

(True Disciple Conference) Come to Me - Isaiah 55

by Paul Washer

God's invitation to come to Him is not just a call to salvation, but a call to a personal relationship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ.

Duration: 1:17:50

Topics: "Jesus Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of truly believing in the power of God. He compares the lack of appreciation for the Gospel invitation to the indifference towards the sound of keys, stating that only those who are aware of their thirst and lostness can truly appreciate it. The preacher challenges pastors to not rush people into a quick prayer, but rather encourage them to seek the Lord with repentance and desperation. He criticizes the reduction of the Gospel to simple formulas and calls for a deeper understanding and experience of God's love.

Transcript

It's a great, tremendous privilege for me to be here this evening with you. Tremendous privilege. God is absolutely an amazing God.

He's a very kind God and a gracious God. Yes, one more. How was that? Is that better? Alright, maybe I should go back to the jungle.

You don't have to worry about these things there. But I'll say it again, not so that it'll be recorded, but because it's true. He is a kind and gracious God.

Some of you young men who are here, you've probably got the concept in your mind that if you reach a certain spiritual level, that God will use you. I don't find that to be true. I find that God chooses most of the time what I call Gideon's call.

He takes the runt of the litter and decides to use it so that he'll get glory for himself. This is never about men being used of God because they found some key. Because they know something someone else does not know.

Most of the time when I'm preaching, there are men in the congregation who are more godly than I am and know more about God than I do. God chooses oftentimes to use the base and the vial and that which is not to confound the things that are. That the one who boasts, boasts in this, not in wisdom or riches or strength, but in God.

Let's go to Isaiah chapter 55. I've been asked to speak from this text, even though when this text is often addressed, I believe that most of the time we miss the point on the passage. I'm going to talk, I don't know how long I'm going to stay here because I have a thing, a commitment that I make any time I preach.

For the first time anywhere, I make a beeline for the cross and try to make sure that all that's straightened out before we go into other things. But I want us to look at Isaiah chapter 55. I've been asked to teach from verses 8 on.

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. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bare and sprout and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so will my word be which goes forth from my mouth.

It will not return to me empty without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, I come before you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And I know that you hear me because of Him. Father, thank you so much for everything that you have done. You are a kind God and a good and gracious God.

You do not consider us according to our own merit, but the merit of your Son. The value, the worth of your Son. Father, I praise you that you do all things for Him and for His glory.

That He is the beginning and source of all things, and He is the end towards which all things are running. And that this has given you great pleasure. And Father, I thank you that you do works on this earth that are so great that they cannot be comprehended.

Promises so tall and deep and wide. Father, thank you. I pray your blessing on your people tonight that you will help them.

That you would strengthen them. That they would love your Son more. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Here we have this famous statement in verse 11. So will my word be which goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to me empty without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I send it.

Oftentimes this word is used to encourage preachers to preach the word of God. That if we preach the word of God, it will not return to us void. It will not be a vain thing.

It will always do the thing for which God has sent it. We oftentimes use this passage in order, as I said, to encourage preachers and preaching to stick to the word. To preach the word.

To have confidence in the word and the power of God through the spoken word. But when we do that, we're missing the context of this passage. We're missing the beauty of it.

It goes much deeper. Now, I don't have time to go through the entire chapter, but we're going to look at some things about this passage before we go on. First of all, look in verse 1. Everyone who thirsts, come to the water.

And who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine, milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread? And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is good and delight yourself in abundance.

What's going on here? What's going on here is this. He is speaking to a vile and wicked nation. He is speaking to a nation whose idolatry and perversion and harlotry is so great that they have been cast out of the promised land.

And they have been severely punished and disciplined. Carried off into exile. Left there without any hope whatsoever but a few promises.

And we see all throughout the book of Isaiah, rebuke after rebuke after rebuke. God's justice screaming out against a wicked people. But then we come to those chapters towards the end of the 40's and into the early 50's.

The Messiah, the Redeemer appears. And He appears and does a work of salvation that no man can grasp or comprehend. One of the greatest and most fearful and sad things about being a preacher is you know from the moment that you take upon yourself to preach the cross and preach what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ, you are going to fail.

And so you have this people cast down and rightfully so. Judged and rightfully so. Every promise it seems taken away from them.

And then all of a sudden appears on the scene the Messiah. And that Messiah goes to a tree. And on that tree He bears the sins of His people.

And He's crushed under the full force of His Father's wrath. And He satisfies justice with His death. And He makes it possible for a just God to forgive a wicked people.

Now after this work of the Messiah, when we get to chapter 54 we see great and almost unspeakable blessings that would flow from His death, His life, His resurrection. All that God would accomplish through it. And then after laying out for the people all these great blessings that would come to them in Christ.

He gives them an invitation. He says, Oh, everyone who thirsts, come to the water. Everyone.

Don't you ever confuse the issue here. The invitation of God is wide and it is deep. Everyone who hears this proclamation.

And we can see in the context that it is not merely limited to Israel. Everyone who thirsts, let Him come. Let Him come to me, He says.

Come to the waters. And you who have no money, come buy and eat. We see a group of people who are absolutely destitute of virtue and merit.

They have nothing in their hands to barter with God. They can pay for nothing. But He says, come.

You who have no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk. One of the things that you have to understand today is I think in some ways the charismatic movement is twisted and torn and heretical in many ways that it is.

Sometimes it almost seems as though it's a rebuke to us. Yeah, they talk about their prosperity and they talk about their blessing and they talk about all these things and they've taken those words and twisted them. But I'm afraid we don't use them at all.

He says, come to me. And what does He promise them? Just merely water? No, He goes on to describe it. Come buy for me wine and milk.

The choicest of the land. You see, what we've got to understand is that there is a prosperity in coming to God. It is not necessarily a prosperity of health.

I'm broken into a million pieces. I have more metal in me than a Tonka truck. It is not necessarily a prosperity of health or wealth or wisdom, but it is a prosperity of drinking from Him, of feeding from Him, of knowing Him.

That a man could be so defiled, laid upon a dung heap, condemned to die, and then through the blood of a Savior be raised up to walk not only in fellowship, not only in communion, but in the sphere of sonship. I rail at these preachers today who promise more than the Bible promises to get men to come to Christ. Come to Christ and God will fix this.

Come to Christ and God will fix that. Do not cheapen the gospel call. Come to Christ because of Christ.

Come to Christ to feed upon Him. Come to Christ to live with Him. Heaven is not heaven because of streets of gold and gates of pearl.

Heaven is heaven because of the presence of God manifest in His Son. And we need to be sure that when we are giving a gospel invitation that we come with the full force of God's blessing. There is a joy and a life and a glory to be had.

A few years ago I read an article from a very well established reform magazine that was talking about Harry Potter. And all of you automatically think, you know, let's have an inquisition and come against Harry Potter. But in a way I want you to know that Harry Potter is a rebuke also to the church.

When a child reads Harry Potter, they see wonder and wildness and life and magic and struggle and victory and defeat in everything that we're made up to be. And when they see your Christianity, all they see is a pew and a cold sermon. God did not come to give us merely correct thinking.

He came to give us life and life in abundance. And you can experience that life even if your body is screaming with pain. To feed upon Christ.

Christ! I love the warning that Spurgeon gives when he talks about everything being in Christ. The prosperity and the blessing upon blessing upon blessing of knowing Christ. And then he warns all of his young theologians and he says some of you think it's all in truth.

Think everything in Christianity is all wrapped up in doctrine and knowing this doctrine and that doctrine. Well, doctrine is extremely important and truth is the foundation of everything we have with God. But you must understand that truth is not the end.

It is the means to an end of drinking the wine and the milk of a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. The wedding in Cana proved that to us because Jesus took the water of religion and turned it into the wine of everlasting life. You cannot come to this passage without thinking that you ought to run or that you ought to jump or you ought to dance with all your might.

Because he's looking at a bunch of beggars who are condemned to die, who are starving and rightfully so, who cannot lift their head to give one argument against their condemnation. And he says to them, based on what my Messiah has done, now, come! Any one of you who is thirsty, come! There's so many of you. You're truly Christian, but you're thirsty.

You're hungry. You sometimes ask yourself, is this all it is? Is this it? Well, I want you to know, it's not some wild, charismatic experience that's going to lift you out of your doldrums into a new life. But it is coming to Christ.

And basically, coming to Christ in His Word. But not just to gather information to find out who He is. Now, I know I'm getting off track here, but that's okay.

I don't have my preaching professor in the audience. I want you to realize something here. Something very important.

Preachers are always telling us what to do. Very seldom do they tell us how to do that. Remember one time a man teaching on how we ought to walk in the Spirit? Walk in the Spirit.

And I was a young Christian, so after the sermon I came up to him and I said, well sir, would you please tell me how to do that? I agree with you, but how do I walk in the Spirit? He got very angry with me and turned around and walked away. He was telling me to do something he didn't even know how to do. I'm telling you, you ought to come to Him and feed.

You ought to have a passion about Him and seek Him. But there's a problem. You don't have much of a passion sometimes.

Just like me. And you don't seem to have a heart flaming with love sometimes. And preacher will tell you, you need to love God more! And you walk out here going, yeah, I know.

How do I do that? I'll tell you how to do it. I'll tell you how to do it tonight. You want to love God more? Here's how you grow in your love for God.

I've been married to my wife for 14 years and I love her so much more now that I can't even say I loved her then because the love I have for her now so far exceeds what I knew when I knew her first. Now why is that? Now she is imperfect. She does have flaws.

I have found things other than virtue in her over the last 14 years. But I have found virtue that I did not know existed when I first knew her. And because of that, I am drawn to love her more.

Do you know why you don't love God? It comes down to theology. You don't know Him. And if you want to grow in your love for God, you grow in your knowledge of His virtue and of His glory, of His attributes.

Let me throw this word at you that's not spoken of enough. His beauty. I've come to the realization that if theology is not beautiful, it's not biblical.

If it doesn't evoke passion out of the truly regenerate heart, there's a problem. And I want to tell you that you know you need to come to Him more. You know you need to feed from Him more.

You know you need to draw to Him more. Now here's what He's going to do. For one part, He's going to work in your life crippling you and breaking you so that He becomes more and more to you and everything else becomes less and less.

But also, to promote your devotion to Him, you ought to seek Him. Even if you have no passion to seek Him, you ought to seek Him. And why is that? Because if you will seek Him in the Word to truly know Him, to know His glory, to know His beauty, then it will inflame in you a passion like you've never had before.

To know God and to know God through what He has done in Calvary. To grow in your knowledge of the cross. He goes on and He says, Incline your ear and come to Me.

Listen that you may live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you according to the faithful mercy shown to David. What is He saying? He's saying this, Come to Me.

All you who are weary and heavy laden. All you who have committed idolatry after idolatry. Committed heresy after heresy.

Lie after lie. Immorality after immorality. Come to Me.

And they cry out, But how can we come to Thee? They know about God's holiness. They know about justice. They know that the wages of sin is death.

How will we come to Thee? Through the sure mercies of David you will come to Me. Through the one that was greater than David you will come to Me. Through the work that I have done for you.

Not through personal reformation. Not through getting all your ducks in line. Not through ordering your life.

Not through offering some work of piety. No, you will come based on what I have done through David My son. Through the cross of Calvary.

God gets so much glory when He is believed with regard to the cross. I want us to notice two things here. First of all, He says, Come to Me those who are thirsty, those who are hungry, those who have nothing.

I want you to realize something that's gone on here. There has been much plowing that has gone on in the book of Isaiah. Much plowing by the prophet.

He has spoken hard words to the people of God. And He has plowed them and broken them up and plowed them and plowed them some more. And God, working through His prophet, working through His own acts of providence, what has God done? God has broken this people in two so that they recognize something that the people of our day do not recognize.

That they are blind and miserable and impoverished. When old preachers... As a matter of fact, I've heard a lot of old preachers say this. It's not hard to get a man saved at all.

It's hard to get him lost. Listen to me. Many times, I don't like preaching much in the United States because they usually just give you a week.

You can't do anything in a week. The old preachers, the ones I used to know when I was a boy, they would come into a town to plow. They would plow for two or three weeks.

All they would do would be preach on sin, offer nothing of mercy to anyone, and walk home every night without giving an invitation. They would plow and they would plow and they would plow until the people began to realize they were exactly as Scripture said they were. Miserable and wretched and thirsty and hungry and starving and dying and most of all, justly condemned.

You preach and you plow with the people until the very sinners setting in the pew raise their hands and say, God would be just in killing me and destroying my soul in hell this very moment. I asked an old preacher one time, this was, oh my goodness, 25 years ago. I just called in the ministry and I went to this place where they would give 50% off the suits for preacher boys.

It was in Paducah, Kentucky and it was one of those almost can this really be happening experiences. So I go into this old store and I'm looking around and all of a sudden the door opens. It was one of those doors with a bell on it and it kind of opened up and ringed and closed.

And I turned around and looked and there's this old, old man standing there and he's just looking at me. And I didn't know what to do. And so I kind of walked towards him and I said, hello sir.

He goes, hello boy. He said, you've been called to preach? And I said, yes sir. And he said, then let me tell you about preaching.

And he pointed out the door and he said, you see that place where that building's at right there young man? And I said, yes sir. He goes, I used to set up a tent there in the fifties and preach. And he said, boy, I'd preach for two weeks.

On sin. On sin, boy, I would preach. And I'd leave them without an invitation.

I'd leave them without hope. And I'd go home and I'd go to bed. And I said, well sir, how long would that continue? He said, until the Spirit of God fell down on the place.

And I said, well, how did you know when that happened? And he said, well, about two weeks into the meeting someone handed me, I think it was \$25 or \$50. He said, and told me to go buy a suit. And I walked into this store.

That store had been there for about 80 years. He said, I walked into the store. And when I walked through the door there was a young man who was a clerk.

And when he turned around and saw me he fell down on his face and cried out, oh God have mercy on me, I'm a sinner. And I knew the Spirit of God had fallen down on the place. Do we really believe that anymore? You know what we're raising up? A bunch of little boys with a lot of correct theology.

But where's the power of God? The power of God. Do we believe it enough? Young men, those of you who may be called to preach. Do you believe it enough to wrestle in the woods? You may have the theology of David Brainerd but do you have scarred knees like David Brainerd? You see, people must know, first of all, that they are thirsty.

They must know that they are lost to appreciate this invitation. I often use an illustration of pulling out some keys and jingling them before the congregation and asking them, does this make you happy, the

sound of the keys? And most of them say, why no? And I say, of course not. But if you were locked away in a dungeon, the sound of keys would fill your heart with joy.

And that's why so many sinners have no respect for the gospel invitation. Their heart does not jump. They have nothing.

Why? Because we have not labored in the preaching of the gospel that they may see their need for Christ. These preachers today, all they do is say something like this. You've got a wonderful family.

You've got a wonderful job. You've got a wonderful life. You just lack one little thing to complete it all.

Jesus on the top so that you can have your best life now. What they ought to hear is, everything in your life is done. You have Christ or you have nothing.

You see, in the economy of God, Christ is everything. It doesn't just say in Colossians that the worlds were created by Him. In the Greek it is the worlds were created in Him.

All things were created in Him. Everything has been created within the sphere of God's Son. Anything outside of that sphere is absolutely asinine.

It's absurd. It's ludicrous. It has no meaning.

That's why one old pietist used to say, any conversation where Jesus Christ is not the theme, it's absolutely absurd. It's a waste. Christ is all.

In all. In all. So He says, incline your ear to Me and come.

Listen that you may live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you according to the faithful mercies shown to David. And then He goes on, Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

Behold, you will call a nation you do not know, and a nation which knows you not will run to you because of the Lord your God, even the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you. Now, most of the old guys, the Puritans and others, they take verses 4 and 5, well, 3, 4 and 5, as a direct reference to the Messiah. He says in verse 4, Behold, I have made him a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the peoples.

God's Son, according to the foreordained plan of God, according to His own willing heart, and His desire to get glory for His Father, and for His Father's desire to get glory for His Son, to do a work almost unspeakable, became a man. Became a man. And lived a perfect life as a man.

And went to a tree. And on that tree, stood, as John Gill will always say, in the law place of his people. He carried their guilt.

And he was crushed. And he rose again from the dead. And he ascended into heaven.

And for the last 2,000 years has been calling forth a people. Why? He had thousands of worlds. He had angels without number.

He had heavens upon heavens. So why would He do this? What you need to understand is this. There is a real sense in which Christ died for men.

But there is another real sense in which Christ died for Christ. Christ died for God. Everything that has ever been.

From the creation of the world, to the fall of Adam. To the promise after promise in the Old Testament. To the coming of the Messiah.

To His returning in glory as God and man. To the gathering forth of a people. All of it has been orchestrated by the will of God for one reason.

To demonstrate the fullness of the glory of God to all creation. Not only for creation's benefit. But for God's great glory.

In dying on that tree, the Son honored His Father. In raising Him from the dead. And making Him a witness to the people.

And a leader. God has honored His Son. He goes on and He says this.

Behold you will call a nation you do not know. A nation which knows you not. Which will run to you.

Because of the Lord your God. Even the Holy One of Israel. He has glorified you.

God has taken His Messiah. His Christ. And He has set Him up as a witness to the people.

And God is calling forth a people. With one special purpose. To give that people to His Son.

You see this changes missions. Like you cannot believe. Any of you want to be missionaries.

Then listen very, very close. This changes everything about missions. You see sometimes I'll go to young missionaries.

And I'll say this. I'll say have you ever spent a night without sleep. Because you're praying for the particular nation you feel called to.

Have you ever passed a night without any rest in your heart. Because of the lostness of the men in the nation where you are going. And almost every one of them has said well yes.

But then I ask them this. Have you ever passed a sleepless night. Because there are places on this earth.

Where Christ is not honored. As Christ should be honored. Do we go? Do we preach for the sake of men? Yes.

But never forget our relationship to men is always secondary. We preach and we go and we do and we work and we labor primarily for God. You go into a country.

You go into a state. You go into a wasteland. You go wherever God sends you.

For the glory of the Messiah who died and rose again. Because He is calling forth a people. And He is using you to do it.

You go for Him. To gather a people for Him. That He could get glory.

You see Jesus Christ is not so much God's gift to man. As the church is God's gift to Christ. So when we go we don't go for men.

And when men do not respond correctly it matters not to us. Because we are not there primarily for them to start off with. We are there and we hold our post and we preach for God.

For Him. Why do you witness when no one listens? Because you are not witnessing primarily so that men might listen. You are witnessing for Him.

To speak forth His glory. To speak for His honor. So He goes on and He says, Verse 6, Seek the Lord while He may be found.

Call upon Him for He is near. It is like here He is almost coaxing the people. You see this people comes out.

Here is something that you need to understand about the grace of God. When it is preached correctly. It is almost unbelievable.

It is unbelievable. Because you have never seen anything like this in your life. Never has such goodness and kindness been revealed to men.

And to go to men with the free offer of the gospel. You almost have to go with evidence to prove to them that it is not a hoax. That it is really true.

My charismatic friends always tell me that the greatest act of faith is raising the dead. I tell them, of course it is not. Baptist preachers do that every Sunday morning.

But they say the greatest act of faith is raising the dead. No it is not. If I could use language that is not too correct.

Do you know what requires more faith than absolutely anything on the face of the earth? To look into the mirror of God's word. And see your sin. To see you as you are.

And then to believe. To dare to believe that God loves you as much as He says He does. One of the greatest problems in most of your lives is this.

You have disobeyed Jude. Where he says, keep yourselves in the love of God. Some preachers have twisted that and said, yeah you better obey God.

You better do this and that so that He will love you. That is not what Jude is meaning. He means something quite different.

He is saying believe God's love. It is the key to spiritual growth. To believe that He loves you.

The hardest thing you are ever going to have to do is to believe He loves you as much as He says He does. I don't know anything about plants. But if you were to call me and say, Brother Paul can you come look at my plant? I say, well I will give it a try.

What is wrong with it? Well, it is very, very sick. Okay, I go to your house. I am not an expert.

I don't know anything about plants. But you take me to the closet, open up the door and there is your plant. And I say to you, well I figured this one out.

Keep your plant in the sun. Keep it in the sunshine. Keep it in the air.

It will grow. It will prosper. God's love is so great in its manifestation through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That He has to in this passage provide evidence after evidence after evidence. That He is really going to do what He promises. Can this be so? Can all my sins truly be forgiven? Can I truly have a relationship with God unblemished and full of glory? And He goes, seek the Lord while He may be found.

Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake His way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. And let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him.

And to our God for He will abundantly pardon. Now, when was the last time you heard an evangelist give an invitation like that? They don't. You know why? Because we've reduced the gospel of Jesus Christ down to pray this prayer.

How many times? I could turn on, if there was a Christian television station around here, which is basically an oxymoron, but if there was a Christian television station around here that had every evangelist or most of them in this world today, they would all end their sermons the same way. Now, if you've understood this message, pray and ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart. How many of them would say, seek the Lord while He may be found.

Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake His way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. And let him return to the Lord.

Now, pray this prayer. Pray this prayer. I want you to look at something.

I'm doing something my wife always corrects me on. She says, whenever you get to preach only one time to a people, you try to do too much. And that's what I'm doing.

I'm going all over this text because there's a lot of things I want to say. But look what we've done to the gospel. Do you know you're a sinner? Yeah.

Do you want to go to heaven? Yes. Would you like to pray this prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart? Well, how long will it take? It will only take five minutes. Okay.

Then they pray the prayer. And then we ask them, are you going to heaven? And oftentimes they say, I don't know. And then we say, of course you are.

Because Jesus promised if you prayed that prayer, He'd come into your heart. And Jesus is not a liar. That is the basis of most Southern Baptist evangelism.

Right there. And it's more damnable than anything that could come out of the Mormon church, or the Jehovah Witnesses, or Catholicism. As a matter of fact, we've done the exact same thing that Catholicism has done.

I lived in a country, a big part of my life, where everyone in that country believed they were saved. Because when they were children, they were baptized as infants. And the Baptists in America say, how

could anyone believe that? Baptists, you do the exact same thing, just worse.

Because everybody in this country believed they're saved, because one time in their life they repeated a superstitious prayer. Do you know you're a sinner? If they say yes, it means nothing. Ask the devil if he knows he's a sinner.

He will say, well, yes I am. As a matter of fact, I have a mighty, mighty fine job at it. The question is not, are you a sinner? The question is, since you have sat under the preaching of the gospel, has God so worked in your heart that the sin you once loved, you now hate? Has there been a supernatural work of God in you? And then the question, do you want to go to heaven? Yes.

Well, who doesn't? Who are the most pitiful, and blasphemous, and dangerous? There probably isn't 5% of the churches in America where I would let my boys attend Sunday school. Let me put it this way, there probably isn't 5% of the Southern Baptist churches where I'd let my little boys attend Sunday school. And I'll tell you why.

Because some teachers are going to walk in there and say this, how many of you love Jesus? A Jesus that they've colored in a book and heard pretty stories about. I mean, who isn't going to love this God? How many of you want to go to heaven? Have you ever had a little 4-year-old stand up and say, you know, with chains and dressed in grunge, say, no, I'd rather go to hell. How many want to go to heaven? I do, I do.

Well, then pray this prayer. So wicked. Do you want to go to heaven? Everybody wants to go to heaven, they just don't want God to be there when they get there.

Everyone wants to go to heaven. That's the whole basis of political theory, to create a utopia or the closest thing we can get on earth to a heaven. That's the basis of everything.

That's politics. Everybody wants to go to heaven. That's not the question.

The question is not, do you want to go to heaven, sir? The question is, since you have sat under the preaching of the gospel, has God so worked in your heart that the God you once hated and ignored, you now love and esteem and desire to seek with all your heart. And then the question is not, would you like to pray this prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart? The question is, has God done a work of repentance? And has He done such a work in your heart that you've been strengthened to trust in Christ alone, that you can throw yourself upon Him? How many times have I seen pastors literally almost fall over and faint when people would come up to me and after talking to them for ten minutes, the preacher's ready to say, well, would you like to pray this prayer? And I look at them and tell them, go home. Go home and seek the Lord.

As though hell itself were opening up its mouth to swallow you down and seek Him until you are found by Him. We have taken these invitations and turned them into something so pitiful and impotent and weak. This country is not gospel-hardened.

It's gospel-ignorant because most of its preachers are. Take the gospel of Jesus Christ and reduce it down to four spiritual laws or five things God wants you to know. Get someone to pray a prayer.

Well, Brother Paul, they're saved by calling on the name of the Lord and believing in their heart and you are taking that text and twisting it so terribly it's unbelievable. He's talking to a persecuted people and He's

saying, if you will believe in your heart and the evidence of that faith will be you will confess with your mouth even though you are like sheep being slaughtered every day. And that's a lot different from getting someone to repeat a prayer on the back of a track and then you popishly pronouncing salvation over them because they repeated the words after you.

This invitation is wide, but it is an invitation to seek the Lord. Brother Paul, we've got to help them. No, that's your problem.

You can't help men. You can only proclaim the gospel, what God has done for men in Christ and then call them to repentance and call them to faith. You have the authority to tell men how to be saved.

You have the authority to beg men to be saved. You have the authority to tell men the biblical teaching on the assurance of salvation, but you do not have the biblical authority to proclaim salvation over men. That is a work of the Spirit.

You see these preachers of old. Now look what He's doing. Here's this gospel that He's laid out for them that He Himself knows.

It's too good to be true. How can men believe these things after all they've been through? And yet this preacher knows the power of God in salvation, the desire of God to glorify His Son by gathering the people unto Him. And so this preacher stands up and says, Now, seek the Lord.

And what will happen? People will seek the Lord as the Spirit of God works among them. They will seek the Lord. He goes on.

He says this. Now this is the most amazing part. He says, verse 7, Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Now at this point in juncture, it's almost as though God is looking at their faces. Total bewilderment. Total unbelief.

How can this be so? It's like the most lowly beggar and greatest criminal combined in one person being told by the most splendid and righteous king, Not only am I going to pardon you, I'm going to adopt you into my family. And they stand there in utter bewilderment. They cannot even move one step forward.

It's too good to be true. And so God comes back with His argument. Now listen to me.

My thoughts are not your thoughts. Nor are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. What's He talking about? I'll tell you what He's talking about.

He's talking about grace. He's talking about His grace. His way of saving men.

My way of dealing with the wicked is not like your way of dealing with the wicked. God's way is not to simply overlook the wicked's sin. But nor is it to leave the wicked in their sin.

He says, My way is not your way. Mankind is prone in its self-righteousness to say it can overlook sin. Isn't it amazing? We can overlook sin unless it's committed against us.

Or mankind desires to take the sinner and strangle life out of him. All these false messiahs running around. Let them be crucified to a tree.

And they would not be crying out, Father, forgive them. They would be saying, Someone hand me a machine gun. So here's the two things that we see in humanity.

Overlooking sin in the name of self-righteousness or condemning the sinner and leaving him to die. But God, He deals with the sin. He puts it away.

He satisfies justice. His own justice. By His own Son dying in the place of the guilty and paying for our crimes once and for all.

And then coming before the most desperately wicked people and saying this, Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord. And He will have compassion on him and to our God. For He will abundantly pardon.

And He goes on, For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are My ways your ways, declares the Lord. And then He goes on, For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. I know that we can use this text in so many ways to describe the workings of God.

But it pains me that for the most part, this text is taken to show about God's omniscience. To prove God's power. To prove God's decrees.

And they do not connect it with grace. He is looking at a people to whom He has proclaimed grace. And the grace He proclaims to them is so astounding.

He has to convince them with many arguments that it is true. And He goes on in verse 10, For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bare and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so will My Word be which goes forth from My mouth, that will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the manner for which I sent it. Not one promise, not one word of all the good words He has spoken, has ever fallen to the ground undone.

He will do everything in regard to the salvation He promises His people. Absolutely everything. Now I want us to look at something that is so very important.

Particularly in Baptist life, but in all evangelical life in America. We have developed a God who has the power to justify men. Who fulfills all His promises in justifying the believing.

But He is no longer a God who also has power to sanctify those He justifies. You see, He is giving a promise here about salvation. This salvation I have promised you, I will complete every word of it.

But in America today, we have all kinds of people who are supposedly saved. God has the power to justify them, to free them from sin. But these very people never grow in grace.

They never grow in sanctification. They are never transformed. They always remain the same.

Carnal and worldly, and they fill up our churches. They make up the majority of people in the churches. God has the power to save, but He does not have the power to save completely.

And that is totally foreign to everything the Bible teaches on salvation. Salvation is a past tense event in the fact that He has justified His people. But it is a present tense event in the fact that all those whom He justifies, He sanctifies.

As a matter of fact, in the Scriptures, in true historical Baptist teaching, and in almost all true evangelical denominations, God's work of sanctification is the evidence that He has truly justified a man. There is no such thing as a continuously carnal Christian. It is not in the Bible.

It is not in church history. It is a fabrication of American Christianity. And of course, we have to have it because it is the only way we can explain that the great majority of most of our churches are carnal and worldly.

Look what He says in verse 12. You will go out with joy and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Instead of the thornbush, the cypress will come up. Instead of the nettle, the myrtle will come up. And it will be a memorial to the Lord for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off.

What He's saying is, through this work of salvation, I am going to reverse the curse. Now this is not just talking about some future time. It's not just talking about some millennium.

It is talking about also His work of salvation in the life of a believer. That when God does a work of salvation, it is not only going to produce a position before God, a position of righteousness and acceptance. But in this life, He is going to change them, make them His people.

He's going to transform them with life and joy and righteousness and holiness. They are going to change. And why is that? And it will be a memorial to the Lord.

Here's what I want you to understand. The work of salvation, the work of salvation has God's reputation riding on it. The work of salvation has God's reputation riding on it.

Now what do I mean by that? Do you remember the people of Israel committing terrible idolatry? And God tests Moses. He basically says, Moses, get out of the way. I'm going to kill them all.

And make a people out of you. And Moses intercedes. Now many people say, Can you believe it? The entire fate of the nation of Israel was in Moses' hands at that moment.

Yes, that's true, but Moses was in God's hands at the same time. But He was testing Moses and proving a point and giving a wonderful, wonderful demonstration of His providence. He says, get away Moses, I'll kill them all and I'll make a people out of you.

And Moses says, no Lord. And this is his argument. The Egyptians, your enemies, will say that although you were strong enough to bring them out of Egypt, you were not strong enough nor faithful enough to bring them into their own land.

You go to Ezekiel 36. He says, I am going to save you for my own namesake. And when I save you, the nations may not bless the work, but they'll recognize it and they'll know that I am God.

You see, His reputation is riding upon it. And that is why when we have this doctrine that says God can partially save a man and cannot sanctify him because the man won't cooperate and cannot bring him into

greater godliness and greater holiness and greater piety, what are we doing? We're trampling on the reputation of God. Salvation is a supernatural work of God.

Now, in bringing it to a close, let me share something with you. There is a great reformation going on in this country. It's not known by media or Christian media.

But there is an underground reformation going on in this country of people who desire truth. Not new truth. Old truth.

But we need to recognize something. That even in the great awakenings, it was not just about God's sovereignty. It was not just about His providence.

It was about the doctrine of regeneration. And this is what we've got to see. Now again, I'm stepping over the boundaries, but there's so much that needs to be said.

You see, we teach the doctrine of justification today. But very few people understand or teach the doctrine of regeneration. You see, man only has two problems.

One is, he is condemned in his sin. The other is, he has no power over sin. For the last generation in this country, they have taught that God, when He justifies a man, can save a man from his first problem.

By justifying a man, when that man believes in Christ, God can put away that man's condemnation and the man is free. But we have lost the doctrine of regeneration. And we have failed to realize that if God has justified a man by faith, He has also regenerated that man by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And that justification will make that man right with God by faith. But the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit will change that man and give him power over sin. If there is no power over sin in the life of the believer, he is probably not a believer.

We have lost the doctrine of regeneration. When I look through Whitefield, when I look through Wesley, when I look through Hal Harris, Daniel Rowlands, on and on, I see something I don't even see among our reformed guys today. And that is preaching the powerful, supernatural, Spirit-driven work of regeneration.

You see, salvation is not a decision. This is what my whole life is about. I'm not a good expositor.

There's only one thing that's always on my heart. What does it mean that Jesus died? And how do men get saved? And I want to tell you something. We have turned salvation into a decision.

If I were to dismiss this church right now and send us all out, we would find a multitude of people that have made their decision. And if you ask them if they're going to heaven, they will tell you yes. And if you ask them why, they will point to a decision.

Because the hour of decision and all these evangelists making people make decisions. Salvation is not merely or primarily a decision. It is a supernatural work of God.

And it is a greater work than the very creation of the universe. Do you realize that when a man gets saved, it is a greater demonstration of the power of God than when God created the universe. And we've turned it into nothing more than pray this prayer.

When God created this world, He created this world, creatio ex nihilo, out of nothing. When He recreates a man, it's a harder task. Because He recreates a man out of vile matter.

He takes a corrupt thing and transforms it. Most people today in our churches are lost. And they demonstrate that they are lost because their entire Christianity is nothing more than they made a decision.

If you ask them, what is their hope within them? How do they know that they have believed? They've made a decision. They've prayed a prayer. They asked Jesus to come into their heart.

But the evidence of true conversion is none of those things. The evidence of true conversion is if any man being Christ is a new creature. All things pass away.

You say, Brother Paul, can Christians sin? Christians do sin. Can Christians fall into heinous sin? Yes, they can. They cannot stay there and live it as a style of life.

Because God will not allow it because He is a good Father and because His reputation is on the line. You see, we don't understand two things. Well, many things.

We don't understand who God is. We don't understand what it means to say two words, Jesus died. Do you know that most people are flabbergasted to know that on that tree, God the Father slaughtered His own Son? They somehow think our sins were atoned for because the Romans beat up Jesus.

And they don't realize that the Father crushed His only begotten Son and turned His face away not because He couldn't bear to see the Romans beating Jesus. He turned His face away because He's holy and His Son on that tree became the serpent, the worm, the sin bearer. The other thing that we don't understand is the power of God in conversion and how to deal with the souls of men.

I have an illustration several years ago preaching up near Alaska. And I'll finish with this. Several years ago preaching up near Alaska.

As I got up in the pulpit, this mountain of a man came through. I mean, he's in his 60s. He could have whooped every person in this room.

He was just a mountain. The saddest man I've ever seen. He came and sat down on the front row and began to preach the Gospel.

Preached for about an hour after I finished. I said, sir, what's wrong with you? You're the saddest human being I've ever seen in my life. He pulled out an X-ray out of a manila envelope and he went like this.

And he says, I'm going to die in three weeks. He said, I just got back from a doctor. I found the first church.

I'm going to die in three weeks. I've lived out in the bush all my life on a working cattle ranch. I have never been in a church.

I believe there's a God. And one time I heard someone talk about some guy named Jesus. I'm going to die.

I've never been afraid in my life and I'm afraid. And I said, sir, I preached the Gospel to you tonight. Did you understand it? He said, well, yeah.

What would most preachers have done at that moment? Well, would you like to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart? But he knew more theology than most preachers. He said, I understand it. Is that it? Is that it? I mean, anyone could have understood what you just said.

I said, sir, do you hate sin? Do you see the vileness of your ways? Do you see you have no merit? He says, I see nothing of the sort. I mean, it's a fact, I guess. And I said, sir, are you going to die in three weeks? I've got to leave tomorrow.

Here's what we'll do. I'll cancel my plane ticket and I will stay with you for three weeks until you die. And we will go through Scripture after Scripture and we will cry out to God together.

We will weep together. We will fast. We will pray.

We will seek the Lord together and see if God has mercy on you. And so we began that night. I would read to him passages of salvation over and over from Old Testament and New, my favorite, John 3.16, over and over.

And we would sit there and we would pray and he would cry out to God. There was nothing. And then after about an hour, we stopped, prayed some more, went back, went through Scripture again.

And I said, sir, let's go. We just kept studying the Scriptures. About another hour into it, I said, sir, let's go back to John 3.16. I want you to just read this passage.

He said, well, we've read it a thousand times. I said, I know, but let's read it again. And so he started reading.

I'll never forget, he had my Bible on his knees and those big old hands of his. And he goes, alright. He goes, for God so loved the world.

And then he went, I'm saved. I'm saved. All my sins are gone.

I'm saved. And he just went on a tirade. Oh God, he saved me.

My sins are gone. And he was going like that with his arms. And finally when he settled down, I said, sir, how do you know you're saved? And he said, haven't you ever read this verse before? Another lady came up to me years ago and she came up and God had broken out on the place and people were crying and weeping and she came to me and she said, I need to get saved.

And for some reason I just said to her, well, how many times have you been saved already? She said six. And I knew something of her life. It was terrible.

Her whole sin had just laid her life waste. She said six. And I said, well, it didn't do much good, did it? She said no.

And I said, well, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to pray with you like those other men so that I can go down the road and tell everybody in the next church that 30 people got saved even though the next Sunday none of them will show up to church? And I said, woman, here's what you need to do. Go home. You know more gospel than most people.

Go home and cry out to God till He saves you. Cry out to God as though hell were opening up its mouth and swallowing you down. She went home.

Cried out to God all night. Fell asleep in desperation. Came the next night totally just horrid condition.

She was under such just the pressure and the working of God breaking her. Another thing. Most people would try to comfort the woman and they would ruin what God was doing in her life.

God was crushing her. He was breaking her. He was tearing down her idols.

She said, what do I do? I prayed all night. I said, well, you've got two choices. You can keep praying till God saves you or you can go to hell.

She went home the next night. Her father came up to me and we were praying before the church. Crying out to God.

And then the music started. He went back and I sat down on the front row and I was still praying and all of a sudden I felt somebody sit down beside me. I turned around and looked and it was her.

She was glowing. I said, what happened? She said, I sought God all night in just abject misery and I fell asleep in total despair. But this morning when I woke up, God shed abroad His love in my heart and all the verses that I had been holding onto and clinging to became a reality.

I am born again. Look what we've done. Look what we've done to the Gospel.

Get people to pray a prayer. You say, well, I've seen people get saved that way. I've seen people get saved through a lot of things.

But how many countless millions of people in America think they're saved tonight? They're lost and going to hell and it's the fault of the Southern Baptist Convention because they wanted a million more and 54 or 64 or something. Vance Habner said, if we get a million more of what we've got now, we're doomed. My dear friends, I know I'm rambling, but I want you to look at something just the course of this.

This is where we're going to end. I think it was the Kentucky Baptist recently discovered that 65% of all the people that are members of the church has never come. Now this is how bad their theology is.

So this is what they've done. They've hired a guy to do discipleship. Problem is discipleship.

I remember back in the 80's, always hearing, we've got just as many people leaving the back door of our church as entering into the front door of our church and the reason why? We're not discipling people. That is not true. Here's why it's happening.

First of all, the Gospel we preach is not the true Gospel. It's a Gospel about a martyred Jesus and if you say a superstitious prayer, he's going to come into your heart quoting out of context Revelation 3, verse 20. And when I've confronted men with it, a lot of them have told me, you're right, I'm taking the verse out of context, but it works.

So we take that passage and we get them to do their little thing and we tell them that if they prayed sincerely, they're saved. So their whole basis of salvation is their judgment of how sincere they were when they said the words. Do you see how preposterous that is? And so they come in, invited in.

Or someone comes down the aisle. They come down the aisle. I just got saved, Pastor.

And the pastor goes, Folks, Bob just got saved tonight. Did you get a word from God? How do you know Bob got saved? That's not what you do! If you do have an invitation and Bob comes forward, you say, Bob, that's wonderful, but I love you too much to talk to you for five or ten minutes and then make some pompous declaration with regard to your eternal destiny. And you look at the congregation and say, This man here tonight made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and we rejoice in that, praise God.

Now we're going to spend the next several weeks counseling him, discipling him, and helping him come to a biblical basis for salvation assurance. But we don't do that. Oh, Bob's in.

We declared it. He did what he was supposed to. He made his decision.

Ask Bob, Bob, why are you saved? I made my decision. You know what the right answer is? Not I made my decision a long time ago. The answer is I'm looking unto Jesus.

I'm trusting in Christ. We treat salvation as a flu shot. I repented.

I believed. My dear friend, the evidence you repented unto salvation is you're still repenting today. The evidence that you believed unto salvation is you believe today.

But we do that. And then, here's the final killer of souls. Because we fear men, because Southern Baptists believe that Scripture is inspired, but they don't believe it is sufficient, we no longer practice church discipline so Bob can live in hell and turn away from the church and do every manner of wicked thing, but in love we don't do what Jesus said to do because we just happen to love Him more than Jesus.

So we don't preach a true gospel. We don't do true discipleship. We don't practice church discipline.

And our Baptist forefathers said, I believe it was Dag who said this also, a church that does not practice church discipline is no longer a church. Listen, the Scriptures are not just inspired, God-breathed. They are sufficient.

We don't need Freud. We don't need Rogers. We don't need Skinner.

We don't need Manhattan, Wall Street, church growth things to turn the church into six flags over Jesus so that people will come. The Scripture is sufficient. That's why most of you say, does this guy, I just took that text because I had to.

This is the only thing I really care about. It's the only thing I care about. Do you know Him? Are you broken over sin when you sin? Is God an inescapable reality in your life? Is He? Do you see Him working? Young men, it's not just about truth.

When I say to people, do you understand this truth? I always follow up with this question. Now, is this truth becoming a growing reality in your life? Do you know Him? Do you know Him? If you died right now, do you know Him? But then again, that's not quite as important as this, is it? Does He know you? Does He know you? I'll stay here all night if you need counseling. All night.

And so will other men. Think about this. Do you really know Him? And young men, think about this.

His Word will not return void. There isn't a whole lot of His Word being preached today. There isn't a whole lot of His Word being preached today.

I would dare say that I could meet with probably 8 out of 10 pastors and they would not know what the gospel is. So if you're going to preach, study the gospel. And my highest recommendation for that is Charles Spurgeon.

What a God he had. What a God. And if you don't preach the right gospel, don't use his name.

A God who would send His Son. A God who would allow sin to be placed upon Him. A God who would forsake His own Son.

And a God who would crush Him and grind Him to powder under the full force of His holy wrath in order to satisfy His justice. That's the gospel. My favorite thing on Abraham.

He's told to take his son up and slaughter him. His only son. And that old man goes up on that mountain and he takes that knife.

He lays his hand upon the brow of his son. And as he's getting ready to slaughter his own son for the cause of God, God stays his hand. And you say, oh, what a wonderful ending to the story.

It's not the ending. It's the intermission. Hundreds of years later, God takes that same knife and lays His hand on the brow of His only begotten Son.

And He slaughters him on that tree. Let me say this. Please, just listen to me.

I was in a seminary years ago in Europe. I think it was Ukraine or somewhere. And I got through preaching.

And I went into this seminary library. Everything was in German, so I was looking for something to read. And I found this one book, The Cross of Christ.

And I pulled it out and I thought, okay. And I just went through it really quick. And I found what the author wanted to say.

And this is what he said. God the Father looked down upon His only begotten Son when He was being beaten and nailed to that tree. And He counted the afflictions He suffered at the hands of those Romans as payment for our sin.

That's blasphemy. It's heresy. We are not saved because of what the Romans and the Jews merely did to Christ.

We are saved because of what His Father did to Him. Someone had to die under the full force of God's wrath. If God is just, He cannot forgive you.

Don't you understand that? In the same way if someone murders your entire family and he's placed before the judge and the judge says, I'm a loving judge, go free. And you cry out, that's not just. That's not right.

There's a judge on the bench far more wicked than the criminals he sets free. If God is just, He cannot forgive you. And that is the whole of the Gospel.

That is what the Gospel is all about. How can God be just and at the same time justify wicked men? There's only one way. God becomes a man.

And God takes upon Himself the sins of His people and He is crushed. The Son was crushed under the holy, just, fierce hatred of God against evil and evil men. And when He died, He paid the price.

That's the Gospel. Several years ago, I had a bunch of preachers write me because of Mel Gibson's film and they were all upset about his film. I wrote everyone I'm back and said, I don't have near as much problem with Mel Gibson's film as I do your preaching.

Because they basically do the same thing. During Mel Gibson's film, one nationally known preacher got up and said, I'm going to preach the Gospel since everyone's been thinking about this film. And I stopped my car.

I said, oh, praise God, someone's going to explain what really happened on that tree. And all he did the whole time was talk about crowns of thorns, nails, Roman whips. Not once did he mention the Son of God crushed by His own Father.

He did not preach the Gospel, you see. Get in and do this, young men. Study the Gospel.

I am not a great expositor and I am not a man who goes and can just... There's only one thing. I'm made for one thing. There's only one thing needed in this country today and that is, people don't understand the cross and they don't understand conversion and they don't understand repentance.

I've only got like two sermons to my name. It's all I care about. But it's the very thing we need.

So let's pray. Father, thank You. God, thank You.

You are so right in everything You do. All Your ways are just. You, oh God, that Jesus Christ would be honored in this country and in this world by His preachers.

Lord, we want the lost to honor You. But we don't even know what to say about You. Oh God, raise up men who will just be Gospel preachers.

Conversion, repentance, repentance, faith. Christ dying under wrath, rising from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father, coming again. Flee from the wrath to come.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, then you shall be saved. Oh God, work in the hearts of people here tonight in this mess of a thing I've made. Oh God, work.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/16/SID16495.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/paul-washer/true-disciple-conference-come-to-me-isaiah-55/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net