

Don't Forget Christmas

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[0 : 00] It's on page 742 if you're using a church Bible.

And Isaiah 55, we're going to look at half of Isaiah 55 this morning, and then on the second of January, as we start into a new year, we're going to look at the second part.

So we're going to go to verses, to verse 5, and the first reading is Isaiah 55, starting at verse 1, page 742.

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest affair.

[1 : 15] Give ear and come to me. Hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.

Keep your finger in Isaiah 55, and then turn to John's Gospel, chapter 6, which is on page 1070.

John chapter 6, it's on page 1070, starting at verse 25 through to 40.

Verse 25. When they found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they asked him, Rabbi, when did you get here?

[2 : 30] Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, you are looking for me not because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.

Then they asked him, what must we do to do the works God requires? Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

So they asked him, what miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert, as it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Sir, they said, from now on give us this bread. Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life.

[3 : 47] He who comes to me will never go hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up on the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Well, let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for the food and drink that we have had already today.

But we come now to you, to the true food, asking that you would fill us and satisfy us, that your Holy Spirit would be present amongst us, enabling us to comprehend your word, but also that it would work in our lives, changing us and transforming us, helping us to see that you are the hope for this world.

[5 : 21] That Christ is the true gift, the only gift that really satisfies. So please help us all, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, there are notes going around, but the title I have given to this first part of Isaiah 55 is Christmas, Hope for the Hopeless.

Two years ago we were sitting on the brink of economic meltdown. Financial institutions were closing, banks were calling in their debts, panic set in, the markets got nervous, and the world as we know it went into recession.

If we were unaware of what that meant, last week's budget has made it very personal and real. The other Tuesday our finance minister, Brian Lenihan, stood up in the door and he gave a very brave and determined budget speech.

Let me quote to you. This has been a traumatic and worrying time for the citizens of our country. They are concerned that we had to seek external support to help us with our economic and financial difficulties.

[6 : 43] They are worried about the impact of this momentous and difficult decision on their lives. Yet, in fact, even in the most intractable and complex crisis, there are clear signs of hope.

And then he concludes. We have been through a tumultuous two years. Today's budget is our first step in ensuring that we get back firmly on our own feet.

We can emerge from this dark time as a stronger and fitter economy. There is every reason to be confident about the future of this economy and this country if we only have confidence in ourselves.

Fighting talk, we might say. Big promises. Can they deliver? Well, we'll all have to wait and see. But without a doubt we can say that the people of our nation are desperate for hope.

It is dark times. It is difficult times. And people are desperate for hope. I want you to imagine the dawn tomorrow morning.

[7 : 55] Brian Cowan has just delivered his speech, which has been followed by members of the opposition. And then the proceedings are interrupted by a voice up in the balcony.

And at first everybody tries to ignore it, but then they are captured by its message. Come, all you who are thirsty. Come to the waters.

You who have no money. Come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Could you imagine?

I'm sure they struggle to comprehend what's going on. But the message they would see is clear. It's a message of hope. It talks of restoration.

It's promising something good. In fact, we know it is a message of salvation. Isaiah, the prophet, who lived 750 years before the birth of Christ, was called by God.

[8 : 58] And he was called to speak into a nation that was quite literally without hope. He spoke to a people who were living in darkness.

After years of turning and running from God, they were now in exile, overpowered and run by another nation, Babylon. Babylon. We've heard of the four-year recovery plan.

Isaiah 55 is God's recovery plan. Not just for Israel, who are in Babylon, but for us and for the world in which we live.

It's a recovery plan that's become a reality through the birth of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, the rescuing ruler who comes to offer hope to the world.

His recovery plan can be seen in three steps. The first step is one of invitation. Look at verse 1.

[10 : 03] Come, all you who are thirsty. Come to the waters. Come on. Come and buy and eat.

Come and buy your wine and milk. Now we'll see what we are invited to in a minute, but let's not miss the extent of this invitation.

This is an invitation that is to everyone. Come, all you who are thirsty. But in particular, it's an invitation to those who are broken and weak.

It's to those who have nothing and who are desperately in need. I love getting invites to celebrations, but there is nothing worse than being the only person who doesn't get that invite, being left out.

Well, here is an invitation. God's invitation to the nation. It's open. It's not exclusive. It's to all.

[11 : 09] And if anything, it favours the most needy. It reaches out to those who think themselves beyond recovery, and it says to those people especially, you can come.

But what are we invited to? Well, it's not so much what we are invited to, but who we are invited to. Look at the middle of verse 2. It says, Listen.

Listen to me. Verse 3. Give ear and come to me. Hear me. Who is this me that they are invited to?

Well, keep your finger, please, in Isaiah 55, and go to John's Gospel, chapter 1, and verse 1.

This me is an invite to come to the Lord Jesus.

[12 : 21] Chapter 1, verse 1 says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Then in verse 14, The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.

The Word that spoke, and offered the invitation, the invitation to come, that Word that spoke, came into the world to become like one of us.

Christ came into the world, and invited us to come, and to receive from him. Flick over a bit further to chapter 7 of John's Gospel.

Chapter 7, verse 37. It says, On the last day, verse 37, of the last and greatest day of the feast.

The feast here is known as the Feast of Tabernacles, or booths. It was an eight-day feast, eight days of celebration, when the people of Israel, literally, went camping in their back garden.

[13 : 44] They would set up tents, and everybody would move into their tents, and they would live in these tents for eight days to remind themselves of the great escape from Egypt, and how God provided for them all the way through the wilderness.

And one of the great events through that wilderness journey was when Moses took his staff and he hit the rock because they had no water, they were thirsty, and water flowed from it.

And so Jesus says, verse 37, On the last and greatest day of this feast, Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

You see, this message in Isaiah 55, to come and listen to me, is the invite of the Lord Jesus to come to me, to come to him.

And I'm sure we're all going to get lots of invites this Christmas to people's houses and to various parties. Well, we must not forget that Christmas is the ultimate invitation.

[15 : 03] It is an invite to the world to say to people, come to Jesus. Because Jesus has come into the world for you and for me, for the nations, and he wants us to come to him.

Listen, listen to me. Give ear and come to me. But what and why is this invitation so special?

Well, the second step after invitation is salvation. salvation. It is an invitation to salvation. Look at the end of verse 1 of Isaiah 55.

It says, You who have no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. The end of verse 2.

And your soul will delight in the richest of fair. prayer. This is an invitation to a feast. To drink and to eat till you have your fill.

[16 : 13] And whenever we come across this in the scriptures, whenever there's an invitation to drink and to eat, it's always a metaphor for life and for salvation.

Again, look at the way in which Jesus takes these very images, these very ideas, and takes these words to offer salvation to people.

Go back to John's Gospel, chapter 4. These are very well-known stories. The first one in John's Gospel, chapter 4, is the woman at the well.

Jesus is thirsty and he's been asking for a drink and her dialogue is there. And then in verse 13, Jesus answered, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

[17 : 27] The invitation, you see, is Jesus to say, come to me, come and drink, because what I give you is true salvation. Have a look at chapter 6, verse 32.

This is after the feeding of the 5,000. So he likens the water as salvation. He likens the bread as salvation.

Verse 32, chapter 6, Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread for heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Sir, they said, from now on give us this bread. Jesus answered, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me will never go hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty. Can we see how this is an invitation to come to Christ?

[18 : 35] An invitation to salvation, to find life in all its fullness. But let's notice from Isaiah 55 two things about this salvation.

First, it's free. In verse 1 of 55 it says, you who have no money got nothing in your wallets, in your bank accounts, come buy and eat without money and without cost.

Now we know fine well that if we're going to enjoy Christmas as the world says, we've got to spend our money. As much as our purse strings have tightened, we've all got to part with our cash to get what we want.

The saying is true, there is nothing free. except God's offer of salvation. That is free. We can't offer anything for God's salvation.

We can't negotiate on the price. We can't bargain with him because there is no price because Jesus has paid the price. He paid the price with his own life on the cross.

[19 : 44] And so Jesus has made this gift freely available to all who will come to him and receive the life that he has to give. So it's free but it's also fulfilling.

Look at verse 2. He asks the question and it's a searching question, why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?

one commentator has helped me pointed out that when Israel went into exile they were not only moving physically from Judah to Babylon they were moving away spiritually.

They were moving away from God and in an attempt to fill the void to fill the gut they immersed themselves into the culture that was in Babylon. they filled themselves with the religion that they found there.

They filled themselves with the gods that were there. They just imbibed the whole culture but it left them empty and unfulfilled and so these are the words that are being spoken into these unfulfilled unsatisfied people.

[20 : 57] And I think it's just so true of our own nation and perhaps in our own lives. We try to find our satisfaction and our fulfilment outside of God.

Outside of Christ. And in the recession and in the struggles people will say if only I had a bit more money. If only I could get another job that was a little bit more stable.

If only we could get out of this recession. If only I could get this. If only I could have that. You fill in the gap for yourself. If only I could have. Then everything would be so much better.

But whatever we turn to, whatever we fill our lives with, this is a reminder to say that it will never truly satisfy.

Look at the end of verse two. Listen. Listen to me. Eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest affair.

[22 : 06] Give ear and come to me. Hear me that your soul may live. As much as there is a recession, we do see people going mad, buying this, that and the other.

People will be getting these gifts and that gift. They'll be eating far too much, drinking far too much. The days will go by and then people will be looking for more food and more things.

Presents will break, there'll be more things that they'll want in life. But it never truly satisfies. The reminder of Christmas is to say that the ultimate Christmas promise, the ultimate gift, is that we will never thirst again, we will never go hungry, because we have everything that we need in Christ.

It's a big searching question. Why spend money on what is not bread? Why give our lives to things that are never going to truly satisfy? Come to Christ, because in him we have everything that we need.

Let me read to you a quote. There is a Narnia film coming out in the cinemas. This is a quote from The Silver Chair. Jill, the character, has just entered into Narnia, and she's incredibly thirsty.

[23 : 32] She hears the sound of a stream, and she makes her way to the stream, and as she gets to the stream, she's confronted with Aslan, the lion.

Are you thirsty? said the lion. I'm dying of thirst, said Jill. Then drink, said the lion. May I?

Could I? Would you mind going away while I do? said Jill. The lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl, and as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realised that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. Will you promise not to do anything to me if I do come?

said Jill. I make no promise, said the lion. Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

[24 : 40] Do you eat girls? she said. I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms, said the lion.

It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it. I daren't come and drink, said Jill.

Then you will die of thirst, said the lion. Oh dear, said Jill, coming another step nearer. I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.

There is no other stream, said the lion. It's a question to ask us all, where will we go to find life?

What do you pursue to quench your thirst? What do you want to fill your life with? What do other people want to fill their life with?

[25 : 42] There is only one stream that we are invited to, that is the stream of Jesus Christ. And Christmas is that invitation for us to come and drink of that salvation.

And what Jesus offers, we will find nowhere else. Come is the invitation, to come to Christ, to come and find his salvation.

salvation. But there's one more step in this process, because it's not just a recovery for us individually, this is to be a recovery plan for the whole world.

The third step I've called transformation, verse 3. Give ear and come to me. Hear me that your soul may live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful or steadfast love promised to David.

David, of course, was the greatest king that Israel ever had. But the mention of David, we should know, was always synonymous with the expectation of a coming Messiah.

[26 : 56] To mention David, who had been all those years ago, was a promise that God was going to raise up a new king, a new kind of leader. So to those who were in exile at the time, this message to come, to come to the king, was one of hope and peace and restoration.

A king who was going to deliver everything that God had promised, pure salvation. And we know that David was a great leader because it was only under David that the whole nation was ever united.

We also know that he was a great commander. Look at verse four. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples.

The greatest victories that Israel had were always under David. He was the greatest leader, the greatest king that they had ever known. king. And now it's pointing forward to a different kind of king, a new king, a new messiah that is going to come.

The ultimate leader, the ultimate commander who would be the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who would win the greatest victory on the cross.

[28 : 13] The one who would win the victory over sin and death. death as he took the penalty, as he defeated the grave and rose victoriously.

Here was the greatest commander, the greatest king who came. And here was the greatest king who would unite people from all nations and make them one under his lordship.

And so it's saying to these people here, there is a king and I have made him a witness to people, a leader and a commander of the people.

And when we come to this king, when we accept his invitation, when we receive his salvation, our lives are completely and utterly transformed.

Look at the end of verse 5 to see this transformation. The end of verse 5 says, for he has endowed you with splendour.

[29 : 17] He has beautified you with splendour. You see, the salvation that Christ brings is nothing less than absolute beauty. Without Christ, we are an absolute mess.

But with Christ in our lives, we are something beautiful. Look at the contrast from verse 1. They were thirsty, they were hungry, there was no money, they were unfulfilled, unsatisfied, there was nothing.

Now in verse 5, it's completely reversed. They are satisfied and now they are covered in splendour. From paupers to princes and princesses, they have now become children of the king.

They have been given, as it says at the end of verse 2, the richest affair. You see, the salvation that comes from Jesus Christ, our Messiah, our king, is full, it's complete, it's satisfying, it's everything that we need, and he utterly changes us and transforms us, not bringing just forgiveness, but totally transforming our lives so that we are something beautiful, something that God changes us and makes us a new creation, a new kind of people.

But there's a whole reason for this transformation, there's a whole reason for this change, and we see that at the beginning of verse 5. He says, Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you.

[31 : 05] Nations are going to run to you. You see, God's plan for the people of Israel was that they would be a magnet, like a people pulling the surrounding nations towards them to draw them towards God's salvation.

They were to be a nation that was to be the envy of all the other nations, so that as people looked in on Israel, they would see what they had from God, and they would also want it.

They would want this God too. They were to be a beautiful and attractive nation that had been so transformed and so changed that nations that they didn't know would come running towards them to get the salvation that God had.

Well, Christmas reminds us. that the King has come, that Jesus is the beautiful one. He is so attractive.

He is the sinless one, the perfect one. He is God's Son, the God Man, Jesus Christ. And the salvation and the life that he offers, as he comes into the world, he is like the magnet.

[32 : 17] He is the one who draws people to himself. But the point I think in these verses here in verse 5, is that if we have received the salvation of Jesus, we become people who are beautiful and in turn our lives are to become an attraction.

Our lives are to be an attraction. Growing up as a kid, and I know Kirsty always laughs at this, but we didn't have a lot of money.

And I always found myself wishing and wanting the gifts that all the other kids have. As they got on their brand new BMX and I hopped around to my space hopper, I wished that I had what they had.

They always had the best toys, the better gifts. They were the envy. I wanted what they had. And when we come to see what Christmas truly has to offer, when we come to see Christ in all his beauty and all his wonder, when we see the true gift, when we have the true gift, others will be wanting what we have.

They will see in us a life that has been changed and transformed, a life that has become beautiful, a life that has become so attractive.

[33 : 40] Do you see there in verse 5? Nations that you do not know will run to you. People will come to us.

They will see us as a community of people that have been changed. And they will be drawn in by the love. They will be drawn in by the forgiveness, by the way in which people repent towards one another.

they will be attracted because Christ has changed us. You see, our nation is desperate for hope.

We long for the new year. We long for a new election, a new government, someone or something who's going to make it all better, to make it all go away. We long for the good old days of Charlie McCreevey, the Santa Claus of budgets, who gave presents beyond our wildest dreams.

But we all know now that it wasn't without cost. We're having to pay for it. And the reality was it never filled, it never satisfied, satisfied.

[34 : 55] It has left people hungry and thirsty. They have delved in to try and find what's satisfied, and it never delivered. In Christmas, we have the greatest invitation, an invitation to take the greatest gift, the gift of Jesus Christ, the ultimate King who offers pure salvation, a gift that is so beautiful and so attractive that if we would only open it, if we would learn to enjoy it, if we would learn to be thirsty and hungry, and only be satisfied by Christ, then people will see within us an attraction, they will see Christ, and they will be drawn to him.

And the reality is, is what we're saying is that because of Christ, because of our message, because of our lives, we bring the message of hope to the hopeless world.

We have got something to say to people. May God give us the courage and the strength to live out this hope and to speak his hope to a needy world.

let's pray together. Amen. We thank you, Father God, that you did send your son, that you didn't wait for an invitation from us, but that you took the initiative, and that you entered into our world, into all its mess and all its darkness, into its sin.

And you came like one of us and invited us to come to you. forgive us for the times where we reject that invitation when we run from you, where we go chasing our own dreams and our own ideas.

[37 : 16] Turn our hearts that we would ever run to you, that we would always find everything that we need in you, that you would create a genuine thirst and hunger within us, create a thirst and a hunger within this community, that draws them and has them running to Christ, that they will never find or never rest until they do come to you.

We pray, Father, that you would help us to enjoy you, to know you, and we pray that you would give us courage to speak the hope that only Christ can bring into a hopeless and needy world.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.