

In the name of Jesus,

If I were new to the area (and in some ways I still am), and I would ask you for directions to McDonald's from here, I imagine I might get a few different answers. For some of you, you might send me to the closest McDonald's, and that might be very easy to find. Others might send me to the one that gives you a little more fries for your buck. For some of you, your first answer might be, "Well, don't go to the McDonald's on Ford and Hix, because they have way too much grease on their burgers!" For some of you, you might send me a couple miles (and a couple of different turns) out of my way, because it's your favorite one. And for some of you, you might first ask which way I'm turning on Merriman, because then you would send me to the one north of here or south of here. In the end, and after all the advice and maybe a little bit of arguing among some of you as to which McDonald's I should go to, I might just go out to my car and see if I can't find a petrified granola bar in the bottom of the console to appease my hunger.

Where we want to go, and how we want to get there is often more complicated than we would like. And if that's true for something as simple as McDonald's, then imagine following directions to getting better grades, or getting a handle on balancing family and work, or getting a relationship back together, or getting used to a new environment, or even something as simple as getting out of bed each day and facing all the new challenges. What's the best way? Can it even be done? And then you come to church today, and it seems like you're getting more directions. Well, you are, but in a way these directions will make all the others in your life just a little easier.

TAKE GOD'S WAY

1. Find the forgiveness "free" way. 2. Head up heaven's "high" way.

So, I asked you before, when I was reading the lesson, what was the one thought, or phrase, or verse that you find hard to understand. I have to imagine for most of you, it has to be the first verse: (v.6) **"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near."** What in the world does that mean? At first glance, it sure sounds like there might be times when we can't find God, and that doesn't sound very good. If that verse has always confused you, let me clarify it a little bit, using the over-arching idea of this sermon that we are going places. Here's one way that you want to look at this verse the next time you read it or hear it. It's not so much that God is going anywhere, because – like the verse says – he is near. God isn't going anywhere, but we may be going places that God doesn't want us to go. That certainly was true for the people during Isaiah's time. In fact, the Jews have quite a history in the Bible of straying from God, reaping the consequences of their wayward ways, crying a few crocodile tears to get God's attention, and then forgetting him when all was good again. It's sure a good thing that never happens today.

Of course it does. To stick with the analogy, we prefer the freeways of life. You know, the idea of a freeway in this country was to make travel easy and carefree, but you also know that isn't the case. Many times freeways are not free of traffic or free of trouble, and on some of the more terrible freeways in this country, they're not even free – they have this awful thing called "tolls"! Let's face it: Our freeways have become frustrated ways.

And it's the same in the path of life. Our sinful nature prefers the freeways of life, the path of least resistance – or at least the path that promises the least resistance, but in the end it probably offers the most aggravation. We get on that freeway of life, thinking that we will get to the destination of

our desire, only to find that everyone else is there too, and nobody is getting anywhere fast because they are not following God's way. We speed excessively through life, not patient enough to follow God's timing for things. We have our fits of unrighteous road rage, bursting into anger because someone who has offended our sense of right or wrong on the road of life. Then there is the traffic jam of life, usually caused by someone who wasn't paying attention to others or wasn't courteous on the road of life, and the ripple effect of their accident has affected everyone around them. Even if we are on God's freeway, there are times when we heed the call of those devilish billboards that promise fun and pleasure, but like I-90 through Chicago that gives you a peek of the skyline or a glimpse of Lake Michigan, that brief enjoyment comes at the cost of the toll of consequences of sin. Let's face it, like everyone else in history we like to go our own way, thinking it will end in a life full of pleasure and fun, but it dead-ends in pain and frustration and death.

Isaiah was right exactly two chapters before today's lesson, where chapter 53:6 he says, **"All we, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..."**, and then at the dead-end of that path, Isaiah immediately points to the better path: **"and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."** If you're feeling a little lost or a little let down on the road of life you've been travelling lately, then listen to Isaiah in today's lesson: **"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."** In short, in both verses Isaiah is telling us to Take God's Way, for on his road we find the forgiveness "free" way.

Seeking the Lord and forsaking your way means admitting you've been going places where God doesn't want you to go and where he cannot be found. Seeking the Lord and forsaking your way means begging for his forgiveness, knowing for certain that he is a compassionate God and his default setting his always mercy and grace for those who turn to him in their time of need. Seeking the Lord and forsaking your way means your are willing to let him chart the course of your life for today, tomorrow, for this next week as well as your whole life, because he knows better than you what lies ahead, and he is much more able than you to get to a destination that is truly more happy and blessed. In short, Taking God's Way simply means to find forgiveness in the One who said he was **"the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6)**, because only through his forgiveness will you be where you truly desire to be – one with the Father every day, and with the Father on the Last Day.

2. Head up heaven's "high" way

What's the best highway you've ever been on? Before you answer that, I suppose we need to qualify what we mean by "best". We could be talking about least amount of traffic, or least amount of potholes (which would then probably not be in Michigan), or the most enjoyable or the most scenic. Let's go with that last one – most scenic. For our family, I would have to say it was the Road to the Sun in Glacier National Park in northern Montana. By the way, if you ever want to get the full effect of that road, you have to travel it right at the end of June or first part of July when it first opens up. You see, this highway truly is a "high" way. It's up in the mountains, and because of the elevation and narrowness, it's only open a handful of months out the year. Usually it is snow-packed and impossible to travel. But if you get there in the first week after the snow trucks clear the mountain pass, you are privy to plethora of sunlit waterfalls trickling under snow drifts and over rocks that is just breathtaking. If you go in August, most of those impromptu waterfalls are all dried up.

If that highway is a little slice of heaven on earth, then you would think that heading up heaven's "high" way – heading on the road that takes us to the real S-O-N – would be just as breathtaking and incomparably beautiful. But it's not. When you head up heaven's "high" way this side of heaven, there are times when you think you will never reach your destination, or that you think you truly are on the road to nowhere. Like old Abraham leaving for a distant country, or little David stepping in front of a giant, or faithful Daniel refusing to give up on his devotion to God and

being tossed to hungry lions for all his trouble, there will be obstacles to conquer and paths to cross, where you look at the road and think, “impossible” or “impassable.”

But our lack of understanding or lack of vision doesn't mean our God is lacking. What does our God say today? **“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** When we think it can't be done, God thinks it can. When we say, “No way,” he says, “Yes way.” And when he says, “My way,” then we humbly echo the words of Jesus, “Not my will, but yours be done.” Take God's Way and head up heaven's “high” way.

You see, our God is so outside of the box, that we can't even begin to understand him. Isn't it great to have a God who isn't limited by the short-sighted solutions we come up with? Isn't it great to have a God whose divine means aren't limited by human imagination? Heaven's “high” way takes you to places better than you could ever expect or deserve – to places where you are more loved by God than you'll ever know, to places where you are more secure in his hands than you'll ever feel, and to places where you have more power over temptation than you will ever have on your own. How can you be sure? Not by understanding, but by believing. As proof, just look at Peace over the past year, during times more difficult than anyone could have imagined a year ago, and you see a congregation that has been more blessed by God than we desire or deserve. Take God's Way, and with a faith that sees past the impossible and impassible, you will find that you truly are on heaven's “high” way.

Let me close by asking a very dangerous question: Which state has the worst roads? You're laughing because you think you know the answer. After our vacation last year, I would have said Colorado, but they come in only at #14 on the list of states with the worst roads, according to a report put out by MotorTrend.com. My home state of Nebraska comes in at #10, followed by Michigan at #9. The state with the best roads is Georgia, and the state with the worst roads is one most of us will never visit, or want to visit after I tell you. Rhode Island comes in at #1.

But I would still disagree with that. The state that has the worst roads is the state of mind that travels any road in this life – figurative or literal – without God. There will always be bumps in the road of life, and you will have breakdowns and fender benders – figurative and literal, accidents caused by others or unfortunately brought upon ourselves by our own sinfulness. Go it alone, and you go where angels fear to tread. So take a better way. Take God's Way, and you'll find that you are always on the forgiveness “free” way, and that you really are headed up heaven's “high” way. Amen.