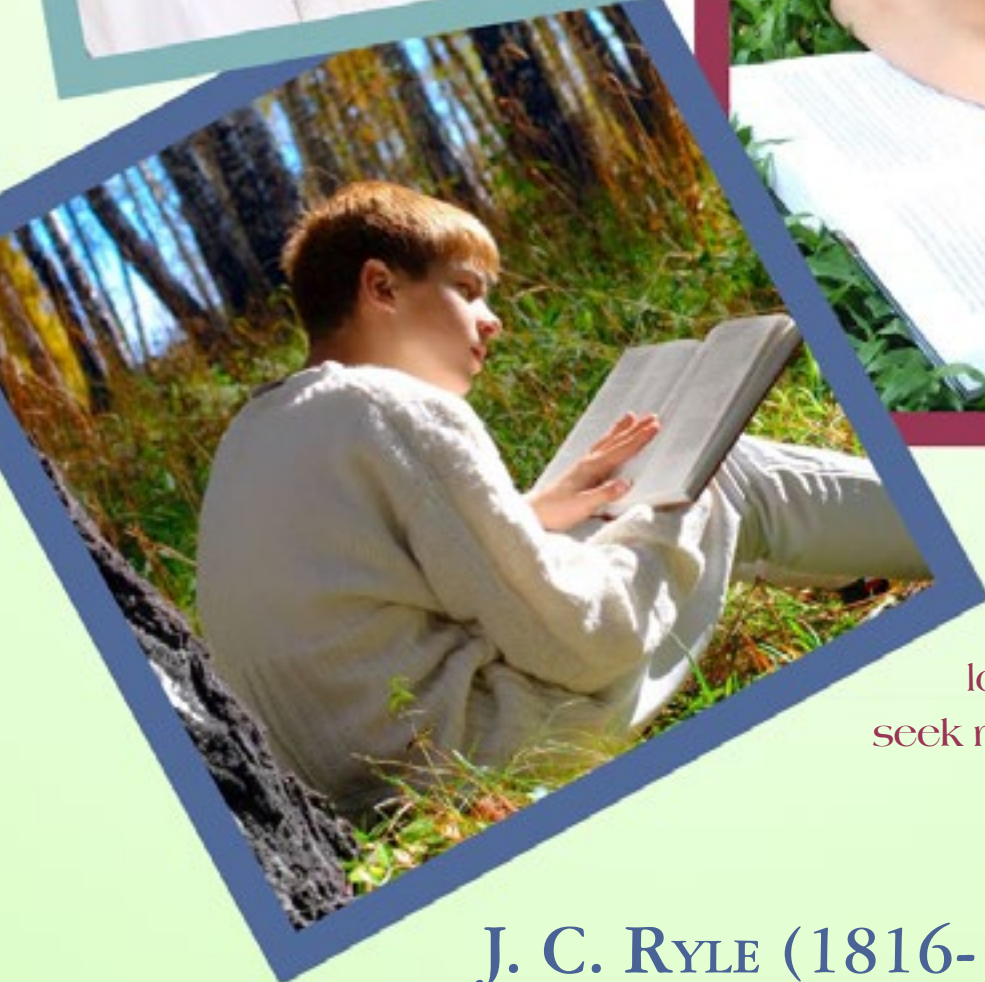


Seek the Lord

EARLY



"I love them that
love me; and those that
seek me early shall find me."
Proverbs 8:17

J. C. RYLE (1816-1900)

SEEK THE LORD EARLY

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SEEK THE LORD EARLY

*I love them that love me; and those
that seek me early shall find me.*

—Proverbs 8:17

Dear children, I am going to talk to you about Jesus Christ and your souls.

I want to make you happy. But I know that people are never really happy unless their *souls* are happy; and I am sure that people's souls cannot be happy unless they love Jesus Christ. And that is the reason why I am going to speak to you now—I want to tell you something about Jesus Christ and your souls.

Dear children, I hope that you will all give your attention while I talk to you. I pray that the Spirit of God may come into your hearts and make you able to do so. Try to listen to me; try to understand what I say; try to remember and carry away something in your minds. I wish to do you all a great deal of good. Do not forget I am speaking to you—not to the grown-up people, but to you, only to you.

Now just think what a pleasant text we have here. It is said: “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.”

These are sweet words indeed; and who do you think says them? They are said by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. He is called “Wisdom” in this chapter. But we know it means Jesus Christ, for there are things said about Wisdom in this chapter which cannot be said truly about anyone but Jesus Christ Himself. Come now and let us see what Jesus Christ says.

Listen, dear children, for this is very important.

1. What Is It to Be Loved by Jesus Christ?

How Jesus loves those whom He loves

He tells us: “I love them that love me.” Now what can we make out of this?

First of all, do you not think it is very pleasant to hear that there are people whom Jesus Christ loves? You know we all like to be loved in this world. Think how disagreeable it would be for you and me if there was nobody alive who loved us. Suppose that no man or woman cared a bit for us; suppose that everybody neglected

us and left us alone. What would we do? We would be wretched, miserable, and unhappy! I am sure we all like to be loved.

Well, then, just consider what a blessed thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ, by the Son of God Himself.

You know that sometimes people love us in this world and yet can do nothing for us. Your dear fathers and mothers love you, but perhaps they are poor and cannot buy what you want; or perhaps they are sick and very old and can do nothing to help you.

But, dear children, these are things that can never happen to Jesus Christ, and I will tell you why:

Jesus Christ is very great. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is Maker of all things. He is God Himself. He is Almighty. He is able to do anything He likes.

Oh, what a thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ!

And, again, Jesus Christ is very rich. He has everything to give that you can want, either for soul or body. He keeps the keys of heaven. He has an endless store of blessings in His treasure house, far more than I could describe.

Oh, what a thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ!

And, again, Jesus Christ is very good. He never refuses anyone who asks Him favors in a proper way. He was never known to say "No!" to any person who made a prayer to Him with a meek and humble heart.

Oh, what a thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ!

Dear children, consider these things. Do you want a great friend? Do you want a rich friend? Do you want a kind friend? Is this the sort of friend you would like? Then be sure there is no friend in all the world like Jesus Christ. There is no love so much worth having as the love of Jesus Christ.

What Jesus does for those whom He loves

Blessed and happy are those whom Jesus Christ loves. I could not tell you a tenth part of all the great things He does for their souls.

He pardons all their sins. He forgives all the bad things they do. He washes them in His own blood and makes them whiter than snow, so that not a spot remains. Dear children, I think that is just what you and I want. We have all sinned many, many sins.

Besides, He gives them power to become good. He puts His Spirit in their hearts; and He makes them love God's ways and like to walk in them. Dear children, that, too, is just the thing you and I want. We have very bad, wicked hearts by nature. We never love God's ways of ourselves.

Besides this, He takes care that none whom He loves shall be lost. He keeps them as a shepherd keeps his sheep. He will not allow either wicked men or the dev-

il to destroy their souls. Dear children, that, too, is just what you and I want. We are all very weak and foolish creatures. We would never be safe if left to ourselves.

And, last, He is getting ready a place in heaven for those whom He loves. He has a glorious house for them there, far away from sin, sorrow, and trouble. Dear children, that, too, is good news for you and me. Is it not pleasant to think He has prepared a home for us so that whenever we leave this world we shall go to a place of peace and rest?

All these things the Lord Jesus Christ does for those whom He loves. Look at them! What mighty things, what glorious things they are! He cleanses them from all their sins. He gives them power to be good. He takes care that they are not lost. He gets ready a house for them in heaven.

Dear children, this is love indeed; this is love worth having. Did I not tell you, truly there is nothing in all the world to be compared to Christ's love? There is nothing like being loved by Jesus Christ!

2. Who Are Those That Jesus Christ Loves?

But let us see next who are those that Jesus Christ loves. He tells us in our text when He says, "I love those that love me."

Now, how shall we know whether we love Jesus Christ or not? This is indeed an important question. Are there no marks or signs, perhaps you will say, by which those who love Him may be found out? Yes, dear children, I think there are. And what those marks and signs are I shall now try to show you.

Remember, then, for one thing, those who love Jesus Christ believe whatever He says in the Bible. The Bible says we are all sinners—lost, perishing sinners, full of wickedness and deceit, deserving nothing but God's anger. Many people cannot quite believe this. They cannot bring themselves to think they are so bad—they dislike to be told of it. It is not so with those who love Jesus Christ. They believe it all; they are ready to say, "It is true, true, quite true!"

Again, the Bible tells us we must come to Christ and trust only in Him if we would be saved. It says that nothing but His blood can wash away our sins, that it is only for His sake that anyone can be forgiven. Many people will not believe this either. They cannot imagine that their own goodness will not help to get them to heaven. But those who love Jesus Christ believe it all. They take the Lord at His word; they stop trusting in their own goodness and are ready to say, "None but Christ, none but Christ is my hope."

Dear children, no one can love Jesus Christ who does not believe what He says. Think what a sad thing it would be if you and I could not get our relations to believe us. Only fancy how hard and unkind it would seem if they were to say, "We do not depend at all on what you tell us; we cannot trust your word." I am sure we would

suppose they no longer loved us. This, then, is one mark of those who love Jesus Christ: they never doubt what He tells them; they believe every word.

Remember, for another thing, those who love Jesus Christ try to please Him. You know when you love people in this world you try to please them. You try to do what they bid you, and to behave as they wish you, and to remember what they teach you, and to mind what they tell you. And why do you do so? Because you love them.

And besides this, you try to please them not only before their faces, when they can see you, but also when they are gone away and out of sight. True love makes you always think: "What would my dear friends like me to do?" If your father and mother found you doing naughty things, doing what they told you not to do, might they not well say, "Child, child, I am afraid you do not really love me"? Yes, indeed, they might. True love will always cause true obedience. And the Bible says: "Even a child is known by his doings" (Proverbs 20:11).

Now, dear children, just as you try to please your friends if you love them, so those who love Jesus Christ try to please Him. They are always trying to do His will, to keep His laws, to live after His commandments, to obey His precepts. They do not think any of Christ's commands are grievous; they never say that His laws are hard, strict, and disagreeable. It is their *delight* to walk in His paths.

Dear children, no man, woman, or child can really love Jesus Christ if they do not try to obey Him. "You are my friends," He says in John 15:14, "if you do whatsoever I command you."

This, then, is another sure mark of those who love Jesus Christ: they try in all things to please Him.

Now we have gotten through one part of our text. Sit still and think for a moment about what you have heard. Each of you ask your own heart this little question: "Do I love Jesus Christ or not? Do I believe what He says, and do I try to please Him?" Those who can answer "Yes" are the children He especially loves. Oh, remember what He says: "I love those that love Me."

3. How Do We "Seek" Jesus Christ?

But let us look next to the other part of our text and see what we may learn from it. I really think this part is almost as pleasant as the first, for it contains a sweet promise: "Those that seek me early shall find me."

Dear children, how are you and I to seek Jesus Christ? He does not live upon earth like one of us; we cannot see Him with our eyes. We cannot reach Him and take hold of Him with our hands, and yet He says, "Those that seek me shall find me." What can this mean? Let me try to tell you.

First of all, you must seek Jesus Christ *in His own book*. The Bible is Jesus Christ's book, and all who want to know Him must be very diligent in reading their Bibles. He says to every one of you, "Search the Scriptures," and He will give the Holy Spirit to those who seek Him in the Scriptures and teach them all about Himself.

Dear children, be regular readers of the Bible all your lives. Let the Word dwell in you richly and then you will be truly wise. Read it daily, read a great deal of it; try to remember it; learn texts by heart. I remember a little girl in my first parish who could learn seventy verses of the Bible in a week. How pleasant it is to find the Apostle Paul reminding Timothy that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15)! Now, why should not all of you be like Timothy in this? I would like to hear that you were all Bible-reading children, children who read the Bible at home as well as at school.

This, then, is one way to seek Jesus Christ. You must seek Him in the Bible.

Second, you must seek Jesus Christ *in His own house*. Jesus Christ has many houses in this country where people meet together to pray to Him and to hear about Him. This church is one of them, and wherever two or three are gathered together in Jesus Christ's name the Lord Himself is really present, though we cannot see Him with our eyes.

Dear children, I hope you will all regularly go to Jesus Christ's house as long as you live. I hope you will never do like those foolish people who keep away from it. Oh, what sad harm they are doing to their poor souls! And, when you go, try to attend to all you hear and to get good from it. Do not stare about and make noise or talk to other children, but listen well to all that is read or preached. Jesus Christ is there and He sees how you behave. He loves to see little children coming to His house and behaving well. If you persevere in [seeking Him], you may be sure He will put His Spirit in you and fill you with all knowledge.

This, then, is another way to seek Jesus Christ. You must seek Him in His house.

Third, you must seek Jesus Christ on your knees *in prayer*. You must ask Him with your own mouth to give you everything that your soul wants. You must ask Him to cleanse you from all your sins in His blood, to give you His Spirit, to make you good, obedient, gentle, kind, truth-speaking children, to keep you from being selfish, idle, greedy, passionate, cunning, or ill-tempered. You must tell Him all you are afraid of, all you feel, and all you wish to have for your soul. This is prayer.

And you need not be afraid of Him at all when you pray. He would like you to tell Him all in your own simple way, just as you tell your own mothers when you want anything. He loves children very much. He was once much displeased with His disciples because they prevented people bringing their children to Him. He said, "Suf-

fer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not" (Mark 10:14). And He is just the same now that He was then.

Dear children, I should like you all to be praying children, children who tell the Lord all your wants and are not afraid to speak to Him. Prayer is the surest way to seek Him, and without prayer your souls will never prosper. Never mind if your prayers seem very poor and weak. Only let them come from your hearts and the Lord hears them.

The Lord Jesus hears every prayer that is prayed to Him in earnest. The least prayer of a little child on earth is loud enough to be heard plainly in heaven above. Heaven seems to be a long way off, but you may be sure the very moment the prayer is spoken it is heard there. A little key will often open a great door. Prayer is a little key of that sort. It can open the door of heaven and take you up to the very throne of God Himself. Blessed are they who delight in prayer and call much upon God.

This, then, is the third way to seek the Lord Jesus Christ. You must seek Him in prayer.

Dear children, I have told you how to seek the Lord. Ask yourselves, each one of you, before you go any further, "Do I really seek Him?"

4. What Is It to "Find" the Lord Jesus?

But our text tells us something about those who seek Jesus Christ. What is it? It says they "shall find Him."

The Lord promises, "they that seek me shall find me." How sweet it is to hear that! Think how disagreeable it would be to seek and seek all our lives, and have our trouble for nothing and never find Him. But the Lord says, "They shall find me."

Now I want to tell you what this "finding" means. We shall not see Him with our eyes, for He is sitting at God's right hand in heaven and not on earth; and yet we are told we shall find Him. How can this be? Let me tell you.

You will find the Lord's presence *in your own hearts and minds*. You will experience something within you, as if the Lord Jesus Christ was sitting by you, taking care of you, putting His arm around you, smiling upon you, and speaking kindly to you. Just as a blind person feels brighter and happier when the sun is shining pleasantly on him, though he cannot see it, so you and I, if we seek Jesus Christ in earnest, shall soon feel our hearts lighter and happier, and something within us will make us know that we have found Him.

Dear children, it is sweet and comfortable indeed when we have really found Jesus Christ! Oh, that you may never give up seeking till you have found Him! And you will find Him, I know, if you seek on, for He is not far off. He is very near every one of us, waiting for us to call upon Him.

When you have found Him, you will have a sure friend in Whom you can trust: a friend Who will always love you, always watch over you, always take care of you, always be good to you, and never fail you.

When you have found Him, you will have strength and power to walk in God's ways, strength to keep yourself from bad words and bad company, strength to do things which please God.

When you have found Him, you will have a pleasant Comforter living in your heart. You will be far more happy, cheerful, and content than you were before. Little things will not put you out as they used to do. You will not be afraid of sickness, pain, or death.

Dear children, how delightful it will be to experience all this! Try, all of you, do try to find Jesus Christ.

5. Seek Jesus Early!

And now there is only one thing more in our text that I want to talk to you about, only one little word. But that little word is so very important that I dare not pass it over. It is the word "early."

"They that seek me early," the Lord Jesus Christ says, "they are those that shall find me."

Dear children, that word "early" was meant particularly for you. Seeking Jesus Christ early means seeking Jesus Christ when you are quite young; and that is just what I want you all to do.

Children, the Lord sends a message to you this very day by my mouth: He would like you to begin seeking Him at once.

Now, remember, all of you, you cannot begin seeking Jesus too soon.

Seeking early is the safest way. Children may be young and healthy, but no children are too young and healthy to die. For death is very strong; death can soon make the healthiest of you pine away, and make your rosy cheeks pale and sickly. Death is very cruel; it does not care whom it takes away out of families, and it will not wait for anyone to get ready. Death will take you just when it pleases. I think as many young persons die as old ones. I see the names of as many young people as old on the grave-stones.

Children, you would not like to die without having sought the Lord at all. Oh, remember, seeking early is the safest way! And then, besides this, seeking early is the happiest way. Surely, if it is so pleasant to have Jesus Christ for a Friend, the sooner you have Him for a Friend the better. You cannot think how happily a child's life goes on when his ways please the Lord! Every-thing seems bright and cheerful; lessons seem more easy and play seems more pleasant; friends seem more kind and

trouble seems less troublesome; and everything in life seems more smooth. Dear children, I want you to enjoy all this. Then make haste and delay not to seek the Lord.

And, last of all, seeking early is the easiest way. When you and I have a great deal of work to do, you know there is nothing like beginning in good time. Now this is just what you should do about your souls: you should begin in good time to seek Him who alone can save them. People who have work to do that must be finished before dark take care to get up early in the morning. So should you do, dear children, in working about your souls. You should seek the Lord in the morning of life, and get your work done before the night of death comes when none can work. Every year you put it off you will find it harder work—more to be done and less time to do it. Every year you will find your hearts more stubborn, more unwilling to do what is right. Now they are like young trees, so soft and tender that by the Lord's help you may bend them any way. In a few years they will be like strong, thick trees, so tough and well-rooted that nothing but a mighty wind can shake them. Dear children, begin to seek the Lord at once. I want you to have as few difficulties as possible on your journey to heaven.

Consider these things. Consider them well and begin early to seek the Lord. It is the safest way, the happiest way, the easiest way. Try to be like Obadiah, who feared the Lord from his youth. Try to be like our blessed Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who grew up “in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

Think of the day when Jesus Christ shall come again to this world. He means to come again in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. He will come very suddenly, in an hour when no man thinks, like a thief in the night. He will gather together all who love Him and take them home to His Father's house to be forever happy. He will leave behind all the idle, wicked, and unbelieving persons who have not sought Him to be wretched and miserable forever.

Dear children, Jesus Christ might come very soon. We do not know how soon. How sad it would then be to see others taken up to heaven and ourselves left behind! How dreadful to feel, “I might have been taken up too, but I would not seek the Lord!”

Think too of the great Day of Judgment, when all of us shall stand before God and give account of our works. Some of the people who are saved will say then, “I never began to seek Jesus Christ till I was forty years old, and I wasted away more than half my life.”

Others will say, “I never began to seek Him till I was twenty, and I wasted many years of my life.”

But some will be able to say, “I sought the Lord when I was quite young. I can hardly remember the time when I did not try to love Him.”

Dear children, how pleasant it will be for those people to think this! How sweet to feel that they gave the first days of their lives as well as the last to Jesus Christ! How glorious they will appear who have loved their Savior in the beginning of their time as well as in the end! May the Lord grant that many of you may be found among them. Oh, seek the Lord early; seek Him while He may be found!

And now, dear children, it is time for me to leave off and let you go. Perhaps I shall never see you all together again in this world. Indeed I am almost sure I shall not, but we shall all meet at the last Day. I do hope you will think of what I have told you about Jesus Christ and your souls. Remember, I want you all to be happy children, and in order to be happy you must love Jesus Christ.

