

## Isaiah 55:6-9

<sup>6</sup>Seek the LORD while he allows himself to be found!

Call on him while he is near!

<sup>7</sup>Let the wicked abandon his way.

Let an evil man abandon his thoughts,  
and let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy,  
and let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly forgive.

<sup>8</sup>Certainly my plans are not your plans,  
and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so my ways are higher than your ways  
and my plans are higher than your plans.

## Seek the Lord

### I.

“Seek.” The first word of our text just jumps out at you, doesn’t it? It makes me think of a song: “I travel the world and the seven seas, everybody’s looking for something” (Eurythmics, 1983).

It’s true, isn’t it? *Everybody’s* looking for something, and people go to great lengths to find it. What are they looking for? What do they seek? “Looking for something” implies an emptiness—an awareness that *something* is missing.

Life is complicated. Perhaps the one seeking feels a new start is needed. Things have gone wrong, and the person just wants a clean break with the past. Surely the next try will turn out better.

“Everybody’s looking for something.” When you notice “everybody” looking for something, you realize that many people seem to have no direction in life. They wander around in vain search for a cognizant thought. They are looking to find some philosophy or some teacher that will make sense of it all.

### II.

Seeking is natural. What these seekers are looking for, whether they realize it or not, is God. Paul writes to the Romans: “What can be known about God is evident among them, because God made it evident among them. <sup>20</sup> In fact, his invisible characteristics—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, because they are understood from the things he made” (Romans 1:19-20, EHV). Looking around our natural world, it should be evident to anyone who doesn’t close his mind that someone put this world here—it didn’t just happen by accident.

This natural knowledge of God is part of the conscience. Paul goes on to the Romans: “[Gentiles] demonstrate the work of the law that is written in their hearts, since their conscience also bears witness as their thoughts go back and forth, at times accusing or at times even defending them” (Romans 2:14, EHV). The natural knowledge of God doesn’t just recognize that there must be a Higher Power out there that started everything going, but that the Higher Power is someone to whom they are accountable for what they have done.

The conscience recognizes that not everything you have done in this life is as clean and

pure as the wind-driven snow. There are some problems. These “problems” are called “sin.” Some of these “sins” are readily apparent to the conscience: you shouldn’t take things that don’t belong to you; you shouldn’t kill or injure someone; you ought to respect authority; you shouldn’t lie.

No matter how “good” you think you have been, instinctively the conscience realizes that some of these sins remain a problem. How do you deal with them? How do you reconcile yourselves to this “God” who is “out there”?

And so...the natural self “seeks” God. Unfortunately, the search often takes a person in the wrong direction. I don’t see many commercials for psychic hotlines anymore, but then I don’t watch many commercials anymore. No doubt there are some who still seek their answers from psychics, or perhaps from their horoscope.

Throughout the millennia brilliant thinkers have devised all kinds of religious and philosophical systems. Many of them focus on peace and love—on showing kindness to others. These seem to be very good things. Society is more calm and orderly when everyone just tries to be nice to one another.

Perhaps the search will lead to science and technology. There one can find the answers to so many things in life. It’s all so logical. Anything that doesn’t comport with your personal view of things you can easily ignore.

Instinctively the conscience recognizes that something is wrong with all of these so-called solutions to the search. They all rely on people. Some of them urge you to look deep inside for the answers, but you *have* already; that’s what led you to seek answers in the first place. The answers aren’t to be found *inside*. When you seek them among science and technology you are looking for answers among other flawed human beings. And when you look at the worlds religions—even so-called religions of peace—you find that they all focus on the individual trying really hard to be a better person. The conscience recognizes that has already failed, so the search goes on.

Sadly, as one looks back in history, even within Christianity the search has come up with less than satisfactory answers. In this 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation we are reminded of the system of penance and indulgences the church had come up with. They claimed that the plans and ways devised by men could help you, or even your deceased relative, on the quest for God and immortality.

It might *seem* that we have beaten this in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but the plans and ways of men still permeate Christianity. Many say you must *choose* Christ, when Jesus said you are incapable of choosing him. Still many believers are told that their own actions are an important part of their salvation, when Scripture clearly shows that the natural self is incapable of doing enough—or of even doing what little you *think* you can do properly.

The gods we seek and create for ourselves are demanding. You must *do* in order to be saved. Isaiah writes: “Let the wicked abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts, and let him turn to the LORD” (Isaiah 55:7, EHV).

### III.

Why is it so important to abandon our ways and our thoughts? Have you ever thought about just how high “high” *is*? With our feet firmly planted on the ground, when we look up at the tops of the trees we think *that* is high. Then you go to the top of a skyscraper and “high” takes on new meaning. Take a trip in a jet and look out the window at the cars and buildings below you, and “high” becomes something still different. Only astronauts

experience the next “high” of being so far above the earth that the planet looks rather small down below.

Beyond the range of our exploratory spacecraft—out past the solar system and even the galaxy—God looks down from the heights of the heavens. “Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my plans are higher than your plans” (Isaiah 55:9, EHV). *That* is the perspective of God’s plans and ways that we cannot begin to fathom.

God’s plans for us are far beyond anything we are able to comprehend or fathom. *Human* plans all involve the individual’s mind or achievements. But the conscience tried to show us that we can’t think deeply enough, or achieve highly enough. God knew that no individual could possibly achieve what is necessary, so he devised a plan to cover all the things we could never hope to do.

Seeking is still important. God put the desire to seek him into the conscience for a reason. When Paul preached his sermon at the Areopagus in Athens, he preached about their altar to an unknown God—the God they instinctively recognized from their conscience that was out there. He said: “He did this so they would seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27, EHV). Paul’s words paraphrase what Isaiah wrote in our text today: “Seek the LORD while he allows himself to be found! Call on him while he is near!” (Isaiah 55:6, EHV).

God *wants* to be found! And why? Because *his* is the only plan that works.

“Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8, EHV). The only plan that works is the plan God devised for Jesus to take on himself the sin of the whole world, because not one of us could shoulder the load of one day’s-worth of our own sin, let alone the sins of a lifetime. The plan was: “God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21, EHV).

To human understanding, this plan makes no sense. God demanded payment for sin. Because human beings couldn’t pay, God died (though God *cannot* die) to make the payment *for* them. God did this so that he could look at sinful human beings as perfect and holy—having *just* the requirements he demands for them to enter heaven. “Seek the LORD while he allows himself to be found!” (Isaiah 55:6, EHV). He *wants* us in his heaven so much that he *allows* himself to be found, and even *gives us* the very ability to find him, by giving the Holy Spirit to us to work the faith in our hearts that recognizes all that he has done in his plans for us.

“Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup>Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my plans are higher than your plans” (Isaiah 55:8-9, EHV). Thank God! *His* plan of salvation is perfect. It leaves nothing to chance, not even human failures.

“Let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy, and let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly forgive” (Isaiah 55:7, EHV). God’s abundant mercy and forgiveness are always there. He calls us to him, and allows himself to be found. Praise God that when we Seek the LORD, he *gives us* the very thing that we seek. Amen.