

A Gospel Invitation for Christians

Isaiah 55:1-3

Intro: Isaiah 55 is one of the great 'invitation' passages in Scripture. As I was studying this again, I realized that I've tended to mis-read this text as an invitation for lost people. I've read it as an evangelism text, an invitation for people 'out there'. But this is actually addressed to God's own people, for the church. This is a gospel invitation for thirsty, weary, shamed and sad Christians.

The opening lines of James Taylor's song, "Walking Man", go like this.

"Moving in silent desperation, keeping his eyes on the Holy Land.

I'm not sure what the song means – but it reminds me that often times God's people are moving in silent desperation. A few years ago, I read a book written by Aaron Stern entitled "*What's your Secret?*". Aaron is the pastor of a large College group in Colorado Springs. He preached a series of sermons on the topic of confession and invited his congregation to step out of the shadows of their secrets and shame and to begin confessing their sins one to another so that they might be healed. A while later he received an email from a young woman named Hillary. This is what she wrote.

"I have a secret, and I have been struggling with it for two years now. And I now know that I can't keep on living my life like this, it has to stop. I've prayed over and over to God that he would help me eliminate this part of my life, and after many failed attempts at stopping I just wind up frustrated, with all hope lost of ever completely been freed. This secret has got me bound up in chains....

I've asked God to change my heart so I wouldn't dwell on this anymore, but it's still a huge part of my life, and takes up much of my thoughts. And I guess I'm telling you this because I don't know what else to do. I desperately want to stop, but trying myself has gotten me nowhere, and I'm losing hope. I'm really struggling with how God is viewing this, and how he sees me, and what he thinks of me living like this...It's weird because on the outside I put off this joyful vibe and people tell me that I'm such a joyful person, but on the inside I'm dying."

Ever felt a bit lost and depressed and hopeless? Maybe it's a besetting sin. Maybe just a lingering melancholy of the soul. Some of you are desperately tired. Some are deeply grieving. You come to church and smile – but if people could see what God sees, inside, they would see quiet desperation.

Children of God, your heavenly Father has a word for you. "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters." This is a gospel invitation for you.

I. The Context

Isaiah 55 has to be read in its context to be understood. You see, the Lord is not speaking to the nameless masses of humanity in general, he is speaking to his people in particular. God is addressing his covenant children – children who have wandered from God. You can read of it in the early chapters of this book. They have forgotten the Lord, they have made alliances with the

pagan nations, and have consequently come under the discipline of the Lord. Isaiah was sent to tell them that the Lord was going to send them into captivity because of their sin.

But that is not the end of the story! Beginning with chapter 40 God gave Isaiah a wonderful message of comfort for his people.

Isaiah 40:1–2 (ESV) Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

His love will not let them go. He will remember them and be gracious to them again. He will provide a way for their sins to be pardoned and their peace restored.

And then, in Isaiah 53 we see that this way will be through the ministry of a Suffering Servant. One who would be despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He would bear their grief, and carry their sorrows, be pierced for their transgressions and crushed for their iniquities. His chastisement would bring them peace and with his wounds they would be healed.

In chapter 54, God calls his people to trust in his everlasting love, sealed by the ministry of the Suffering Servant. The invitation of Isaiah 55 is addressed to those who've come under the shelter of the Suffering Savior of Isaiah 53. God has a gospel for his children. God has a word of comfort for your grief, pardon for your guilt and redemption from your shame. Your sin and rebellion no longer stand between you and your Heavenly Husband. Here, the Lord calls you to lay hold of his salvation, to experience it, to come, and drink, and live.

II. The Invitation (vs 1)

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

I wish the ESV were a bit more literal here. The old King James reads, “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” The Hebrew begins with the interjection – “Ho”. It communicates urgency, a great desire to be heard.

Here God speaks with an urgency born of love. Imagine a firefighter urging a young child to jump from the window of the burning house into the safety of his arms. Or better yet – make the firefighter the child's father – and now you begin to sense the meaning of that little word – “ho”. The Heavenly Father is calling here to his children. Specifically his ‘thirsty’ children. “Come, everyone who thirsts.”

The Bible often uses the metaphor of thirst to depict the soul-hunger of God's people walking in the wilderness of this world.

*Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

Do you ever sense a soul-thirst for God? Life is going ok. But your soul feels weary and dry. Life in this sinful world can do that to you. Thirsty people are people who have seen dreams die and hopes languish, and hearts broken. Thirsty people don't enjoy the presence of God like they once did, and tears well up in the secret hours of the night as they grieve the loss of the intimacy with God they once knew.

Thirsty people are those who see what they are and mourn what they are not. In the face of deep disappointment and private shame, they have lost their expectation for God's blessing and the experience of joy.

These are precisely the people whom God invites. To you he says, "Come". Come to the waters.

B. What is Offered?

Notice the buffet of gospel beverages offered to those who thirst: Water, Wine, Milk.

1) Waters: Throughout Scripture water is an image of refreshment, restoration into the fullness of life in the presence of God. *Psalm 36:7–9*

- ⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

God invites thirsty souls to come – not simply to receive a cup of water, but to come to **"the waters"**. A fountain of water. Imagine Lake Michigan in the middle of the most arid desert on earth! What a miraculous joy for a man with parched mouth and swollen tongue, dying of thirst, stumbling over the sandy dunes and discovering fresh, cool water as far as the eye could see. This is what God invites us to – water, vast, fresh, cool, life giving, soul restoring water.

2) Wine – wine is the beverage of joy, it gladdens the heart of man. It is a beverage for celebration, for feasting, for fellowship and gladness. Joy is the first fatality of a rebellious heart. The broken cisterns of this world can provide momentary relief, temporary happiness – but the cost is always joy. God invites us to lift up the cup of salvation and drink the gospel wine of joy: deep, soul-satisfying delight in the God who made you and knows you and loves you in Christ Jesus.

3) Milk – milk is the miracle food of life. It is packed with the proteins and nutrients the body needs to grow. God offers those made anemic and sick with sin, those souls that are stunted by pride and shriveled with selfishness to come and drink milk – life-supplying, health restoring milk of God's truth and grace. There are refreshments for all our needs in the gospel of God!

"Come where the fountain flows, River of life,

*Healing for all thy woes, doubting and strife.
Millions have been supplied, No one was e'er denied.
Come to the crimson tide; Come, sinner, come.*

C. What Does it Cost?

Notice the repeated emphasis on the free nature of these gospel graces.

“He who has **no money**, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk **without money** and **without price**.

and he who has **no money**, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk **without money and without price**.

Why this heavy emphasis? Because the natural instinct is to think there is something we must do, some way that we must pay. Surely, we can't just expect God to bless us for nothing. There is something we must do, something we must contribute. And so we try harder. Don't we. How many of you didn't say to yourself in some way this past week, I simply need to try harder?

How's that going?

Trying harder will never bring you the water of God's presence, the wine of His favor, or the soul-sustaining milk of His truth and grace.

God isn't asking you to try harder. He's inviting you to come and receive his water and wine and milk – for free. This means that there is absolutely nothing standing in the way of you receiving and enjoying these blessings of God – right now. This invitation is for right now. It's for this moment.

III. The Question

*:2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*

Questions are God's most effective methods of bringing us to our senses.

“Adam, where are you?

“Cain, where's your brother?”

“Elijah, what are you doing here?”

The questions are loving invitations for us to face ourselves.

This question is the same. “Why do you work so hard for what is not bread and spend your labor for that which does not satisfy?” God acknowledges that we are working hard. We are nothing if not busy. But our spending isn't providing bread and our business isn't providing soul-satisfaction.” God says, “Why are you doing that?”

And there's no answer for it. Except pride, stubbornness, foolishness.

The question exposes us. Much better if he had said “What are you doing?” And we could have told him – we are busy trying to live the Christian life, busy trying to fix what's wrong inside of us.

And it would have seemed noble somehow and worthwhile. We could have said we were doing the best we can – and that would make our efforts seem laudable even if our souls were empty.

But he asks this – “Why”. The question is meant to show us the foolishness of our laboring for what doesn’t satisfy and our neglecting to come and receive what God gives as a free gift. What a gentle way to correct us. How kind the Father is. This isn’t a rebuke, it’s an invitation. It’s an invitation to face ourselves, to realize how lost we really are on our own. How foolish we’ve been. And in invitation to turn to what will feed our soul.

IV. The Instruction (vs 2b)

Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.
Three short commands: listen, eat, delight.

A. Listen -- “Listen to me”. God wants you to know that he is speaking and he is speaking to you.

There are a million voices in our lives – the voices of politicians, the voices of entertainers, the voices of advertisers, friends, co-workers and, most prominent of all – our own stubborn will and foolish heart. None of those voices will bring us to water.

Listen to **me**. The very first step to gaining eternal soul-satisfaction is to listen to God.

“Incline your ear and come to me, hear that your soul may live.”

Some of you have been hearing the **words** of God all your life, but you’ve never really heard the **voice** of God. You haven’t paid attention, you haven’t “inclined your ear.” Isn’t it time to listen? No matter where you are spiritually tonight – God’s instruction is the same... “Listen to me.”

B. Eat -- “Eat what is good.” It is not enough to draw near and smell the life-giving bread. The bread of life cannot nourish and save you unless you eat of it. Eat what is good!

Eat the truth of God’s love and compassion and mercy and grace.

Eat the glory of his redeeming power and willingness to save. You have to eat these things, take these truths in, receive them with joy. You have to believe them.

C. Delight - “Delight yourselves in rich food”

The word “rich” is literally “fatness” or “abundance”. God commands us to come to his banquet table not to politely nibble, not to help ourselves to a small portion lest we be improper in our appetite. God commands us to delight ourselves in the fatness of his gospel banquet. To satiate ourselves with his abundant kindness, the overwhelming riches of his grace to us in Jesus. To respond with faith and obedience to this great invitation! Listen to him. Eat of his truth. Delight yourself in God and satiate your soul with the riches of his grace.

It's an invitation meant for you – wherever you are in your spiritual walk tonight. No matter what you've done or failed to do, God is calling to you. He's inviting you to come, eat, drink, and live. That's God's last word in the Bible.

Revelation 22:17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.