

Christ Community Covenant Church
Seek the Lord while He may be found!
Pastor Dave Scherrer - March 3, 2013

God is not unwilling to judge evil, but rather He is slow to anger and longsuffering in love, not willing that any should perish. His desire is that before 'bad things happen' we look at our lives and test the fruit of our faith and behavior.

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Someday we all face a reckoning. It is prudent to do that reckoning NOW, lest we fool ourselves into believing we are standing firm when in fact we are headed for a fall.

The Compassion of the Lord

It is good to remember the compassion of the Lord. I am so grateful for his patience with me and his tender strong hand in my life encouraging me when I need hope and disciplining me when I get off the mark and become lazy or take my blessings for granted. I love that about my God! This verse is a sample of the Prodigal God, the Sovereign Lord who lavished blessings on us.

Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-9

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁶ ***'Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;***

⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Seeking the Lord

What does that mean to seek the Lord? I think it means lots of things. It means to seek to know Him. And this is far beyond being able to identify his attributes or to characterize his character. To know Him is to be deeply in love, intimately aware of His presence and purposes in our lives. It is to seek to be about the priorities of God and to live a fruitful life.

To seek Him is to desire the things that God desires and to see the Kingdom of God expanded through the testimony of His word. To seek God is to see every human being as an ever-living never-dying soul who is in grave danger that if they do not repent, they will perish and never see the Kingdom of God.

To seek him is more a matter of the heart than the mind. Poetry is perhaps the best literary medium to capture the angst that there is in seeking after God best. In our Psalm today we see that I seek after God because my soul thirsts for Him. Only he can give me water for my soul, I am dying of soul-thirst and only God has the fountain to drink from. So we seek after Him with all our being, lest we perish of thirst:

Psalm 63:1-8

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
³ Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.
⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. ⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with
fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,
⁶ when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
⁷ for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
⁸ My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

Today in a moment we will go before the table and seek the face of God. We seek the cup that satisfies the thirst of our soul. We seek the fat rich food of eternal life, the kind of food that is at once a delight to taste and gives strength to our core. But this food will only taste like simple bread and sweet juice if there is no longing for Him; to see His face - to know His smile of approval.

Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength

Mark 12:30

³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Imbedded in this seeking of the Lord there is certain urgency. As we have said the Lord is patient and longsuffering. He is waiting because He is not willing for any to perish. But His patience is not endless. There will be a time when love and justice meet and that is what we call the Judgment. In the fullness of time every wrong will be confronted and every selfless act of love rewarded.

Perhaps you have the habit of procrastinating. Maybe not always, but sometimes. To your own frustration perhaps. Habits of putting things off until the consequences are so dire that they demand your attention. Then you kick yourself for placing your quality of life at risk by your laziness and failure to prioritize. Right in here it is good to be able to learn from the mistakes of others.

Learning from the mistakes of others

We don't usually do that well but God is appealing to us to see how others have suffered and to learn from their mistake and to seek after God while He can still be found.

In our readings for today we see that seeking the Lord means to repent from our sin, to repudiate the temptation to be God in our own lives and to instead live in such a way that there is obvious Kingdom profit. We see this clearly in our Gospel passage this morning:

Luke 13:1-9

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

⁶ And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Let's tackle the first part of this passage first. As has happened throughout history, in that day people have died tragically. At the time it was a common misconception that if you did something bad – sinned really badly – then you could expect to have bad luck and misfortune in your life. Jesus is quick to correct their theology and to turn this question into a teachable moment. He confronts parenthetically, “Do you think they were worse sinners than you?” And then he leads them to the more compelling thought; ***“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”***

Remember our admonition from our Isaiah passage a moment ago? ***“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”*** There will come a time when time ends and all the doing and speaking is done.

II Cor. 5:10-11

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

It is time to seek the Lord now before it is too late! Jesus goes on to tell a story about time running out.

Luke 13:6-9

⁶ And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ ⁸ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

L #1: The Master expects fruit.

I want you to remember that fruit happens when the tree is rooted into good soil and is near clear water. Once that happens, fruit will naturally happen. Like the prophet Jeremiah noted of the faithful man:

“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” (Jeremiah 18:8).

Jesus said, ***“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples”*** (John 15:8). We want to be Christ's disciples and we want to glorify the Father. We accomplish this through 'bearing much fruit.' Bearing fruit is evidence that you are rooted deep in Christ, that you have been seeking His face and making His priorities your priorities. This is what it is to bear fruit. And that happens naturally when we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. God does not want barren trees, He wants fruitful ones.

L #2: The Master is patient but a time is coming when the Master's patience will run out.

As patient as the Master is, His patience will run out. He will come back searching for fruit for years. He will allow the keeper of the vineyard to persuade him on to another year. But eventually, the unfruitful tree will be cut down. He does not want it using up the ground.

If I understand the gardening practices correctly, vineyard keepers would sometimes plant fig trees in the corners of their vineyards where grapes were not growing. They would do this to keep from wasting any part of their property. However, there was a tradeoff. The fig tree would use some of the ground's nutrients. As long as the fig tree bore fruit, the tradeoff was fine. But why would a vineyard keeper maintain a fig tree that was leaching out the ground's nutrients from the grape vines if it would not even bear any fruit?

#3: The Master will help us bear fruit

Did you see the interceding on behalf of the gardener? I liken the gardener to Christ who pleads for us on our behalf as we read in Romans 8:34, *'Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.'* Not only is the Master patient with us, the Master helps us bear fruit. In fact if it were not for the mercy of the Master and the Gardener, we would all be sent to judgment without a hope, for there is nothing righteous in any of us by ourselves. And not only that, He has the vineyard keeper dig around us and put manure at your feet to stimulate growth. To help you seek the Lord while you still can. God has not just planted us here on the earth and then said, "Get to it." He helps us.

[My story of losing my sight]

Pastor H.A. Ironside said he heard this story at age 8 and it never left his mind: It was of pioneers who were making their way across one of the central states to a distant place that had been opened up for homesteading. They traveled in covered wagons drawn by oxen, and progress was necessarily slow. One day they were horrified to note a long line of smoke in the west, stretching for miles across the prairie, and soon it was evident that the dried grass was burning fiercely and coming toward them rapidly. They had crossed a river the day before but it would be impossible to go back to that before the flames would be upon them. One man only seemed to have understanding as to what could be done. He gave the command to set fire to the grass behind them. Then, when a space was burned over, the whole company moved back upon it.

As the flames roared on toward them from the west, a little girl cried out in terror, "Are you sure we shall not all be burned up?" The leader replied, "My child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been!"

What a picture of the believer, who is safe in Christ!

"On Him Almighty vengeance fell,
Which would have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus becomes our Hiding Place."

The fires of God's judgment burned themselves out on Him, and all who are in Christ are safe forever, for they are now standing where the fire has been.

(Illustrations of Bible Truth, Moody Press, 1945, pp. 34-35)

Isaiah 55:1-3

55 "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!

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and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

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hear, that your soul may live;

and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁶ ***"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near."***

Come to the table and eat till you are full!