

# Seeking the Lord

by Devereux Jarratt

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking the Lord in an orderly and importunate manner, with humility, penitence, faith, and perseverance, especially during the time of youth.*

**Scripture:** John 1:16, Acts 4:12, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 3:21, Colossians 3:10, Hebrews 12:2, James 1:23, 1 John 2:6

**Topics:** "Spiritual Transformation", "Christ Likeness"

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## Description

The preacher delves into the concept of beholding as in a mirror, emphasizing the continual action of looking at or reflecting the glory of the Lord, which leads to transformation into God's image. Various commentators and theologians discuss the significance of beholding Christ in the mirror of the Gospel, highlighting the importance of gazing at Jesus to be changed into His likeness. The sermon explores how believers, through beholding Christ in Scripture, are gradually restored to reflect His image and manifest godly character, drawing power for a holy life from their relationship with the risen Christ.

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## Transcript

In the conclusion of chapter fifty-four of Isaiah, the Lord promises to protect His church against all her enemies of every description; to render every weapon formed against her of no effect; to condemn every slanderous and malevolent tongue that should arise against her in judgment; and to supply His people, the true members of His church, with a divine righteousness sufficient to justify them from every charge. He further promises that, being established in this righteousness and adorned with the fruits of holiness, they shall stand acquitted before the throne of the last judgment and be put in possession of that glorious inheritance which was purchased by the blood of the Redeemer.

Chapter fifty-five opens with a pathetic call and affectionate invitation to all sorts of men, without limitation, to come and receive the blessings of the new covenant. "Ho, every one that thirsteth," that pants for happiness and the benefits of the Gospel. The invitation is to all that read and hear, without exception. Every soul that sees his need of pardon, righteousness, and salvation and is sensible that he must perish without them is welcome to partake of these blessings and by faith to claim them as his own. "Come ye to the waters;" as the waters which flow in streams and rivers are free for all, so is Christ, the fountain of life. He freely offers forgiveness of sins, righteousness to justify, grace to sanctify, and eternal life and happiness to glorify all that come unto God by Him. The Spirit, whereby believers are sanctified, is frequently represented by the metaphor of waters, and to come to these waters is to frequent the

ordinances of the Gospel, which are the pools wherein they flow and where the faithful maintain communion with the Saviour who here dispenses, out of His fullness, grace to cheer and refresh His thirsty people.

And lest any, through a sense of their guilt, unworthiness, and want of merit, should be discouraged and fear there would be no admittance for them unless they can bring some good in hand to make them welcome, it is added, "And he that hath no money, come ye." In the Gospel market all things are to be had at no cost. He that is too proud to stoop to the gratuitous terms and thinks to come with money in his pocket to purchase the Gospel wares or with merit to recommend him will be wholly disappointed, and his money will perish with him. The truth is, we have nothing. Our all was lost long ago. We are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. If we know this, we should bless the Lord for establishing a market so suitable to our poverty and wants.

It is in consideration of these matters that we are so pressingly invited to "come, and buy, without money and without price," to hearken to the free promises of Gospel salvation and feed upon them by faith that they may become food and nourishment to our souls. "Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." We are naturally prone to unbelief and backward and slow of heart to believe the promises of salvation; therefore, the invitation is repeated that we may be sure of welcome and also to show us how much in earnest the Lord Jesus Christ is that poor, perishing sinners may accept of His bounty and be rich and happy forever. Oh, what great encouragement is here for sinners of every description to come and get all their wants supplied, seeing they are sincerely and repeatedly called and nothing is required on their part but to come and receive, as a free gift, what has already been dearly purchased for them by blood divine.

All men wish to be happy and are seeking happiness in many different ways which are not likely to lead them to the attainment of their object. Our Lord, therefore, expostulates with us and kindly asks, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not?" This is as if He should say, "Why will you toil and waste your strength and substance in chase of happiness in the riches, honors, and pleasures of this world and in the muddy and polluting streams of sensual enjoyment where it is not to be found?" All the pleasures and vanities of time cannot make you happy. They are false delights at best-husks and not bread. They cannot satisfy or allay the eager and boundless cravings of the immortal spirit. Could you gain all the world calls good or great, you would be as far from happiness as ever. Or, if you are seeking to obtain the favor of God and the salvation of your souls by the merit of your good deeds or by your own righteousness and moral and religious duties, your disappointment is inevitable. You are seeking death in the error of your life, for by the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified (Romans 3:20). So that, in either case, you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not.

Oh, that you, my dear hearers, were but deeply conscious how wretched and miserable you are by nature and practice and how impossible it is for you to establish a justifying righteousness of your own by anything you can either do or suffer. None but Christ can save you. His righteousness is sufficient for your justification, exclusive of everything else. All earthly enjoyments are mere empty dreams and flying shadows-the baseless fabric of a vision which flatters and deludes you to your eternal disappointment and ruin. When you truly know these things, you will listen with eager attention to the gracious call which follows: "Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." It is as if the Lord Jesus had said, "Listen to Me with the greatest attention, and obey the invitations of my Gospel; your life-your eternal life--depends upon it."

"Eat ye that which is good:" take the heart-reviving, soul-saving blessing it freely offers and bestows, that ye may be truly and substantially happy. "And let your soul delight itself in fatness," in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Is it not strange that men who are in a perishing state and must famish and pine away to all eternity without these blessings, should stand in need of so many and repeated calls to induce them to receive and enjoy them? But that is the case! It is a melancholy fact! It is truly lamentable! It is a truth over which my soul mourns in secret places!

The call is again repeated with some particular considerations and special motives to induce a compliance: "Incline thine ear and come unto Me; hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you; even the sure mercies of David." Here is the promise of a life of justification and sanctification—a spiritual life of grace here and of glory hereafter. "And I will give you the sure mercies of David:" mercies of every kind, rich, free and repeated mercies, according to that everlasting covenant which is ordered in all things and sure. Not mercy but mercies, including all the blessings of the new covenant such as pardon of sins-of thousands and millions of the most aggravated transgressions; peace with God; the influences of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the mind, purify the heart, compose the soul, and afford serenity and composure amidst all the storms and calamities of this life; a sense of the love and favor of God and the cheering and reviving prospects of everlasting mansions above; a deliverance from hell and all the dire consequences of sin; and a title to heaven and all its unwithering joys. This is a short inventory of the "sure mercies" promised as an inducement to engage sinners to incline their ear and come unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

That these promises might be received and relied on with unshaken faith and confidence, God sent His own Son to publish them to the world as a faithful and true witness to the people and sealed His mission by signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. He is also given to be a Leader and Commander to the people to instruct and guide them into all truth, and to protect and defend them against all the power of earth and hell, as the Captain of their salvation. Nor shall His mission be in vain. For though you and thousands of others should remain unpersuaded to come unto Him and do die in your sins and be engulfed in hell to all eternity, yet this will not be the case of all. Numbers will hear and obey these kind and urgent invitations and run unto Him and will partake of the sure mercies of David that are of Christ, who has purchased them with the price of His own blood. "These shall run unto thee." This may point out the eagerness with which Christ is embraced by all those who are sensible of the evil and danger of sin and feel their need of a Saviour and the blessings of the Gospel.

Thus am I brought on to the words of the text wherein we have an earnest exhortation to sinners to seek the Lord that they might find Him and the blessings of His grace. "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."

It is very clear that the words are addressed to ungodly and unconverted persons, for such are mentioned, as it were, by name under the epithet of "wicked" and "unrighteous" and, as such, stand in need of conversion. They are exhorted and enjoined to seek the Lord and to return or be converted unto Him. And as this is the case of every man by nature, so my text directly points at every unconverted and impenitent sinner in this assembly. Therefore, let all such hearken attentively while the eternal God is exhorting or commanding you by His Word to "seek the Lord while He may be found, and to call upon Him while He is near." It may be the last call you will ever have. Your non-compliance at this time may seal your damnation for ever and ever.

In the prosecution of the subject I propose,

First, To show the manner in which we must seek the Lord and what is implied in the exhortation to do so.

Second, To speak of the seasons when He should be sought.

Third, To mention the encouraging motives suggested in the text to induce us to seek the Lord.

Fourth, To make an application.

And may the Lord enable me so to speak, and you so to hear, that His name may be glorified and we edified, for Christ's sake, Amen.

#### THE MANNER IN WHICH WE ARE TO SEEK THE LORD AND WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE EXHORTATION TO DO SO.

By seeking the Lord we are undoubtedly to understand the making use of all the means of grace which are divinely appointed for obtaining an interest in Christ, the favor of God, and the sanctification of our hearts and souls so that we may obtain the pardon of sin, a title to heaven, and a fitness for the enjoyment thereof.

What Is Implied In the Exhortation to Seek the Lord? The following particulars are implied:

a) That we have lost the favor and image of God and that these must be regained, or we cannot be happy here or hereafter.

b) That we are by nature, or while in a natural and unregenerate state, at a distance from God, and therefore we are so frequently called to come to Him and to return to Him. We are not at a distance from Him in regard to place, for He is omnipresent, and wheresoever we are, God is there also. We are continually surrounded by His presence, but we are at a distance in regard to friendship and vital union because we are destitute of saving faith which is the effective cause of this union. As long as we continue destitute of a life-giving, soul-saving, heart-purifying faith, we have no union and friendship with God, no communion with Him or conformity to Him, but we remain at a distance from Him.

c) The exhortation implies that we have lost our way to heaven and happiness and are like benighted travellers who have lost their road and are wandering in a wilderness. We are therefore exhorted to seek the Lord Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. He is the only way to the favor and image of God. He is the right way that leads to the city of God.

The Manner In Which We Are To Seek the Lord. Here a question may arise: "How or in what manner must we seek the Lord so as to find Him?" This question I am now to answer.

a) We must seek the Lord orderly and by due method. Take care to begin at the right end of the business and proceed in a regular manner. The foundation must be first laid in conversion, or we shall do nothing to the purpose. The want of observing this has been attended with bad consequences. Too many, when they begin to see the necessity of being religious and seeking the Lord, enter upon the business in a very preposterous manner and so make nothing of it. Instead of examining the present state of their souls and crying to the Lord for pardoning and converting grace, they are querying whether a man can be perfect in this life or not, whether this doctrine or that doctrine be true or not. Thus they begin at the wrong end of their work and spend themselves in searching after opinions and in advocating this side or that of

questions in which, at least for the present, they have no concern. As their religion begins with opinions, so it is likely to end in opinions, which in good truth must be airy and unsubstantial enough.

I would advise you to follow this method. First, sit down and consider your lost and miserable state by nature and practice and the awful danger your precious souls are in on account of your multiplied transgressions of the holy laws of God. This will point out what your present necessity is and that you must obtain pardoning mercy and converting grace or you will be miserable in hell forever. Then you will apply yourselves to the means appointed and adapted for the attainment of these.

b) We must seek the Lord in an importunate manner. "The kingdom of heaven," says our Lord, "suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). We must not seek in a formal, lukewarm manner, for many shall seek in this way to enter in at the strait gate of conversion and shall not be able. Therefore strive, agonize, to enter in at the strait gate (Luke 13:24). The case requires importunity. The salvation of your souls is at stake. "Except ye be converted ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 18:3). The Lord promises success to importunate prayer and to nothing else. "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

c) We must seek the Lord in a humble manner. Be sensible of your spiritual poverty and that you have no merits, no price to bring with you by which you can obtain the favor of God or procure the pardon of the least sin. Whatever blessings you receive at the hand of the Lord must be without money and without price. The Lord looks favorably on him that is of a poor and contrite spirit. David found the truth of this from experience. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:6). The hungry who are poor in spirit shall be filled with good things, but the rich, the proud beggars, are sent away empty.

d) We must seek the Lord in a penitent manner. Repentance always implies a ceasing to do evil and learning to do well. Accordingly, we read in the text, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord." In vain do we pretend to seek the Lord while we retain any species of sin whatsoever, for only he that confesses and forsakes his sin shall find mercy.

e) We must seek the Lord in a believing manner. Believing, not only that there is, in heaven, a holy, just, and sin-revenging God, but also that He is a merciful God. Believe that not only will He render vengeance to His enemies and punish the wicked, but He will also hear the cries of the penitent and reward those that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). This is extremely necessary. If we do not consider the holiness and justice of God and that He will take vengeance upon the workers of iniquity, we shall never think in earnest of forsaking sin, and then, when we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and its God-provoking and heaven-daring nature, Satan will drive us to despair unless we consider and believe God to be the merciful rewarder of them that diligently seek His face through Jesus Christ, who is the Mediator between Him and His offending creatures.

f) We must seek the Lord with perseverance. Many begin to seek for a while but they grow weary in well-doing and never reap the fruit of their labor. Too many begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh. They get awakened and stirred up in prayer and other means to obtain the pardon of sin, a sense of the love and favor of God, and the saving conversion of their souls, but not obtaining these as soon as they might expect or as soon as some other have professed to obtain them, they faint in their minds, get discouraged, become remiss in the use of means, and so stop short of the prize. They lose their labor and their souls to boot. And now, having relapsed into their former state of inactivity, they are tempted to decide that no such

things as the sense of forgiveness, the love of God, conversion, and such like are to be obtained by ordinary people in these days. They have tried for them, they say, as much as anybody and yet know nothing about them. Hence their last state is worse than their first because it is not to be expected that any man will earnestly seek that which he does not believe to be obtainable. But had they, like the Syrophenician woman, continued to press on and take no denial, they would have found that perseverance would have crowned their labors with success. In due season they would have reaped if they had not fainted.

#### THE SEASONS WHEN THE LORD SHOULD BE SOUGHT.

My text enjoins us to seek the Lord while He may be found and to call upon Him while He is near. There are seasons which are attended with peculiar advantages for seeking the Lord and to which some special promises are made. Such a season is the time of youth. "I love them that love Me," says the Lord, "and those that seek Me early shall find Me" (Proverbs 8:17).

Let the younger part of my audience attend to this. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). You will never see a season in all your lives so favorable for seeking the Lord and obtaining His mercy and salvation as the present. You are not yet so hardened in the ways of sin as others who are more advanced in years. You are free from a thousand perplexities which harass those who have families to govern and provide for, which engross their thoughts with anxious cares. If you do not seek the Lord and embrace religion now, the odds are vastly against you whether you win ever do it in all your life. If you look among those who are now possessed of true religion and are happy in the love and favor of God, you will perhaps find twenty who embraced religion when they were young people for every one who did so in more advanced age. Let me, therefore, my dear children and youth, beseech you, as on my bended knees and with the tenderest bowels of love and pity, seek the Lord now. Pray, oh, pray fervently to God that He will pardon your sins, purify your hearts, bless you with a sense of His love, and establish you in all goodness. Do not let the devil persuade you that it is too soon, for it can never be too soon to be delivered from the wrath and curse of God which continually hangs over your heads while you are without an interest in the blood and righteousness of Christ and while your hearts are not renewed by the Holy Ghost. It can never be too soon to love the God who made you, the Saviour who shed His blood for you. It is never too soon to taste the sweet, the satisfying pleasures of religion which exceed all the joys of sense and the gratifications of the deluding and ensnaring world. Young people die as well as old. If you die out of Christ you are lost and ruined forever. It is therefore the height of folly for you to suppose it is too soon or that it is not now high time for you to seek the Lord.

Let your age be what it will, the proper season for seeking the Lord is now. It may be now or never. Now is the only time you can call your own. Therefore, from this moment, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). There is no concern in all the world equal to the concern of your souls. Therefore, let that which is of the first dignity and importance be first sought, and let all other things bend to this: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (Second Corinthians 6:2).

Seek the Lord at the season when He may be found and at a time when He is near. God has promised to be found of them that seek Him, and He is near to those that call upon Him. Therefore, while the Lord is calling on you by His Word and we enjoy the ordinances of religion and the means of grace, we should cry mightily to the Lord, both publicly and privately, for mercy, grace, and salvation. We know not how soon the candlestick may be removed out of this place and when the Spirit of God will cease to strive with you.

Neither do you know when death may convey your bodies to the grave and you will be fixed in remediless despair. The Lord is now near. He waits to be gracious. You are invited to come unto Him. But in a little while all these golden seasons and Gospel opportunities will be no more. A period will be put to the time when God is near, and then you shall call upon the Lord and He will not hear; you shall seek Him early, but you shall not find Him. Oh, how these awful considerations should awaken every soul to seek the Lord while He may be found and to call importunately upon Him while he is near lest, too late, we cry "Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say, unto you, I know you not whence you are... depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity' (Luke 13:24-27).

At such a season as the present, delays are extremely dangerous. Hereby we abuse the tender mercies of God who has provided these ordinances and means of salvation. In hardening our hearts we grieve the Spirit and give the devil greater and more effectual advantages over us. Every day we resist the Spirit, we are going farther and farther from God. Every day we delay, we are drawing nearer to hell and everlasting ruin. Every day we wax weaker and weaker, sin and corruption wax stronger and stronger, and the probability of our ever turning grows less and less. In a word, the danger is daily increased of being given up to a hard heart and a blind, reprobate mind so that damnation will become inevitable. Therefore, let me entreat you this day to hear and obey the divine call. Do not harden your hearts lest God shall swear in His wrath that you shall not enter into His rest (Hebrews 3:17,18).

To excite you to flee from the wrath to come and to seek the Lord before it is too late, I shall now proceed with:

#### THE ENCOURAGING MOTIVES.

Contained within the text, "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," are strong and encouraging motives.

Sinners, your case is bad indeed and enough to make every considerate heart sad just thinking of it. You are hanging over the burning fiery furnace held only by the slender thread of life. This is all that holds you and keeps you from dropping down into the flaming gulf of everlasting perdition. It is a fearful situation indeed! But though your state is dreadful and horrendous, yet it is not desperate. If I thought it was, I would not say a word that might torment you before the time. But I think I can give you the best assurance that it is not the case. Notwithstanding all your great, multiplied, and long-continued provocations, your offended Sovereign has mercy in store for you. If you will now forsake your wicked ways and your unrighteous thoughts and will return to the Lord through Jesus Christ, He will have mercy upon you and will abundantly pardon. Oh, that such unequaled goodness and super-abounding mercy may lead you all to repentance. "Though you have played the harlot among many lovers, and have done evil and bitter things as you could, yet return unto Me," says the Lord, "and I will return unto you." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). No sins so great, no crimes so aggravated, no rebellion, however causeless and long continued, shall operate to your final destruction if you will but now return unto the Lord and seek His face; for He will surely have mercy upon you and abundantly pardon all your transgressions so that iniquity shall not prove your eternal ruin.

It is frequently said among you that I never prophesy any good concerning you; that I preach you all to hell and there I leave you; that I give you no encouragement, and such like. In answer to such I would say,

"How can I bless whom the Lord hath not blessed?" "There is no peace,' saith my God, 'to the wicked.'" "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the [peoples] that forget God" (Psalm 9:17). The Word of God does not furnish me with a single sentence with which to comfort or encourage any man that will persist in sin. But it does abound with encouragements to those who will forsake sin and return to the Lord. Such an encouragement is in my text, and if you have delayed your repentance and conversion to God until you could hear some encouragement, then all your excuses for any further delay are now silenced. For what greater encouragement can you expect? I think that it is so great that it exceeds all expectation. Would to God the encouragement may operate so kindly on your hearts as to induce all of you, without one exception, to arise this very hour and to say one to another, "Come, let us return unto the Lord," or at least, that this may be the silent language and settled purpose of every heart. But is it so in fact? Does the all-seeing eye of God now behold such a purpose taking place in every breast? Are your souls in motion towards Him? Look inward, my brethren, and say, "Is it so or is it not?"

#### THE APPLICATION.

From what has been said we may learn that as the mercy of God and everlasting happiness are bestowed through the blood and righteousness of Christ on all that truly return unto the Lord; or, in other words, on all who repent and are converted; so all such as refuse to return to God through Jesus Christ and remain in an impenitent and unconverted state are yet in their sins, unpardoned, out of the favor of God, and under the curse due to all their transgressions. If they persist, they must suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. If you want to know whether you will be happy or miserable should you die in your present state, you must inquire whether you have forsaken all your wicked ways, ungodly practices, and unrighteous imaginations by true repentance and have turned to the Lord by a sound conversion and obtained pardon and mercy by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. A man is not likely to pass through such a change as this without knowing something of it. "Seek and you shall find" (Matthew 7:7), says our Saviour. But if we seek and find what we sought for and yet do not know that we have found, what comfort or satisfaction shall we obtain?

I fear the majority of my hearers are neither true seekers nor finders. Indeed, it is impossible to be the latter if we have not been the former. Scripture says, "Ye have not because ye ask not" (James 4:2). The greater part of you, I fear, are yet careless and prayerless. Secret prayer you neglect or pass through it in a cold, hurrying, or formal manner. Family prayer you wholly omit. There is no more prayer in your families than in your stables. You come to church, 'tis true, but it may be easily discerned by your lounging posture and light, trifling behavior, that the prayers are nothing to you. I dare say some of you would be ashamed should your companions think you were seriously joining in the prayers. But you are not ashamed to join with the servants of Satan in their profane language and in pouring out the dialect of hell! No, nor are you ashamed to join with them in their drunken carousals and wicked feasts. Poor souls! You are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity-still in your sins and in your blood. There is only a step between you and death, and that step could land you in everlasting misery. Oh, consider seriously and solemnly reflect upon your deplorably dangerous state. Be entreated to seek the Lord-now-while he may be found. Call earnestly, fervently, frequently, upon Him while He is near and still waiting to be gracious to you.

If you will not hear and obey these solemn calls and gracious invitations and seek the Lord while you enjoy the ordinances of the Gospel and means of grace in which He may be found, you will bitterly lament your folly when it is too late. You will remember, millions of ages hence, what opportunities and means of salvation you once had, but lost and abused them all. A remembrance of the earnest invitations you have heard this day will draw tears from your eyes and groans from your hearts. What indignation will be

excited against yourselves when you reflect on the pains which have been taken to make you happy and how obstinately you have resisted all the remonstrances of God, your ministers, and your best friends, and that you sold your salvation for a thing of nought and rushed down to hell with the sound of mercy in your ears.

Oh, what anguish, what tortures, what sharp twinges must your poor souls feel from the worm that never dies and the fire that never shall be quenched. Your misery must be eternal! The smoke of your torments will ascend forever and ever. You will be bereaved of all hope and sealed up in black despair. Oh, shocking thought! But this must be your certain doom if you will not seek the Lord now while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near.

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