-fifth chapter, this glorious church flings her doors wide open in the world-wide invitation from her Lord, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” But there could be no such invitation, nor any church to give it if Jesus had not died. *The great invitation of the fifty-fifth is made possible by the truth given in the fifty-third.* Bear this in mind.



Our text gives us a *command*, a *promise* and a *warning*.

I. The *command* is, "Seek ye the Lord." It comes from one who has the right to command. Let not the fulness and freeness of the invitation lead you to think you have nothing to do. It is true Jesus says he came to *seek* as well as save the lost; yet he also declares we must seek if we would find. It is true, he stands at the door and knocks, yet must we knock if we would have it opened unto us. It is true, God opens wide the door of his grace and proclaims, "whosoever will may come"; yet must we "strive to enter in." He offers the water of life "without money"; yet must we "buy" it. God presses the gift of eternal life on us; yet is it true, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel." God forces himself on no soul. He offers himself, and then it is our privilege, our duty to "seek the Lord." We cannot sit down and wait for salvation; we must seek the Lord, though he is not far from us.

Many of the young make the mistake of thinking that religion will come to them sometime in the future, and that they need not concern themselves to "seek." In every community there are a number of men of excellent character who hope that some day, through the prayers of their Christian wives, they will become Christians, yet never stop earnestly to seek for themselves. So the years go by and they drift farther and farther from the things they have heard. Hear all ye what God declares, "*Seek ye* the Lord." We must seek with all the heart. Then shall ye seek me and ye shall find me, when ye seek me with all the heart. Can you hope by a few fitful seekings to find the Lord? Seek as you do earthly prizes. What earnestness! What self-denial! What difficulties are struggled against and overcome! And for what? For corruptible crowns! Alas! for the in-

corruptible crown you are not willing to take a little time for serious thought and prayer. The slightest hindrance will turn aside your purpose. The difficulties in your way are but the test of earnestness. When Jesus answered not a word to the prayer of the anguished mother pleading for her child; yea, when he cast her heathen origin in her face, and told her that heathen dogs had no right to the children's bread, she only drew the closer and put a deeper power in her appeal: "Lord, help me." When the crowd bade Bartimeus hush his cry, he but "cried out the more exceedingly." When the press about the Lord prevented the four who bore the palsied man from entering the door, they climbed to the roof and opened a way and showed their faith. Yet here are blessings, needed by you and offered to you, richer than ever blind begged for or palsied needed; yet, when Jesus is "near" to give these, and is "passing by" no more to return for some, you let any hindrance stop you. The fear of man, some business call, an invitation of pleasure, the faults of some Christian, any slight hindrance, is excuse enough for your neglect. What is it you are thus lightly treating? IT IS ETERNAL LIFE.

Oh! that it could be deeply impressed on you that while divine love has thrown wide open the door of life and written over it so all may see its words of welcome, "Ho, every one," still you must strive to enter. Hear, then, God's command, "*Seek ye the Lord.*"

II. A *promise* is in the text, though it is implied, not distinctly stated. If God *invites* us to come and *commands* us to come, there is surely an implied *promise* of acceptance, when we obey the command and accept the invitation. He has filled his book with richest promises and holds up before us one illustration after another, that we may see how sinful souls came to accept

his invitation and that none ever went away unblest. He assures us that the favor of God standeth sure, and that "*whosoever*" cometh to drink of this water shall receive it without money.

Now we may turn to consider the full confidence given us by the great truth taught in the fifty-third chapter. When our sins and fears arise and make us ask, "Can God accept and forgive me"? God answers by showing us one already "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities;" the stripes due for our sin have been laid on him, and "with his stripes we are healed." Jesus has "made his soul an offering for sin," therefore he can be just yet justify you, ungodly as you are. That chapter assures us—

"That love unknown  
Has broken every barrier down."

It is a glorious, amazing truth, that since Jesus died God is graciously bound to receive every soul that comes trusting in Jesus who died. See how beautifully this was illustrated in the case of Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son. You remember he was injured when a child and was always "lame on both his feet." When David came to the throne he sought the descendants of Jonathan that he might show to them "the kindness of God." But Mephibosheth thought David meant evil to him, and he was afraid and tried to escape and hide himself. When at last found and brought before David he came with fear and fell on his face. Yet did the king meet him with the gracious words, "I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan, thy father's sake." When Mephibosheth answered, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I?" What did David virtually reply? "I am not thinking of whether

you are comely as Absalom, or lame on both your feet ; I am thinking of Jonathan, of my love to him and of my covenant with him. That covenant binds me to show kindness to you, therefore you shall be as a king's son and sit ever at my table."

David and Jonathan had made a "blood covenant" together. The blood of each flowed in the other and that covenant could not be broken. Therefore was David bound to show kindness to Jonathan's son.

Oh, poor sinner! you have been running away from God, and, when at last the Holy Spirit lead you to fall before him, your sin makes you feel you are all unworthy the least notice or favor. Why should he look on "such a dead dog as I am?" With wondrous love God lifts you up and says, "There is a blood covenant between me and my Son. By that covenant I am bound to show the kindness of God to all for whom Jesus died and who come to me by him. I cannot turn you away if I would. You may feel all unworthy a place at the King's table, but I make you as one of the King's sons and you shall sit at my table forever."

What absolute confidence is given to us by that invitation which says, "Ho, every one," and then points to the fifty-third chapter as giving us "all the fitness he requireth"! You see, you do not need to be cured of your lame legs before he will show kindness. We are ever putting the seventh verse of this chapter before the sixth. We say, "I will forsake my wicked ways and give up my unrighteous thoughts, then seek the Lord." "No," God says, "come to me first, then you shall be strengthened to forsake your wicked ways. I put the sixth verse before the seventh." What avails it to the leper to cure a few of his sores when the fatal disease is sent out from the heart in the blood? Come, ye lepers,



to the Son of man. Let his merciful touch make you clean. Wait not to rid your soul of one dark blot,

"To thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O, Lamb of God, I come, I come."

Nor need you fear that you may be shut out because you are not of the elect. It is true that God chooses us and that we are "chosen before the foundation of the world." Yet he has left us the power "to choose whom we will serve." Paul does not hesitate to reaffirm the Saviour's teaching, that we owe our salvation to the sovereign electing love of God. Yet, side by side with this great truth he presses our responsibility. In the ninth chapter of Romans he presents the great subject of predestination in such a way that it gives some the cold chills to read it; yet he closes the subject by showing us in the last verse of the tenth chapter, God standing with outstretched hands of loving, earnest entreaty, and saying, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands."

We only "darken counsel with words" when we attempt to explain how God is sovereign in his electing love, and yet has left to us the power of choice. However we may fail to understand, we shall never fail to find it true that God's decree bars the door in the face of none who seek to enter. While election shuts a great many in, we know it shuts none out. So far from that being true, he has flung that door wide open and stands "*all day long*" stretching out his hands and saying, "*Whosoever* will, let him come." It is wonderful, wonderful! *All day long, all day long*. Does that look like God had shut the door? Nay, you must run away from God's loving entreaty and hide yourself from that invitation which follows you "*all day long*."

Thus, you see, the question with you is not will God

receive me when I seek him, but will I let him find me? The question is not will he hear me when I pray, but will I hear him beseeching me? It is not will he open to me when I knock and plead, but will I open to him knocking and saying, "Rise and let me in?" It is not will he give me eternal life in answer to my anguished prayer, but will I take the life which, with a father's love, he presses on me? Oh! every shadow of doubt is taken away from us, and we are stripped of every vestige of an excuse!

III. The *warning* of the text. The preacher would not be faithful to you did he not press on your thoughts the warning in this text. Do not the words, "while he may be found," "while he is near," warn us that there is a time when he may *not* be found, when he is *not* near? For one hundred and twenty years God was near to the people in the days of Noah, and through the open door of the ark God was to be found. At last he shut the door. Then it was too late to seek. The door was shut and there was no more refuge to be then found from the beating storm and whelming waters. Were there not five virgins who gave little heed to invitation and warning, and who stood at last outside and the door was shut? It was the voice of the Bridegroom, no longer near, who bade them depart.

"Too late! too late!  
Ye cannot enter now."

There is a time for the husbandman to sow. If he sow not neither shall he reap. Ask the Holy Spirit to burn into your soul the words in Proverbs i. 24-32: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel . . . when distress and an-

guish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." When infinite patience gives us up, to whom shall we look for help? When the Spirit of grace, long grieved and resisted, takes *his* sad flight, what is left us but the darkness of eternity's night?

Delude not yourself with the thought, "God will be too merciful to let me suffer." He solemnly declares he must. Delude not yourself with the hope that you will have another trial in the world to come. There is no *second probation*, as if God had not given you a fair chance here. If you lose now, all is lost. The appeal of the rich man in hell to Abraham in heaven, and the answer given back to the lost man, forever settles it as a tremendous fact, that when once we cross the river of death, there can be no changes in our destiny. A great gulf rolls between heaven and hell, and they "that would come from thence" will find that it is forever impossible. It must be forever true, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life, but he that obeyeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Was it any wonder that when David thought of the ungodly going to such a doom that horror should take hold upon him? That Paul could not speak of it without weeping? That tears of divine pity should have fallen from the eyes of Jesus, as he beheld the city nearing destruction? That the cry should be wrung from the heart of God, "How can I give thee up?" Can you then treat such a warning lightly?

The hour of your spiritual death may come long before the day of your bodily death. Have you never seen strong trees standing on the hillside, around which the axe had cut a broad girdle, severing the current of its

life? This was done in the late spring. All summer these trees waved their green leaves as full of life as any that stood on the hillside. Yet all who looked at that white girdle knew those trees were dead. So may men go in and out among us, they may be active in their pursuits, and may possess much that is attractive in their lives, but the seal of spiritual death is on them. Achan died when he stole the wedge of gold, before his body was broken with the stones of justice. Ananias and Sapphira died when they lied to the Holy Ghost, days before their bodies fell at Peter's feet. Herod died when he put away John the Baptist's warning words, long before his body so miserably perished.

“ Spurn not the call to life and light;  
 Regard in time the warning kind;  
 That call thou mayest not always slight,  
 And yet the gate of mercy find.

“ Sinner! perhaps this very day,  
 Thy last accepted time may be;  
 Oh! shouldst thou grieve him now away,  
 Then hope may never beam on thee.”

Oh! God is near us now. Souls are seeking him, and finding him near; are calling on him, and he is found of them. Shall this house of prayer be the place where you shall decide against him, and shall it be in this hushed assembly that the destiny of your soul shall be fixed?

Several of us lads went one day to see a railroad bridge, which the workmen were then building, and which was said to be the highest in western North Carolina. We were standing at the foot of the highest pillar, guessing its height. The foreman came to us, and pointing to some bloody marks on the ground said, “There is where one of the workmen fell yesterday. He was under the

influence of drink and would not be warned. He fell from the top of that pillar, and here is where we picked up his crushed body." We started back from the place. It was a solemn spot to us, that marked where the man had died.

But there may be made in this church, while we are hearing God's invitation, a spot far more solemn; one that shall mark the place where an immortal soul perished; one over which you will weep in eternity, and say: "There I refused to hear God, and there I lost my soul."

Oh! while the Spirit is whispering in your heart, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart," while Jesus once more invites, while God is near, *come!* COME! Provoke not that state in which it will be impossible to renew you again to repentance. It were better for you, if you had never been born.

Begin now to seek the Lord. Stop and think. You cannot stop and think of your sin and ingratitude against such love and patience without coming to repentance. You cannot think of Jesus bearing your guilt, of his suffering and death for you, without learning to love him who thus first loved you. "My people will not consider" is the mournful charge God brings against us. Therefore does he entreat us to—"Come now let us reason together." "Harden not your heart," but "seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near."