

Biblical Evangelism

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 55:6-13

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Isaiah 55. We began this chapter a number of weeks ago looking at how the Gospel is set forth in this particular chapter in a very clear and concise way. I don't know beside the Psalms whether there is another portion of Scripture that is cited in the New Testament more than the prophet Isaiah. As Bob just read for us, Romans 10 and how many times Paul, even there, brought us back to this inspired book. I'm going to be reading from verse 1 down to the end of the chapter even though my text will be primarily in verses 6 through 13 and what I want to speak with you about is "Biblical Evangelism." Biblical evangelism. Here in verse 1,

1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. 3 Incline your 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. 4 Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. 5 Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee. 6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: 7 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. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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. 10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. 12 For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with

peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

There is a lot here and we'll take this as the Lord directs. If we don't get all the way through, certainly we can always come back to it. But here is a portion of Scripture that anybody that is being trained to preach should read and contemplate prayerfully. I know that when I went through my preacher training, we referred to a lot of different books about evangelism and how to preach the Gospel and touched on what I was taught at the time was the message that we were to preach. As I look back now that the Lord has since taught me, I didn't learn the Gospel in preacher's school. The Lord was pleased to open my heart and teach me in his school well after I had already been preaching for a number of years and caused me to see that it was a false message that I was preaching. He showed me I was lost and opened my heart to Christ. But had the emphasis in those schools been on the word that I have just read for you, versus men's interpretation of the word, it would have been a much more profitable time.

Modern evangelism and here's an example, if I had but one text open and to teach preachers as I have done over time throughout the world in different countries, this would be one that would be a point of emphasis for us to consider what it is to preach the Gospel. The word "evangelism" comes from the word "evangel," which means "Gospel." So what we have here is a pattern. We have here a model that we find throughout Scripture of what it is to preach the Gospel. So-called evangelism today, modern, contemporary evangelism, I have no qualms in telling you that it is a poisoned pot from which so many are being made to eat. But it's called the Gospel for evangelism and when I weigh it with this word that I have just read for you, I have to tell you plainly it's not the Gospel. It's not evangelism.

You say, "Well, what is it?" Well, it's proselytizing. That's a word that even Christ used of men that crossed land and sea so it's not for lack of zeal. Even now there are people being sent out to cross land and sea and to convert sinners is their mission, but even as Christ said, once they have so done, they have made of that sinner twice fold a child of the devil. If you look at Matthew 23:15, you'll see of what I speak here. In Matthew 23:15, there weren't any group of people more zealous and more religiously dedicated to proselytizing people, in other words, as we might use today, getting people to live right, be right and walk right, which is the modern message. No matter where you go, you hear it often. This was their mission and in Matthew 23:15, our Lord didn't commend them. He said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte." A proselyte was somebody that if they found you outside the Jewish religion, they required you, in essence, to become a Jew. You had to get circumcised. You had to start dressing like a Jew. You had to start reciting the law. Who does that sound like? Catechisms. It sounds like getting people to reform, change your ways and do as we do. Different congregations that you pass by, they all have a different set of rules and regulations but they're about proselytizing people. If you begin to

question the pastor and say, "Well, how come we do this but down the road they don't do that?" The pastor will say, "Don't listen to them. You just follow what we tell you to do."

That's what these Pharisees did, but the Lord said, "and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." I've pondered that for some time. Why twofold more the child of hell? They're already a child of hell by nature, but by bringing religion to them and bringing profession to them, by making them think that because they've said something or done something according to what you told them to do that now they are righteous before God, you've doubly blinded them because 1. they don't see themselves as sinners anymore, and 2. you've given them a false righteousness. You've given them a robe of righteousness that they can work out or are working out in order to gain or maintain their salvation and both are false. To be blind to your sin but also to be blind to true righteousness is to be twice fold a child of the devil.

So some very serious declarations here. Even the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1, if you'll look over there in Galatians 1, this is a man that the Lord raised up to send forth to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles. He was a Jew and yet he was to carry this Gospel to the Gentiles and he went from place to place, this region of Galatia in Asia Minor, which might be related to several parishes. They might be about that size, maybe a little more, where Paul traveled but after having preached the Gospel there, there came in these proselytizers otherwise known as Judaizers. Their one goal was to get people to follow the Jewish law so they would preach circumcision; they'd preach rules and regulations, things that you have to do, must do in order to be saved or to stay saved.

You can see how firm Paul is writing back to them in verse 6 of Galatians 1, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." If the message is not wholly, completely, entirely exalting the Christ of God and that grace of God which is without merit, then salvation is wholly of him, in him, by him, through him and what he accomplished, it's another Gospel. It's just that simple. There is no room for gray area here. This is how the Spirit directed Paul to write.

Then he says, verse 7, "Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." I've heard some try to explain what their preacher is preaching by saying, "Well, it's not as clear as what we would like. It's not maybe as plain as what you declare it but, you know, I'm not going to say he's not preaching the Gospel." They hedge. How could it be both ways? It's either clear or it's not. It's either a declaration of Christ and his glory or it's not. There is no middle ground here. Paul calls it in verse 7 a perversion of the Gospel of Christ. If you try to add to or take anything from that which gives Christ all the glory, it's a perversion of the Gospel. A perversion.

Paul even more boldly states in verse 8, "But though we, or an angel from heaven." How many people have you run across today that will testify that they were out in the field or driving down the road and somehow an angel appeared? To them it's a very real experience. "I saw him standing at the foot of my bed." Here Paul says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have

preached unto you, let him be accursed." That's a strong word. You look it up and it's literally "let them be damned."

"As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel." Do you think the Spirit of God was directing Paul in clarity here? I've often said if something appears once in Scripture it's worthy of note but when it is said twice, it's like we tell our kids, "Don't make me tell you twice." Once is enough.

But here he says it again, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God?" In other words, am I doing what I'm doing to gather a big following after me or is my mission to declare what God himself has declared concerning his Son? Or do I seek to please men? "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

So coming back here to this portion in Isaiah, you can see why I want to deal with this carefully in the time that we have. We can always come back to it, but I want us to see the elements of true biblical evangelism that distinguish it from the false popular message of our day. I've written down in my notes seven particular characteristics of the Gospel and how it is to be preached. My prayer is that the Lord would use this even in our own hearts because as we leave here we're going out into a very religious world but lost and if you don't declare the truth, who will? It's a time for us to, as the Lord gives those opportunities, to be true to men's souls, but more importantly be true to the honor and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The very first thing that I would have you note here in verse 6 and it's this one that I noted as we began this chapter in some of the commands that are given from verse 1 down to verse 5, words like "ho," or "come," or "incline your ear." These are commands, even as here in verse 6, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found." That's a command. It's not an invitation. It is not an offer. It's a command. So that's the first point I'd have you to see that with regard to biblical evangelism, we don't go out offering Christ to sinners as if he were up for election. He's not. Way back in Psalm 2, God the Father already said, "I have set my king on my holy hill." There is no election here. Even when Christ was on the earth, he didn't go about seeking a popularity vote where he offered himself to them and now, alas, they turn thumbs down on him. No, the Gospel is a command and I would say in that it stands in contradiction to what you'll hear popularly preached today.

I'm not making this up. You can go out there and turn on the radio and listen, if you can endure it, or you can even read some articles by some very popular preachers today, go out on the internet and read it, and you will see that what distinguishes the Gospel from what men preach is that they make the salvation of God an offer. They truly believe that the key to salvation is in man's hands. You've heard preachers say, "God has done all that he can do and now the rest is up to you."

I can remember back before the Lord opened my eyes to the Gospel and it may still be very popular but there is a little booklet that is called "The Four Spiritual Laws." It's a

little booklet that we were instructed to use. Go around and hand to people. Easy reader. The very first of those laws says this, "God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life." That's how it's put and that is made to be the very starting point of that particular Gospel. Can you imagine a banner being hung on the outside of the ark the day that God destroyed the world and preserved Noah and his family, just eight people, and that banner saying, "God loves you and offers you a wonderful plan for your life." What a contradiction. It's not an offer. You know, even as Noah was declared to be a preacher of righteousness, that ark was a declaration. It wasn't an offer. It was a declaration that any that were to be saved would have to be brought into that ark. There was one door, one ark, and exclusive to that, there was nothing but condemnation.

That's the message that we have to declare whether men like it or not. This is a declaration of God, but as you read on in those same four spiritual laws, law number three continues down the same vein making the death of the Lord Jesus a mere provision. Here's what the law states, "Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through him you can know and experience God's loving plan for your life." It all has to do with you. It's a provision and that's how it's preached.

Dear friends, an invitation or an offer supposes that the right to accept or reject lies with the sinner and that's what's wrong with it. A command, on the other hand, places the authority in God's hands. Think about who is declaring here, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." That doesn't sound like an open invitation. That sounds like a declaration. Seek the Lord. Call upon him exclusively. That word "called upon" means "to worship him."

That law number four that I just read for you, I went out on the internet and pulled this up to make sure I was quoting these things correctly. It's been a long time since I've looked at it but it's there and it states, "We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, then we can know and experience God's loving plan for your lives." We must individually accept and that's how I was taught before my eyes were opened to Christ and the Gospel and truth. I was taught that salvation was like a contract that is put out for you. God has already signed his part, now you go out and get people to sign on their part and there were even little formal contracts that we were given where you got a witness, you got somebody else that was there and actually testified that you prayed the prayer. So I know what I'm talking about because that's how I was trained.

On this particular site that I looked at, there was a "submit" button that after going through these steps and praying the prayer that was there, you could click on this button that said "yes" in answer to the question, "Did you pray this prayer?" So if you clicked yes, then it submits your email to somebody. I didn't click on it. Doubtless, somebody is going to try to get a hold of you to make sure it sticks. Believe it or not, these are terms that you'll hear people use, "Let's make sure it sticks. They have made their decision, they have received Christ and now we've got to make sure it sticks."

But there is another link that says, "I still have questions," so you can click there, but either way the decision is made to be yours to accept or reject. I don't know whether you

see what's wrong with that, but that's a pot of poison of which I spoke of which many today are deluded. How different the word of God. As you look over here in Romans 9:15-16, look with me there. The Gospel is a command. God commands men everywhere to repent. He commands sinners to seek the Lord. He commands sinners to call upon him while he is near, in other words, in the way that he has determined, that is through his Son.

In Romans 9, it's very clear to point out, if you look in verse 11 concerning Jacob and Esau, it says, "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved," that's the grace, "but Esau have I hated," that's justice. God doesn't owe grace to sinners, but he declares unto sinners through the Gospel where it is that grace is to be found. It says, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found." It's not on your timetable. It's on God's.

"But Esau have I hated. What shall we say then?" verse 14, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" The fact that he distinguishes between sinners? Showing grace to whom he will and condemning whom he will? Look at what verse 15 says, "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." He has the right to say to sinners, "Seek the Lord while he may be found." This is not an open-ended invitation. Do not presume as some do, "Well, I'm going to live my life the way I want to and in the end I'll go ahead and make things right with God." That's not in your hands to determine. It is God's to show mercy, grace to whom he will, when he will and not in your hands.

So that's the first point I'd have you to consider, the Gospel is a command. I declare to such. You don't give invitations. There is nothing to invite you to. You're commanded to look to Christ. You're commanded to trust in his person and his blood and righteousness alone. That's God command. I'm but a herald of the king like that horseman that rides into a village, sounds the trumpet and unrolls the scroll and declares exactly what the king said. Don't add to it. Don't change it. Move on to the next village. Declare it. It's what it is, it's a Gospel declaration.

But secondly, coming back to my text here in Isaiah 55:6, we might not get off verse 6, but there's a lot here. True faith looks continually to Christ alone. The command here in verse 6 is to seek the Lord. You say, "How is that different from modern evangelism, so called?" Well, the modern message, the plea is to make a decision for Jesus. The focus is on you making a decision. That's where all the emphasis is. If you'll just decide. If you'll just make this decision for Jesus, he's waiting, then you'll be saved. The emphasis here in the Gospel is rather on the Savior who it is we are to seek. You see, the eyes of faith are never in here, they are outward looking to him. Given eyes of faith, that's what you will do.

You will seek the Lord. You will call upon him while he is near and the sense of the word "seek" here in verse 6 is literally "to resort to, or frequent a place." Some of you have favorite vacation spots where you often go back. You like it. It's relaxing. You resort to it, that's why it's called a resort. It's a time to get away and rest, but it's also a word in the original that means "to tread a place." It's a well-worn path to the Lord. So even here in the word, "Seek ye the LORD," it's not some quick decision you make, "Okay, I walked the aisle and I did what the preacher said so I'm saved." No, it's in the present tense. There is a well-worn path to the Lord. As a needy sinner, we never stop coming to the Lord.

I remember when I was in Africa if I got off the beaten trail, beaten path, if you will, and got lost, you always looked for a well-worn path because it either led to a village or it led to a well or it led to a field. It led somewhere where you could get help and so you got on that path and you stayed on it regardless of the surroundings that you may not know where you were. It meant that people walked that path regularly. That's the word that's used here. It's not a matter of a simple formulated prayer that somebody puts in your mouth and says, "Okay, now that you've prayed this prayer, then don't doubt it, you're saved." That's foolishness. No, here is an urgent continual coming again and again and again to the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "LORD" there you see in verse 6 is in all caps. That's Jehovah. The Living God. That's Christ, the great I Am to whom we come.

You say, "Why do we come?" We're drawn to him. He has caused us to see our need. I have as much need today as I ever did as a sinner and that's why the Scriptures declare that we come to him, that throne of grace, in time of need. I am always needy. The Lord has made it so.

Look at 1 Peter 2:4. Most people today want a quick fix. They even want a quick fix when they go to the doctor and I'm guilty of that. If it's something serious, "Don't you have something that can get me in and out of here? Don't talk to me about laying up in bed for three weeks." We're just that way. We think that we're invincible. Just fix it like a flat tire. Just change it out and keep going. But this matter of salvation, dear friends, is not a quick fix. That's how preachers make it, "Bring your friends. Today we're going to see how many are going to get saved." So they have this big crusade meeting and you have all these people in there that what they're doing is proselytizing, getting them into the system. Getting them to change their mindset to think like they want them to think. But salvation is not that way.

Salvation, look here in 1 Peter 2, it says there in verse 1, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." How long does it take a babe, a newborn babe to grow up? It's a process. It's a journey. It's a lifelong growth. It says, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Now look, "To whom coming," ever coming, "as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." To whom coming.

So "Seek ye the LORD." The modern method is to beat a path to a man made altar or to a baptismal pool as the preacher is trying to make sure his numbers stay up where they should be. "How many can we get baptized?" Or beat a path to the preacher. People like that. Preachers like that. They like it when men want to consult and seek them, but that's not what it says, it says, "Seek ye the LORD." That's not something you can hurry up when the Scripture says wait on the Lord. The preacher is trying to make it happen, it's not the Lord. There is no hurry up here in what is described. Or to come to the mourner's bench. None of these things are taught in the Bible.

Even some writers of old would exhort their readers to come to faith or repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ. I used to preach that way. What's wrong with that? You're putting something between them and the Savior. No, it's coming to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. It's coming to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance. It's seeking the Lord in that way that he has so taught. The command is to come to Christ, is what it is.

Alright, thirdly, and maybe we'll just have to stop here in this one, but let's take a look at it. Coming back to Isaiah 55:6, I will tell you this, that the right to give grace or withhold it is in the Lord's hands alone. Do you notice how it says there, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near"? I would say to you even now as this message is being declared that the Lord is near. The message of Christ, me standing up here pointing you, the sinner, to Christ, he has brought this message near. You're not here by accident. I'm not here by accident, but don't be thinking in your heart that somehow, "Well, I think I'll go ponder this." You've got nothing to ponder. These are the strict commands of Scripture. Nothing says that tomorrow he will be near, that tomorrow you will even have an opportunity to hear again. He may take you out today. He may take me out.

So we see that the right to give grace or withhold it is of the Lord. The modern false message is what? The Savior is waiting. He's always there waiting and some would argue that as long as you're alive there's hope but that may not be the case. The Bible message is, "Seek him while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," what that says is it's not up to you, the sinner but the Savior, as to who, where, when and how.

I was raised to in the summer stay with my grandmother and she had breakfast right at 7 a.m. She had lunch right at noon. She had supper at 5 o'clock. And it didn't matter whether you were within earshot or not but the way she announced it was time, we had these plumbing pipes. It was a three story house and she had these plumbing pipes and she would bang the knife on the pipe to let you know it was two minutes until sit down time and if you didn't get there for that, there wasn't anything to eat. She'd pack it all up and put it away. That was it. There were times when I would be late and come in and the table was already cleared and, well, sorry, the time was past. And she determined it, she was the cook and it wasn't sitting around waiting for it to happen. It was served, done, gone.

There is a day when the Lord will be afar off and he'll not be found. Our Lord Jesus told the Pharisees that. He said, "You'll seek me and not find me." He caused himself to be

found of those sheep for whom he came to lay down his life, but as far as the rest, trifle if you will, but the consequences are being left to your own condemnation, destruction. You know, that time may come in our lifetime. Again, I cannot emphasize enough that it may be that the Lord leave you to your own reprobate mind and give you a long life. That was the case with Esau. He lived a long and prosperous life as far as the world was concerned but he was a reprobate. Such was the case of Judas Iscariot who sat under the preaching of our Lord. Sat there and heard and yet whose heart was hardened and in the end perished.

I believe that's the urgency that we see here in verse 6. God has given us the privilege even to hear of Christ today, that he would be gracious and cause our hearts to seek him, have that well-worn path to him and to this message of grace which says that,

"He paid it all,
All to him I owe.
Sin has left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

If that doesn't draw your heart, that's an indication already of heartlessness and may the Lord be merciful and not leave us there.