

## John 43 – Seek and Find

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### **Scripture 1: (Jn. 7:33-36 ESV)**

Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."

The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?"

### **Scripture 2: (Isa. 65:1-16 ESV)**

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that was not called by my name. I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

Behold, it is written before me: "I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their lap both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together, says the LORD; because they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds."

Thus says the LORD: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,' so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all. I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains; my chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there. Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me. But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in."

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart and shall wail for breaking of spirit. You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord GOD will put you to death, but his servants he will call by another name, so that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.

### **Scripture 3: (Rom. 10:5-21 ESV)**

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

## Sermon:

After having examined the seeming public silence and inaction of the Jews as it concerned Jesus and His teachings, most especially their inability to publicly arrest Him, we next see Jesus inform the whole crowd of His hearers, “*I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.*”. However, understanding what He mean is both easy and hard for us.

- It is easy because we know “the rest of the story”, just as John's original readers did {since we are confident that he wrote his Gospel for the encouragement of existing believers, rather than for convincing new converts as the Synoptics}. We understand that Jesus was alluding to His upcoming passion: His death, resurrection, and ascension; and His return to heaven where, even now, He presently reigns and is presently interceding for us in the Father's presence.
- It is hard because, in order to understand Jesus's words in context, we must consider what His hearers likely thought within John's narrative, based upon what they could have known at this moment within Jesus's story.

So, what could Jesus' hearers have known and understood at that moment? What prompted or encouraged the questioning response of “the Jews”?”

They asked one another, “*Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him?*”. This suggests that they wondered if perhaps Jesus might try to “disappear” and go into hiding somewhere, but they knew full well that Jesus could not entirely disappear and still remain a devout and religious Jew. Despite the apparent “strangeness” of the many things that Jesus said and did, He gave no indication of being willing to abandon and cease His orthodox faith and practice. Therefore, He would not be expected to completely abandon Temple worship or His membership in a synagogue community.

They wondered, “*Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?*”. Perhaps they were wondering whether Jesus might try to flee Judea and live among the Hellenistic Jews instead; to live out in the wider Roman Empire. But although He would be geographically distant, He could still be found and “reached” by the offended and indignant Jewish authorities, if they wanted to. Or perhaps they were wondering whether Jesus might seek employment as a “wise man”, or a philosopher among the pagan Gentiles, or more specifically among the Greeks. That would enable Him to teach His “moral philosophy” and the accumulated “Jewish wisdom”, but doing so would almost certainly require that He abandon His “Jewishness”; both so as to become acceptable to the Gentiles and be the natural, spiritual consequence of close engagement with them. Such a decision would be punishment enough, in itself because, in doing so, He would become “cut off from His people” {and interpretatively “cut off” from the spiritually living} which is the true ultimate sanction for blasphemy, divine disobedience, or covenant transgression (e. g. Genesis 17:14; Exodus 12:19, 31:14).

After first imagining Jesus's possible options, they asked the next, most important question, asking “*What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?*”. The questions of “What does Jesus mean...?” or more appropriately “What does the Bible teach...?” are the most important questions for everyone to ask because they are the first step towards the understanding and application of biblical truth.

The question here of “What does Jesus mean...?” remains very important to us because, by Jesus saying simply, “*You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.*”, He refutes, rejects, and expressly

denies one of the most common (and most incorrect) assumptions made by Evangelical Christians: the false assumption that people (whether everyone, or just anyone at all) are actually looking for God.

They assume that people want God. They assume that everyone is on a quest to find and know the divine, when the truth is precisely the opposite. They assume that everyone is desiring God because of some “felt need” intrinsic to our human nature; they are wrong but **almost** right. Sinful humanity wants nothing more and nothing better than to remain as far removed from the righteous holiness of the LORD, as possible; which is what leads us to so quickly and so easily fall into the trap of idolatry: {...exchanging the truth about God for a lie, worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator} (Romans 1:25).

Everyone feels like “something” is missing in their life, a hole that they need to fill; this “emptiness” is due to our lack of original righteousness and the corruption of our nature; our sin (WSC 18). Therefore, each of us set out upon a quest to find what we are missing, yet we try to fill the void with anything and everything except God; except for Jesus Christ; except for the **only** True, Holy, Sovereign, and Creator LORD revealed in the Bible. This quest is often what drives people deeper into their sins, chasing after the false and unattainable promises of Satan's; whether it be our various addictions, adultery, pornography, false religions, astrology and divination, social or political authority and influence, popularity, and the praise of others.

Yet, although the ultimate and only absolutely correct answer that we are questing for is God, we cannot actually know Who it is that we are seeking until and unless He calls us to Himself.

- That is the inherent problem with the whole “church growth movement” which has influenced American Evangelicalism since the 1970's;
- That is the problem with “Seeker Sensitivity”, which is more rightly called “Seeker-driven Church”;
- That is the core problem with those people who have worked to change the church to try and make it more attractive to the world (to worldly people) {and they have unfortunately had tremendous success}, when the true work of the Holy Spirit upon individuals and the work of the church in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, is to transform the world and make it look more like the Church of Christ.

Scripture firmly refutes the assumption that unregenerate, reprobate, and wicked sinners: people who wrongly think and believe they are happy, satisfied, and fulfilled with their lives; are looking for the Church and are looking for Jesus. The psalmist, king David, wrote (and was quoted by the Apostle Paul), “*The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, **to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.***” (Ps. 14:1-3 ESV). No one, not one sinful, unregenerate, human person ever decides to seek the LORD God. They do not care about God and they do not want Him. The testimony of Scripture and the plain evidence which surrounds us, clearly testifies to the fact that the world: the *kosmos* and everyone who belongs to it; does not want Jesus, nor does it want anything that God has to offer.

- Conclusion: there is no such thing as a “Seeker” because no one seeks God upon their own initiative or desire<sup>1</sup>.
- The church cannot and will never attract the world because the world is not looking for the Church.
- Any particular expression of the church that tries to attract the world by looking, acting, and appealing

<sup>1</sup><https://www.reformation21.org/mos/1517/seeker-sensitive-vs-seeker-driven>

<https://www.timesheraldonline.com/2012/05/13/the-seeker-sensitive-movement-and-churches/>

to the world's preferences and desires will quickly stop looking like, acting like, and being the Church.

Therefore, something more great is required before any person can begin looking for God and there is a logical priority to what that is. The Apostle Paul explains this in his letter to the Romans.

- Beginning with Romans 8:28, “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*” (Rom. 8:28 ESV), Paul equates “*those who love God*” with “*those who are called according to his purpose*”, implying that before a person can “love God”, they first must be “called” by God.
- Then he describes what is commonly called the “Golden Chain of Salvation”, saying that “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*” (Rom. 8:29-30 ESV), whereby Paul describes the necessary, logical order for every individual's salvation: they must first be foreknown, next predestined, and then called, justified, before finally being glorified.

But then that begs the question, where does our faith fit into this order? Scripture teaches us to believe that “regeneration precedes faith” because the Holy Spirit must first act upon us to make us *another*: “born again” or “born from above”; before we can and may believe (John 3:5-8). However, we also believe that during our regeneration the righteousness of Christ is imputed and applied to us, which thereby causes us to be justified and therefore, is more broadly understood as the practical, consequential effect of our salvation (WSC 33). So, faith: including our assenting act of believing; must logically follow our having been called but be before our justification. Since faith is justification's prerequisite, we more rightly consider faith and justification as sharing the same position within this list.

- Then, in Romans chapter 10, after affirming the prophetic teaching of Joel declaring, “*...it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*” (Joel 2:32 ESV), and understanding that logically, only those who know “the name of the LORD”: only those who know and are known by the LORD (Matthew 7:23); may be included within this potential “everyone” {a limited rather than universal pool of possible people}, Paul explains how a person may come to know the LORD in order to call upon Him, “*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?*” Before a person can call upon God they need to know that He is, **who** He is, and why they can/should call upon Him.

Logically, a person cannot believe (cannot have *pisteuo*) in Christ Jesus and “*call upon the name of the LORD*” in order to be saved, unless they first know who He is; unless He has first been found by them because no one can reasonably search for something if they do not know what they are looking for (because “You'll know it when you see it.” just does not work.). This makes an external call absolutely necessary, which thereby makes evangelism the functional priority of every Christian.

However, since there have been and are so many evangelists, and since most everyone has easy access to a Bible, and since most everyone today knows about Jesus (or has heard something about Jesus), why then does not everyone believe? Why does everyone not respond with faith?

Not everyone believes because, not everyone who hears our external evangelistic call also receives an internal call by God's Holy Spirit. That internal call is the specific kind of “call” that Paul meant in Romans 8:29, an

effectual call, and a call which is only “heard” by those who have been given the “*ears to hear*” (Matthew 11:15) because they are *anohen*. The external call is universal and freely offered to all, but the internal call is only given to and received by God's Elect.

So if, as Paul and the Psalmist tell us, “...*no one seeks for God...*” (Rom. 3:11 ESV) and if both the evidence that **God is** (the ordered world around us; Psalm 19:1) and evidence of **who God is** (the Bible; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), is readily available and **always** present and at hand, but if we cannot recognize it for what it is on account of our sin nature, then a person could seek after a “god” all that they might want: seeking after the divine, or some “higher power”, or even a “power within themselves”; but they will never be able to find the truth, unless and except that God, who gives that internal call, reveals Himself, personally, to them.

So, when Jesus told the Jews, “*You will seek me and you will not find me.*” what He meant (in part at least, if not the whole) was that they knew enough to know that they should be looking. They had the special revelation of God, having the Law of Moses and the Prophets; yet since they did not understand Who and What they were supposed to be looking for, they would not find Him. They would not find and recognize the Christ because they were not actually looking for Him, because Jesus was not the Messiah they wanted. Instead they were looking for some other Messiah: a warrior and king; they were looking for some other Savior to save themselves in their own righteousness.

Then, when Jesus told them, “*Where I am you cannot come.*”, after having earlier said that He was “...*going to him who sent me...*”, the Him whom He had just accused them of not knowing, telling them while teaching in the Temple, “*You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.*” (Jn. 7:28-29 ESV). Clearly, Jesus meant that He was going to return to where ever He came from: namely, heaven.

- Jesus was speaking ahead here; this was prophetic speech. He was both **foretelling** and **forth-telling** what will be when “*his hour*” comes. They could not come to where He will go because:
  - He will have been translated alive and bodily, having ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9).
  - He will have passed through the heavens and entered into the Holiest of Holies, to enter into the Father's presence and intercede on behalf of all whom the Father had given Him (John 10:29; Hebrews 4:14, 9:11-12).
  - He will be seated beside the Father, reigning over both heaven above and the earth below (Psalm 110:1; Matthew 26:64) until the time comes for His return in glory.
  - He will be where only the Elect: the beloved, adopted, *anohen* children of God; are invited and welcomed.

Interpreting this, there are two ways we need to consider Jesus's pronouncement of, “*You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.*” in order to better understand His intended meaning. We need to look at it from a mundane and literal perspective and we need to consider a spiritual view.

- Considering it mundanely and literally, is simple and straight forward because we realize that logically the Jew would not be able to physically find Jesus since obviously, they could not physically enter into heaven.
- Considering it spiritually **and** considering it from the perspective of our side of the cross (which would have also been John's perspective when writing this) we understand that they would not recognize Jesus

as the Christ and they would not find Him, because they were looking for a different kind of Christ. We understand that they “cannot come” to where Jesus is, not because they had been “dis-invited” or were simply “not permitted”, but because they simply lacked the ability (they lacked the **power**; {the Greek translated here as “cannot come” is the Indicative, Present, Middle, 2<sup>nd</sup> Person, Plural form of the verb *dynamis* (the term from which we derive the word “dynamite”): a verb conveying power and ability; implying an action that is on-going and active on the 2<sup>nd</sup> person's part}) to follow Him to where He was going because:

- they lacked the necessary righteousness;
- they were sinful and unregenerate; and,
- they lacked faith in Jesus Christ.

However, in all fairness to history and charitableness, we should also recognize that Jesus's declaration of their inability and lack was not an absolute statement {as per the Greek verbal tense of “Present”}: it most rightly concerned their immediate present and did not preclude the possibility of each individual hearer's faith and regeneration in the future.

Meanwhile, the oddity of these four verses and their placement within John's narrative suggests that there is something deeper going on within them; something which becomes more evident with a better and broader degree of knowledge and understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures, much like the understanding of Paul.

After having explained the necessity of hearing the Gospel preached before one could trust Christ in faith, explaining that “...*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*”, Paul rhetorically asks, “*But I ask, did Israel not understand?*”, where by “Israel” he refers to those whom John calls “the Jews”, and his expected answer is that “The Jews did not really understand.”. Finally, he invokes the words of the prophet Isaiah against them, “*Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."*. Paul understood that Isaiah meant the Gentiles when he said, “*I have been found by those who did not seek me...*”. He remembered that, even further back, this also included the patriarch Abraham who was a Gentile before the LORD revealed Himself to him {and other ancient Gentile men like Job and Melchizedek}, and whom Scripture in no way suggests was seeking the LORD God prior {although Jewish tradition (midrash Genesis Rabba chapter 38) and the Q'uran (21:51-9, 62-3) both contain stories about Abraham's rejection of idolatry and desire for the one true god}.

- The Gentiles did not seek God because they did not know they **needed** to seek the LORD but, they did/do find Him once He calls them and reveals Himself to them.
- But the Jews on the other hand, those who knew that they needed to be seeking the LORD: the ones whom Jesus had just told that they would not find Him; are the ones who will never find God, despite Him {holding His hands out “*to a disobedient and contrary people.*”}.
- But why would they not find Him? Isaiah tells us that they would not find the LORD because:
  - they were {walking in a way that is not good};
  - they were “...*following their own devices*”;
  - they were “*a people who provoke [the LORD] to [His] face continually*”;

- they were doing all manner of forbidden and unclean things like “...*sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels*”;
- they would say, “*Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.*” on account of their self righteousness and self confidence.

That is why the LORD described them as being “...*a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.*”.

- Their sins and their sinfulness had made them become offensive to the LORD.
- Their continual, willful disobedience had made them obnoxious and odious to the LORD.

Therefore, by rejecting God's commandments, they also rejected the LORD. All of their extra practices and “traditions”, which were meant to preserve and help them keep the Law of the LORD, but instead caused them to trust in themselves and their own works of righteousness, instead of trusting in Jesus Christ by faith alone (Romans 9:30-32). They were looking for their own Messiah, not God's. They were looking to be their own savior, when the dead cannot possibly save themselves.

Their inability to find Christ and to go where He would go was not on account of God hiding Himself from them; of God somehow preventing them or stopping them from finding Him, because remember, the LORD actually wants to be found (1 Timothy 2:4). Instead, Isaiah wrote and explained why a little earlier, saying “*Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*” (Isa. 59:1-2 ESV). Please understand this, God does not hide Himself from Man. Instead, God is hidden from Man because of our sin.

Whenever we see a solar eclipse, there is no substantive change to the sun. Instead, it is the moon which moves between the earth and sun, obscuring the light. So, our sin is like the moon and God is like the sun; He remains present and unchanged, but our sin comes between us and hides His light from us. We cannot find God, no matter how hard we try, because our sin and sinfulness is in the way and we cannot remove it, any more than we can move the moon. That is why we need God and His Holy Spirit to clear the path for us: to remove the obstacle of our sin; before we can hear His call and seek His face. But until He does that, a person can seek all they might want but they will never find Him, because they would not know what or who they are looking for.

So, how does this apply to us, today?

We cannot help but view this passage in light of John 14, when Jesus explained to the disciples that He would be leaving to prepare a place for them, telling them the precise opposite of what Jesus just told the crowd here, “*And you know the way to where I am going.*” (Jn. 14:4 ESV). Therefore, we know and remain confident that the critical difference between **them** and **us** is the object of our faith, whether it is: in Jesus Christ “...*the way, and the truth, and the life.*” (Jn. 14:6 ESV), or in a person's own self righteousness.

So, while many of those in that crowd may have been believing (or beginning to believe) that Jesus was a Messiah, they were not believing in Him as their Messiah: as their spiritual Savior.

Once again, we see how our present cultural moment closely echoes theirs'. Their general populace was beginning to believe and accept the idea of Jesus as a Messiah: as a political Messiah; but, they were not ready or willing to accept Him as the Son of God: as the divine Savior and Redeemer of Israel; just like our culture



(including adherents of other religions) will readily accept the idea of Jesus as being a “good man”, a “good, moral teacher and example”, yet it will adamantly deny the fact of His divinity.

Therefore, we must each take care to examine ourselves, to be certain and sure to know that it is in Jesus and His righteousness that we trust for our eternal security rather than our own self righteous, self justifying works. Knowing Jesus: knowing and believing who He is and what He has done for us; we must be certain that, since we know the way to where He is, that we are following that path and not wandering off onto any other.

This is why the two questions used in Evangelism Explosion are helpful and important as a diagnostic tool because, not only do they help us to find out what others honestly believe (so that we may present and explain the Gospel to them), but they may also be used to help correct ourselves. Those two questions are:

1. If you were to die, right now, are you certain that you would go to heaven?; and,
2. If you died, right now, and suddenly found yourself at the gates of heaven and were asked, “Why should you be let into heaven?”, how would you answer?

We would expect that few people, certainly among everyone who claims the title of Christian or even those who just simply consider themselves to be “religious”, would answer the first question with an affirmative, “Yes”. Yet it is with the second question that the “rubber meets the road” because that answer will often reveal the heart's truth.

How would **you** answer? Answering quickly, without taking time to think about it, just as an immediate response?

- If your immediate, reactionary answer includes anything along the lines of: “I’m a good person.”, or “I haven’t really done anything bad.”, or “I attend church every Sunday.”, or “I try to help people and I often given to charity.”, {or “I am a: Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Pastor's wife, Pastor's kid, or Christian.”}; then, you need to stop and reexamine your priorities and think about your hope for salvation.
- But, if your immediate, reactionary answer is more like: “Because Jesus said I could.” {“The man on the middle cross said I could.” - A. Begg}, or “Because I am covered by the blood of Jesus.”, or “Because I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ.”, or “Because Jesus gave His life for me.”, or really any answer that relies upon “Because Jesus...”; then you may be confident that you know how you have been “saved”, and that your faith is in Christ as your Savior; then you may be confident that at the most important moment of all, you will “...*call upon the Name of the LORD.*”; then you may be confident that if and when you seek after Jesus Christ, that you will find Him because you have heard His call and, because you know where He is to be found and, because you are able to come to Him through your faith and trust (your *pisteuo*) in Him, alone.

**AMEN**