**Isaiah 55:6-9** 6Seek the Lord while he allows himself to be found! Call on him while he is near! 7Let 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. 8Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the Lord. 9Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my plans are higher than your plans.

I believe we need to pay attention to the words that are before us today. Maybe it’s because I am older or maybe it’s because I am paying attention more, but these words all the more ring out for me. Can you honestly tell me when you will be called to your Judgment Day? Can you honestly tell me on what day and hour you will die, when your body and soul will be separated and you will go and stand before the Lord to find out whether or not Jesus is found in your heart! That is the issue.

The issue is not have you gone to church, given this, done that, didn’t do this or that….wait a minute, maybe this is the problem. Many of us, actually a lot of people that I know, declare themselves “Christian” because somewhere down the line they were taken to church by their parents and learned something about God. But then they grew up or simply got older and stopped going to church. What is in their head is that they know something about God and they have decided that since they have this knowledge, now limited because they forgot most of what they were told, but they have decided that they are “Christian.” There is not a shred of “being” a Christian in their life, but they have decided they are Christian.

You do understand that when we use the term “Christian” we, as true believers in the Lord God, cannot and must not use our own personal definition for what this means. God is the one who determines what is and what is not a Christian. God is the one who decides who is a believer and who is not. Our job is to make sure that our definition and our lives match what God has said and declared.

So for instance, we find this question and answer in our Catechism. It is question 208. This question occurs right after a discussion about the exaltation of Jesus and that as the exalted Lord and God Jesus is going to appear in his heavenly glory to judge all the people. He is going to judge those who are living and those who are dead, phrases with a double intent. Jesus is going to judge believers and unbelievers. The living, those with faith are the believers and the dead, those without faith are the unbelievers. And then comes question 208: *“On what basis will Christ judge all people?”* The answer given is: *“Christ will judge all people on the basis of whether they have believed in him and his Word or not.”*

Let that sink in. God has set forth a standard for the judgment. It is Jesus and the Word of Jesus, and literally the Word of Jesus is the entire Bible! So when Jesus says to you, “My child, you have done this evil and though my word tells you not to do it, to repent when this evil is pointed out to you, you made the decision to continue to ignore me, to shun me, to dishonor me, and to this day, you have never said, “Lord I am sorry, please forgive me!”

I know, you think you are going to say on that day of your judgment, “Well fine Lord, then I am sorry!” But if this is your Judgement Day I want you to know your repentance is too late. You did not and do not have Jesus as Lord and Savior in your heart. You will be shown to be an unbeliever and you will be condemned. Remember, there were two thieves on the cross. One, hours before he died confessed Jesus and was saved. But the other, died without faith in Jesus. Faith, that is always the issue. The wonder of God’s Word, that is always the issue. Our theme for today will be: **SEEK THE LORD!**

As you look at the opening words of our verses I don’t think there is anything difficult and earth shattering here. We are called upon to “seek” the Lord, to look for him, to engage in search and inquiry into his truth and wonder. I do not think the Lord would give such command unless such a command were possible. Here is what I will tell you. I believe that in every person’s life, somewhere, sometime, somehow the Lord has offered that person the chance and opportunity to seek Him out. We are told that it is the Lord’s will that every person be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Ti. 2:4). So I believe what God says. Every person gets that call from the Holy Spirit to seek the Lord. Most ignore it. Most would deny it ever came. Yet the Lord would not call upon us to seek Him unless it is something that could happen.

Look at the rest of that passage. It says, **“Seek the Lord while he allows himself to be found!** The NIV84 had translated: “Seek the Lord while he may be found.” I believe the EHV has rendered a clearer translation. We can seek him because the Lord is offering opportunity for us to find Him. We can seek Him because the Lord has put Himself in position to be found. Notice how the next line emphasizes that truth: **“Call on him while he is near!”** There is the Lord. There is His truth. There is His beck and call, your opportunity to hear and believe in his wonder.

For many of us in this church and many other churches, that beck and call from God came through our parents and pastors as they brought us to baptism, Sunday School, confirmation and worship. Some of us clearly heard the call of God and to this day He is in our lives. Many of us heard that call, maybe for quite a while we believed and treasured God but somehow, in some way, Satan was able to lure us away. We stopped coming to worship. We stopped trusting God’s Word and wisdom. For many, Satan lured us into sin, especially the sin of thinking sin didn’t matter anymore. So we became worldly. It is subtle, but what happened is that we were lured into thinking that the things of this life, this world, this living on earth that we do, triumphs anything that God is.

Give this some thought. We won’t miss that football game or whatever sport you are most involved in. We might even be so wrapped up in our sport that we easily purchase the extra channels or make sure to get that season pass or the best camo outfits, the latest guns, and so on and so on. I have asked you this before, look at your bank accounts. After the basics of life are accounted for: housing, food, and clothing: where is the rest of your money going? Where is the Lord and giving to Him on that list? It is so easy to be lured away, to put the Lord on a back burner, to decide that the cabin or the boat or whatever is more needed and important than Him. We all have those challenges because that’s how Satan gets us to ignore the call and encouragement of God to seek him and call on Him.

Now why would we want to call on the Lord? Please note that in this use of the word call it is literally being used as synonymous with the words “worship and praise.” Why would we want to worship and praise the Lord? Listen to the next verses. **“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.”** The depth of the joy that I find in these verses is immeasurable. God is always willing to forgive. God is always willing to show mercy and grace, understanding and compassion. God knows our problems, our challenges, our trials and anything else you can imagine. God knows how we stumble and fall, how we dishonor Him and forsake His goodness again and again. God knows everything in our hearts. And yet, sinners that we are, God is willing to forgive. Not because we don’t sin but because we are appalled by our sin, shamed in our disobedience to Him. We hear the pronouncements of His Word and we are cut to the heart.

In complete trust and honor to God we beg His forgiveness. We plead that he turn our hearts around, that God lead us on paths of righteousness, that somehow God would allow us the simple experience of bringing glory and honor to his name. This is our life of repentance. We see our sins and evils and we want to be, we strive to be different and new, to be servants to our true Master and children to our Holy Father in heaven. We want to be found in the robe of Jesus’ righteousness.

Many a time when I hear about that robe of righteousness we have from Jesus I think of that young boy whose Mom has so carefully dressed him up and gotten him ready for his role as the ring bearer in the wedding of a family member. When she finished dressing him, everything was tight and neat and all who saw him then were filled with praise and smiles. But by the time the ceremony came around, how many times didn’t that boy walk down the aisle with a piece of shirt hanging out, a shoe untied and his hair looked like a comb hadn’t touched it in years! That’s us, just minutes after Jesus dresses us up! But we have lives of repentance. Lives where we seek the Lord, where we call upon him for help and strength. With Jesus, no one will ever see a shirt tail out, a shoe untied or hair messed up. Because in Jesus, God’s grace and mercy is poured out. Forgiveness is always near and on hand. God’s graciousness abounds because we are turning to him, seeking Him, calling to Him. Seriously, why wouldn’t we? The Lord is willing to forgive when we abandon our evil thoughts and actions.

Do we fail to seek Jesus because of what our next verses say? **“Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the Lord. 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.”** Do we see these words and decide that since we cannot fathom God, therefore we shouldn’t even try? Yet that is not the purpose of these words. These words are here to remind you that God is God and you are not. Your thoughts, your wisdom, your ideas and plans are far, far from the wonder and awe of what the Lord God truly is. These words are here to remind you to make sure you are involved in the Word and truth of God. You are to be involved in seeking him, working to grasp and cling to Him. But there will be times when you will need to think and say: God’s wisdom and plans are greater than mine. Though I do not grasp and understand this or that, God has spoken, God has revealed and no matter what, I will follow and believe the Lord over anything else. I will not let the world buffalo and bully me away from the Lord. I will not let the world with its shallow grasp of what is make me think that God is not. I will certainly not let the world clip, snip and throw out the Word of God in my life.

Seek the Lord! That does mean we can know Him. That does mean, that though it may be limited, we can grasp his wonder and joy, his marvel and the salvation He has given. We can believe that God promised and then sent Jesus. We can believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior who went to the cross to pay for our sins! But please, don’t proclaim Jesus your Lord and Savior without the same confession that is found for us in the words or our epistle reading for today. Philippians 1 has two awesome statements that help to define what the Christian life is. Verse 21: **“Yes, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** Here is a verse that says I will not be afraid. I will stand upon the truth and marvel of Jesus in every way. I live Jesus and in Jesus I understand that even my death is victory and joy in every way.

The other verse is 27: **“Just conduct yourselves in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come to see you or am absent, I may hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, contending together with one soul for the faith of the gospel.”** If we can’t in any way comprehend God then clearly the words I just read to you are pure garbage and worthless encouragement in the impossible. Yet these are beautiful words. We are being encouraged to be children living our faith, to live the truths of God to His glory and honor, to stand firm in what God has clearly, precisely and faultlessly revealed in His Word. That is what faith does. That is the end result of seeking the Lord!

Please, seek the Lord now! Let the wonder and joy of His salvation revealed in Jesus be your confidence and hope in all things. Do continue to seek the Lord. I say this with intensity. I say this because of the truth that our verse also reveals to us: **“Seek the Lord while he allows himself to be found!”** The opportunity is now. Don’t wait, because what will you do when the Lord is so tired and so upset with your foolishness that the Lord finally walks away from you and no longer makes himself available? Don’t let that happen to you. Seek the Lord! Call on his name. Rejoice in the salvation that is ours in Jesus! Amen.