

Seek the LORD While He May Be Found

‡ **Worth the effort** (vv.6,7)

‡ **Worthy sacrifice** (vv.8,9)

In the name of Jesus, our loving Savior and dearest Friend, beloved of God in Christ:

In the Midwest we call them “straight line winds.” In my home state of Oregon they use the Indian name “Chinook.” Whereas here we might see an occasional oak tree uprooted, Chinook winds can flatten a whole forest of jack pines – uprooted or snapped in two. Every year working for my grandfather required cleanup with chainsaw and ax. And I was always impressed at how our trees on Blissful Acres Ranch seemed to fall around the houses as if guided by an unseen hand. But shortly after my mother and stepfather sold their home and moved to Arizona, the new owner who considered this merely their summer home called one night: “You were sure lucky all those twenty years,” he said. “After last night’s storm we’ve got trees fallen into the dining room and bedrooms too. What a mess!”

You notice he couldn’t say, “God was really good to you.” Just dumb “luck” is all he could see, I suppose also when years earlier a huge tree in our front yard just missed my aunt in her car by a few inches. Natural man does not want to see God controlling nature or working in our lives. Nor can he fathom how quickly his “luck” is running out when the storms of Judgment Day rage beyond any hurricane or Hinckley, Minnesota, firestorm. You and I are here because we’re hearing God calling us out of this darkness of our stubborn unbelief: **Seek the LORD While He May Be Found.** Look! It’s...

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Far too many church people think they’ve got this licked. They cluck like hens and shake their heads at the ungodly out there who won’t acknowledge our Creator. They think that they can get to God on their own, either by works and merits of the church, or Protestants by their position and powers of intellect, their “decisions for Christ” or “born again” experiences. They go to great efforts to do “church” their way without ever stopping to think that God is not at all pleased. In his scathing Chapter 3 of Romans, the Lord’s Apostle Paul destroys every possibility that we can find God or come to Him on our own: *As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”* (Romans 3:10-12 NIV) Christians too suffer from Oprah’s empty “spirituality.”

Some of you may remember shepherd Philip Keller’s story about his neighbor’s sheep. In his classic book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Keller describes the fence climbers who crawled around during low tide from their blasted, dried up pastures next door, then gorged themselves on his lush green grass. Bloated, sodden sacks they were when Keller loaded them up in a wheel barrow and took them back to the hireling across the fence. Those sheep had gotten in on their own. They never came under the good shepherd’s care. He would have given them dry rations to build them up to eating such rich food after near starvation from their satanic shepherd. But they were worse off when to Keller’s dismay, his neighbor took out his shepherd’s killing knife and slit their throats. He could not have cared less.

If God is not in your life, Satan is in control. But not one of us will ever get to God on our own. Deaf, blind and dumb by nature, we cannot seek God, much less find Him. But His loving voice cuts through our gloomy sin and unbelief, calling today whether we’ve known Him as our Savior since our infant Baptism or are just learning about the one true God right now: *“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”*

Marriage and family are God's training ground in mind and spirit. It's sad to see how quickly a young bridegroom's passion plummets to self-love where he blames God's gift of a wife for everything. And where her respect and admiration for him once was so radiant, her harsh tongue soon betrays a heart with no desire to please him, only herself. They may both want the same thing, but for self first, not for each other. Giving to get ruts the wheels on our wedding cart. And man's natural way is to give up and blame someone else for his sinful failures. Pride destroys. Only God's grace can heal.

When I hear God calling through His Gospel of forgiveness in Christ, I repent of my *wicked ways* as shame in God's sight and *forsake* them along with my *evil...thoughts*. In hopeless unbelief I would only flail for love on my own, until the Lord comes calling, "***Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.***" God's *mercy triumphs over judgment*" (James 2:13), not only with God, but between us sinners in all our relationships with each other. Jesus' blood washed away all my pride and selfishness. Yours too! This Good News brightens our eyes to see, and gives us the power to think and feel the way the Lord's Apostle Paul counsels in the best ever advice on mental health: "***Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.***" (Philippians 4:8f NIV) **Peace** alone is **Worth the effort** by God's grace to stop condemning and **Seek the LORD While He May Be Found**. Here is truly...

✠ **Worthy sacrifice (vv.8,9)**

But whose **sacrifice** is it? What are we really giving up if we slam the door on *evil thoughts* and *wicked ways*? Jesus says, "***For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.***" (Matthew 15:19 NIV) Is any of that worth keeping? Does sin ever really give the lasting pleasure human hearts so desperately crave? If it does then Hollywood should be the most satisfied, stable place on the planet. And all our fellow Americans living their soap operas should enjoy warm fuzzies day and night. But you and I often have to learn the hard way with King David how sex outside of marriage is death not only for our souls but for everyone who gets in the way of our sinful desires. Violence and death would strip the silver screen of all its luster if we weren't so sinfully blind by nature. We're talking **Worthy sacrifice**, but it's not our **sacrifice**.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." The best we could do is gorge ourselves on life's sinful pleasures and forfeit the fine health and eternal joys for which God created us. He made a paradise full of fruit for our first parents while they enjoyed holiness in God's image – emotionally, intellectually, willfully one with God. Instead, they chose the one fruit God forbid, and Adam brought sin's death and suffering into God's world.

But there you see how high and awesome His *thoughts* and *ways* truly are. Moldy houses full of asbestos we destroy. Cars collided from bumper to bumper we smash on flatbed trucks headed for the melting furnace. We give God reason every day to use just two fingers of His powerful judgment and squish us like bugs on the counter where we don't belong with the germs of sin inside our souls. Instead, God sent His Son to suffer in our place. Instead, He cleans out all the harmful effects of sin. He buried the mold with Christ. Crucified and risen, He builds our hearts and homes in loving kindness and tender mercy. Instead of leaving our smashed Old Man full of cancerous bumps and bloody bruises, God's dear Holy Spirit through Word and sacraments creates in us a New Man, able to love unselfishly like Christ, treating our bride or our husband and children, friends and relatives, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students – all undeserving as we – but loving them with Christ's conquering kindness from God. Rather than condemn our hearts, He heals them and creates them clean and new. The only real **sacrifice** here, the truly **Worthy sacrifice**, is the one Jesus Christ made of Himself on the cross. Today we **Seek the LORD** because today God chooses to **Be Found**. What joy is here in Christ alone! Amen.