

## Isaiah 55:6-9

6. Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7. 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. 8. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. 9. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

### God’s Ways Are Not Our Ways nor His Thoughts Our Thoughts

During my time at Bethany Lutheran College I had some really great professors, several who were exceptional. It’s wonderful having an instructor who can take a complex issue and break it down piece by piece into bite sized forms of information one can understand. There was one professor in particular, who I was exceptionally fond of, who had a gift of taking the poorly-worded, awkward, and stumbling answers he received in answer his questions in class, and would reword the students answer into a finely polished and articulate response. I remember this professor as a reminder of just how amazingly intelligent some people are in this world, the way they can wrap their minds around subjects and organize and articulate their thoughts. Sometimes I wonder at the amazing inventions certain engineers develop, or the savants who can see number and memorize it even if it contains thousands of digits, within a few minutes. It’s mind boggling what certain individuals are capable of. The thoughts and ways of certain people can leave us dumbfounded. How much more so the almighty God?

In our text for today the prophet Isaiah contrasts the ways and thoughts of God with the ways and thoughts of the wicked and the evil of this world. Sometimes when we think of the ways and thoughts of God we think only in terms of the wonders and complexities of His creation

and fail to comprehend the impact that it has on our personal lives. We may think that God separates science from man, He separates the physical world from morality. God didn't design a world that contains the laws of math, chemistry, and physics that result in only numbers or statistics. No, God's creation has a special purpose for man. It's designed in a way that gives man guidance in how he is to live. The way the laws of this world tell mankind how to live is not only to please God, but it's also for the good of man. The rules of creation, such as biology and sociology are intended to curb man into a way of life that is in his best interest and for his good. The laws of creation, these are the ways and thoughts of God and they are reflected in what is right and good for man.

Man is able to read God's will in part for his life through reason and nature. Man can know the natural law, that is the moral law of God, apart from God's word. St. Paul confirms this in Romans and writes, "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." (Romans 2:14-15).

But just having access to the law of God is no guarantee that it will be followed. Even if a person is extremely intelligent and discerning it's not a guarantee that that person will do the right thing. Think of your own life, knowing the right thing to do and actually doing it are by no means one in the same. Even in arbitrary matters we often don't do the thing that is in our best interest. Like when you know that if you took 20 minutes a day to study for the upcoming exam in two weeks you know you would ace it. Instead, you put it off to the last second, let the anxiety build up, spend six agonizing hours cram studying the night before, and get a B- on what should have been an easy A. (It's almost like I'm speaking from experience.) This principle applies to work projects we put off, decisions we make for our diets, or our sleep schedule. Knowing the right thing to do and actually doing it are not the same thing.

These examples I've used are innocent enough but it's this same weakness of man that separates him from the ways and thoughts of God and eventually leads the ways of men to wickedness and evil. A current example from our society is full blown acceptance of homosexuality. I saw some statistics from the Center of Disease Control which showed that 70% of the people who contracted HIV in 2015 were homosexual males although they only comprise about 2% of the population. You don't need citations from Scripture to come to the conclusion that this lifestyle is dangerous for the people who participate in it. Look at depression rates, rates of drug and alcohol abuse, even suicide rates! They all tell us that this is a lifestyle that shouldn't be pursued. But, rather than discourage this lifestyle or even remain neutral about it, our society has decided that this lifestyle should be promoted as equal and viable, if not preferable to the heterosexual lifestyle. This is harmful to the individuals who are suspect to this particular weakness! It is a failure to act in their best interest.

Rather than do what is best, not just in a moral sense but in a pragmatic sense, our society would prefer a person not be offended rather than do what is best for their health. Society has decided on many issues it would rather dress something that is wrong and harmful as right and good rather than speak the truth in love out of fear of offense. The results of this faulty thought process are becoming more and more evident. Again, knowing the right and doing the right thing are not one in the same. It's as our text says: God's ways our not our ways, nor his thought's our thoughts.

Knowing the right thing to do and living our lives accordingly affects us as well. We of all people should know God's will in what we are to do. Not only do we have our reason and senses, as do all people, to observe and do what is right, but we have God's will for our lives written down for us as well! And still, we hold onto our pet sins. We have those individual sins that we don't want to give up. We know they are harmful. We know they are against God's will, but we hold onto them all the same. We

rationalize in our minds that they aren't that big of a deal, they aren't actually hurting anyone, or we twist, ever so slightly, God's word when it speaks about that sin. You know what that particular sin is for yourself. Maybe it's lusting after someone who isn't your spouse, perhaps a coworker or someone on the internet. Maybe it's the gossip you love to share and you maliciously slander your neighbor for your own guilty pleasure. Maybe it's getting drunk only once in a while. Maybe it's the sin of pride and conceit and you would rather look down and judge those in society saying "Thank God I am not like that person" than recognizing them as another soul who needs a savior just like you do. We all have them. We who of all people should know better, remain unable to break from sin. Just like everybody else, God's ways are not our ways nor his thought our thoughts.

But more importantly than God's ways and thoughts for our life are God's ways and thoughts for our salvation. God's plan for salvation is not based upon our works or deeds, or how well our thoughts and ways line up with his own. God achieved our salvation in a way that is incomprehensible to man. Although man can come to the knowledge of what is right and wrong, man cannot come to the knowledge of how God intends for man to be saved. All manmade religions come to same conclusion: there must be something we do to merit forgiveness; we must make our ways and thoughts in line with God's in order for us to be saved! But once again God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts. And thank God for that.

Since we cannot on our own know God's plan for our salvation, so we do what our text says: "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." (Isaiah 55:6) We turn to Scripture, where God says he will be found. Scripture doesn't tell us what we naturally expect to hear. Scripture doesn't tell us of how we must earn our salvation. Scripture tells us of a salvation that appears to man's reason a stumbling block or foolishness. Scripture tells us of Christ and cross he bore on our

behalf. St. Paul tells us, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25) Scripture points us to Christ: to his life, death, and resurrection. This is the way that God saves us from our sin. We are saved by Christ’s perfect life which he gave on the cross on our behalf and the resurrection that guarantees us the victory.

We know of God’s ways in the laws of nature and the law in Scripture. This law exceeds and condemns us. But, we also know, through the truth in Scripture apprehended by faith, of God’s ways of mercy which forgives and saves us! “For it is by grace you have been saved, though faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) The way of salvation is the wisdom of God. God’s ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts.

There is nothing we do to earn or deserve the love that the Lord gives to us. This mystery is incomprehensible: why the Lord should give the life of his perfect Son on our behalf. But in our text the Lord tells us of the kind of love he has for us. The Hebrew verb in our text “to have mercy” has its roots in the Hebrew that is associated with childbirth, mothers, and love a mother has for her children. This paints a powerful picture of God’s love for us.

There are stories of the hardest and most wicked sort of criminals who before their execution cry for their mothers. The reason they cry for their mother’s is because they know, even in their hardened hearts, that their mother still loves them. No matter how much evil they have done, no matter if the whole world hates and despises them, they know that their mother still sees them as the precious child they once were. A

mother's love will always see the chance for good and redemption in the heart of her child even if reason says she should not. This love that a mother has for her child describes the way which God loves you and has mercy on you. No matter what you have done, no matter who you are, whether you are a lifelong Christian baptized at birth or a convicted criminal repenting on his last breath, whether you have worked in the vineyard the whole day or for just the last hour, when you turn to the Lord as a sinner in need of your savior he will have mercy upon you. Thank the Lord that His ways and thoughts are full and free forgiveness found in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.