11-10-19

Isaiah 55:6-13 (1)

The Prophet Isaiah had a ministry that lasted almost 60 years. He prophesied during the time of the divided kingdom: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah prophesied primarily to the southern kingdom of Judah; and it was during his ministry that the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians. The Assyrians also attacked Judah and took most of it. At one point, Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army. The Judean king at that time, Hezekiah, listened to Isaiah’s advice and the city submitted itself to God. By the direct action of God, Jerusalem was saved from the Assyrians.

Judah still had its problems and continued to go after idols and serve false gods. Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, took the nation past the point of no return and they were doomed to fall to the Babylonians a century later. During Isaiah’s ministry, he warned the people time and again that they were facing the judgement of God unless they turned back to Him. But he also let them know how much God loved them. He let them know that even after they had stubbornly turned from their God, and after He had brought judgement upon them, that He would restore them.

The words of God, spoken through Isaiah, applied directly to the people of Judah living then, and for centuries into their future; even for time still to come. Because the Bible records the words of God Himself, these words are also for us. They are words of warning and of hope; they are words of eternal life; they are actually words of power. This is what Scripture means when it says that the word of God is living and active.

Our passage for today includes all these things; I hope that we can consider what is said and simply be in awe of God. In these few words, He covers Genesis to Revelation, the power of God’s word, and salvation in Jesus Christ. These are good words to hold in our hearts and allow to guide our lives.

We begin with verse 6:

Seek the Lord while He may be found;  
Call upon Him while He is near.

We are given two clear commands here: seek and call upon. “Seek” has an intensity to it, it is stronger than “look for”. There is a determination here; the person seeking truly wants to find and is willing to spend whatever is necessary in time and resources. Even when we are Christians, as disciples, we are to continue to learn as much about God as we can, and to live by what we learn.

“Call upon” has several different levels. We can picture a person seeking the LORD and finding Him; then that person calls to the LORD to get His attention so that He will wait for him and that person can come near to God and stay with Him. We as Christians also call upon the LORD. Calling upon the LORD can mean worshiping Him.

Genesis 13:4

[He was at] the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

Also, calling on the LORD is when we bring before Him a need or concern.

Psalm 50:15

Call upon Me in the day of trouble;  
I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.

Notice that when we call upon God for our needs and we see how He provides for them, that we are to honor Him; that means thanksgiving and worship. Calling upon God means worship or leads to worship.

In this verse 6 is a wonderful promise; that the LORD is near and that He can be found. Now we in the New Testament age have a better understanding that for us to seek God and to call upon Him requires the Holy Spirit to call to us. He is the One who leads us to Christ and gives us the faith to believe so that we in turn seek God and call upon Him.

We also see in this verse a very strong warning: There will come a time when God will not be found and will not be near for us to call upon Him. All of us face death; at the moment of death, all hope is gone for those who have not placed their faith in Jesus. None of us knows when that moment of death will come. There will also come a time, according to the Bible, that God will send a very strong delusion upon the people of the earth. Those who have rejected Christ and lived in lawlessness will be irreversibly deceived into continuing on that path. The time of the coming of this delusion is also unknown to us.

The warning is clear; if you haven’t accepted Christ as Saviour, the time is now. If you have accepted Christ as Saviour, the time is now to tell others about Him.

Verse 7 begins:

Let the wicked forsake his way  
And the unrighteous man his thoughts

A person’s way is their life style, the manner in which they live their life. Our natural inclination is to live wickedly. In Genesis 8:21 we read, “for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth”. Wicked living starts in our thoughts. As Jesus told us, what comes out of a man is what defiles a man; so our unrighteous thoughts are where our unrighteousness comes from. The people Isaiah spoke to did not make these changes; what they should have learned was that they were unable to. This is why Jesus came. We are saved by His work and His righteousness is imparted to us. We are then given the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit so that we have the ability to live in a way pleasing and useful to God. Sometimes we still fail, but we do have the ability.

The rest of verse 7 shows the love and mercy of God:

And let him return to the Lord,  
And He will have compassion on him,  
And to our God,  
For He will abundantly pardon.

The people of Judah had turned away from God to idols and other nations; Isaiah extends an invitation to turn back to God. All of us here have sinned and rejected God; in Christ we are invited to return to the One who formed us in the womb and gave us life. But look how safely we can turn back; we need not fear that God will only take us back grudgingly. He will have compassion on us. When you have compassion on someone, it is more than being kind to them; your heart goes out to them, you want to physically and emotionally care for them. You deeply desire to make things better. This is how God feels toward those who come to Him; and He has the power to make things better.

God will abundantly pardon. He is not stingy with forgiveness. The Holy Spirit will give us an understanding of how our sin affects our holy God; but also, the faith to turn back to Him for mercy and acceptance. For us to forsake our wicked ways and our unrighteous thoughts by the renewing of our minds, is repentance. Those who remain unrepentant will face God’s judgement and wrath; but those who turn from evil in acceptance of Jesus Christ, will be taken lovingly into the arms of God.

Verses 8 and 9 bring us face to face with the infinite mind of God:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways, declares the Lord.  
For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways

And My thoughts than your thoughts

Although God created mankind in His image, there are serious differences between us. It is typical of human-beings to think of God in terms of themselves. This is arrogant, but it is our nature; fortunately, God understands this and is willing to be merciful anyway.

The unbeliever will often point to things in this world that appear to be unjust and use it as evidence that there can be no just God. They will point to evil and suffering and say it is evidence that a loving God does not exist. But that is all bringing God down to our level and to our viewpoints. God is above these. He is just and He is love, we don’t have a proper understanding of these terms. Our ideas of justice and love are terribly tainted by sin. This goes clear back to Genesis 8:21 again, “for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth”. Our carnal ideas of love and justice come from an evil intent; we can’t trust ourselves.

Fortunately, we can trust God. This is where the believer comes to an understanding that the Bible is true and we can believe what it says. The Bible tells us that God is just and that He is love. It tells us that there is no darkness in Him. It tells us that He is truth and that we can trust Him. In fact, our only hope is to trust Him.

The Bible is clear that God does not commit evil; but at this time, for His own reasons and according to His own plan, He allows it. Somehow, it will all work out to bring Him glory and to be for the good of those who believe on Jesus for salvation. Sickness and death will touch our lives, we will be faced with great difficulties that are not of our own doing. We look at the evil and sin that are so prevalent in the world and even Christians only have a vague understanding of why God allows such things. The unbeliever will curse God, turn from Him, or try to claim that He believes God doesn’t exist. The believer will know that sin is the root of all this suffering, and that God will bring it to an end in His perfect timing and according to His perfect will. The Christian will cling to Christ and say with Simon Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.”

How comforting all this is, if we will just set aside all our thoughts that we are independent and self-fulfilling. We can know that the God who created the universe and has all things under His control is for us. His thoughts and ways are so far above ours that we can’t begin to comprehend them. But in His kindness, He has revealed enough. In the Bible, God has given enough information for us to believe in Him and His Son, that we may be saved and comforted. In Jesus, who is the exact representation of the Father, we see the power, wisdom, love, and compassion of God. God has given us enough; and this is also a demonstration of His love because He didn’t owe us anything.

These two verses declare the wisdom of an infinite God; one who is far above His creation. But it can also be narrowed down to its present context. How do *we* tend to respond to someone who has harmed us; someone who has lied about us; someone who has betrayed us. It is natural for us to respond with anger and resentment, and probably a desire to be separated from that person forever.

But God’s ways and thoughts are far above our own. When we do these things to Him, He desires us to return, just like He did the people of Judah. When we have lived a life of sin, He remains near and listens for us to call to Him; in fact, He calls to us. When we repent and humbly turn to God, He has compassion on us and forever forgives our transgressions.

Let’s be quick to call upon our God in worship and thanksgiving. Let’s be quick to call upon our God with our needs in this life; physical, and even more, spiritual. Let’s spend time thinking about God; to dwell on God and what the Bible tells us about Him is never a waste of time; it is the worship of the one who deserves it.

Prayer

O LORD our God, we worship You; for You are glorious and light and power and love and justice. You are holy and there is no darkness in You. Your wisdom is shown in all Your creation yet it is far beyond us to grasp. Your ways and thoughts are higher than ours, and we bow before You in wonder and awe.

We read in Your word how You called Your people Israel back to You time and again. They suffered Your judgement but they never lost Your love. And You are right and merciful, even in judgement, or no-one could stand. Thank You that You have that same mercy toward us; nations that were not chosen by You, but You are willing to accept us as Your people.

It is good that You are above us. Now we may rest assured in Your love and care. In Jesus Christ, we are safely in Your all-powerful hand and no-one can snatch us from it. We cling to You in times of evil and of good, knowing that You are the only way.

It is in the blessed name of Jesus we pray

Amen