

Isaiah 55

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[0:00] Isaiah 55, 1 through 13. Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourself in rich food.

Incline your ear and come to me, hear that your soul may live. And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you because of the Lord your God and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

[1:12] For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Welcome Christ Church. Thank you, Marjorie, for reading that.

[2:17] We at Christ Church believe that it is worthwhile hearing God's word read in its entirety. We want to hear from him before we hear from the pastors who are going to preach on the text.

So thank you for that. Over the past couple of years, year and a half or so, I've turned to this text quite a number of times, and it offered great comfort and encouragement to me at various times.

And I've most recently, during a time of loss, a friend of mine reached out to me and actually included this text to encourage me with this text. So my goal is that you would be encouraged today as well, that you would be blessed, that you would be challenged, and that you would look towards God because of the reading and the time spent in this word.

Let me give you the lay of the land a little bit before we get started. So Isaiah 55 is at the last chapter of a section that begins in Isaiah 40 and goes to 55.

In that section, Isaiah talks about the servant king and the suffering servant. You might remember Isaiah 53 is the classic text on the suffering servant. I'm also going to be reflecting on the history, and you can read that.

[3 : 28] That will be your homework for later on today. In 2 Kings 19 and 20 and thereabouts, that's the background information for our text as well today.

So let me just open in a word of prayer right now. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for your Holy Spirit who gives us understanding and wisdom.

So we pray that your Holy Spirit right now will speak through your word, give us understanding and wisdom as we hear your word. We pray these things in Jesus Christ's name.

So our text can be summarized like this. Our ways are not God's ways, as we heard. So come, repent, and feast on his word, and walk in his ways.

So let me say that again. Our ways are not God's ways. So come, repent, feast on his word, and walk in his ways. The text can be divided into three sections.

[4 : 25] The first one is the invitation to a feast in verses 1 through 5. And then the cost of a feast in verses 6 through 7. And then a celebration of a feast in verses 8 through 13.

So the text opens with this invitation to a feast. We have this word, come. Come, everyone. Come to the waters. Come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine.

And then again in verse 3, come to me. So we're being invited to a feast. And it starts out slow. The feast starts with water to drink and food to eat. But then it builds.

It dresses up the table with wine and milk. Those are luxury items for its day. And then in verse 2, we then see words like satisfies and good.

It delights us, and it is rich food. So we have a sumptuous feast sitting in front of us here. But we get tripped up. If you notice, there's a word in there that says, listen.

[5 : 22] Now, I don't know about you. I can practically smell this feast and see this feast and taste it. The last thing I want to do is hear the guy next to me smacking or belching or whatever. So the listening kind of doesn't fit the imagery.

But that tells me that there's something else going on here. So what is it that's going on here? If we take a look at that phrase in verse 2. Listen diligently to me.

So who are we listening to? Who's speaking here? It's God who's speaking. So we're invited to hear God speak, to hear his words, to hear his words of salvation.

And this word that we're hearing that is being offered up is good and delightful and rich food. The idea of listening is picked up again in verse 3 here where it says, incline your ear and come to me in here.

So come here. We are hearing God's word. We are feasting on God's word. And the result of hearing his word is that your soul may live. So this is a life-giving feast that's being offered up here.

[6 : 26] So what's on the menu of this feast? That's the next couple of verses, 3 and 4. In verse 3 and 4, God reminds his people that out of his steadfast love for them, he has made a covenant with King David to save and protect his people.

Now, at the time that Isaiah was prophesying to his people on behalf of God, King David is long gone. King David's grandeur and his power have faded from the kingdom.

The kingdom of Israel has already fallen to the Assyrians at this point and was carried off into exile. The kingdom of Judah is on the verge of collapse. And the word that they are feasting on looks more like bread and water, not necessarily a feast.

So where's the feast? The feast lies in God's steadfast love as he fulfills his promises. In verse 3, God promises an everlasting covenant.

This requires a forever king who will reign over a forever kingdom, which will invite all nations to join. The suffering servant who springs forth from the line of David will become that forever king.

[7 : 32] We hear about him in chapter 11 of Isaiah. What Isaiah's audience doesn't understand yet is while the promises are applied to them, their near future, these promises also hold a future fulfillment and an eternal aspect to them.

So our first point is, you are invited to this great feast. Come, hear the word of the Lord and feast on it. Now we don't just get to just pull up a chair and dig in and start eating.

There's a little bit more to it there. Did you notice in verse 1, there's this cost associated with this feast? Take a look at that again. He who has no money, come buy and eat.

Buy wine, milk, and milk without money and without price. So there's a price associated with it, but to you it's free. So that means that somebody has to pay for it.

Just imagine you've been invited to a wedding at some point. Usually they put out a good spread. There's a great feast, a banquet, and it's free to you.

[8 : 40] And, you know, somebody has to pay for it, though. So usually the parents of the bride get stuck with that bill. But somebody's paying for that feast, but it is free to you.

So who is paying for this great feast described in Isaiah 55? God himself invites us to the feast, and he will cover that cost. Everyone is invited.

Everyone can hear the word, but to fully participate and celebrate in the feast, we need to respond somehow. We need to respond to this invitation as we learn in verses 6 and 7.

So let's take a look at that. So how should we respond? Verse 6, Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Isaiah's audience was painfully aware of how much time was running out for them.

The kingdom of Israel already crumbled and was carried off into exile. The temple of Jerusalem was stripped of its gold but still standing, and the Assyrian troops encamped outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem.

[9 : 43] The people of Judah had a strong sense of urgency, and they called out to the Lord. But surprisingly, or not so surprisingly, as soon as the troops withdrew and the threat was gone, the urgency waned again.

And under the leadership of the next king, they started doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord again, as we hear from king after king in 1 and 2 Kings. For us today, we need to realize that while he may be found and while he is still near, means that there is an expiration date on this invitation.

That date is either the last day of your life here on earth, or the day when Christ returns to gather up his people. The problem is, we have no idea when that day is.

And the thing is, we're in the middle of the COVID crisis right now, and even just this morning, I saw in the news another story, like my parents were fine one day, the next day they were in the hospital, and three days later they're gone.

So within a week, people have lost loved ones pretty quickly. So we should have a sense of urgency. The call to call upon the Lord while he may be found, while he is still near.

[10 : 53] How should we respond to that invitation? Take a look at verse 7. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord.

Again, the kingdom of Judah responded to Isaiah's warnings and called upon the Lord while he was still near, and the Assyrian troops retreated. King Hezekiah called upon the Lord when he was almost at death's door, and God extended his life for another 15 years and allowed him to rule the kingdom under God's rule for another 15 years.

Today, we are called to repentance. For some of us, this means that we may need to forsake our wicked ways and repent and turn to the Lord for the very first time in our lives.

For others who have already done that in the past may have veered off the path of righteousness. We may need to turn from our wicked ways again and return to the Lord, as our text says, and live life under his reign once again.

And take a look at verse 7. God is gracious. He will have compassion on us, and he will pay the price that we might be pardoned.

[12 : 07] God himself paid the cost of the feast. It is free to all of us, all of those who hear his word, but only those who respond to the invitation by calling upon the Lord, forsaking their wicked ways, and returning to him, will be able to fully participate in and celebrate this feast.

Our third point brings us to the celebration of the feast. Once you're permitted entrance to the feast, you've showed up with your invitation, you can see the food over there, it's time to celebrate.

The text gives us three points of celebration, and you can follow them by the four statements, F-O-R. In verse 8, for my thoughts are not your thoughts.

And then verse 10, for as the rain and the snow, and then verse 12 again, for you shall go out in joy. Those are the three statements, those three points of celebration.

So let's take a look at the first one. When we repent and return to the Lord, we celebrate. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

[13 : 13] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. God's ways are not our ways. We already saw this in verse 2, that our ways are not satisfying.

Take a look at that up there. Verse 2 says, Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? We're just spinning our wheels, and we waste our time and resources because we follow our own path, and we see that our ways are wicked, or our thoughts are unrighteous.

We do not walk in God's ways. Sometimes we struggle because His ways don't always make sense to us. We can't see what He sees. We don't know what He knows, and we get frustrated.

So let me assure you, though, that God has a plan. Just imagine Mary. We just celebrated Christmas. She was nine months pregnant, and she's on a dusty old road heading down to Bethlehem.

Yeah, and then she gets to Bethlehem, and the city's full and crowded, and there's no suitable place for her to give birth. Be assured that God has a plan, and this was His plan for her, and He had this plan in motion hundreds and thousands of years before.

[14 : 35] We see in Micah, the prophet foretold that this child would be born in Bethlehem, so they had to get Mary to Bethlehem in some way so that she could give birth in Bethlehem.

We heard about this child as far back as Genesis 3, some reference to Him. So God had a plan since the beginning, and He was carrying it out.

Mary didn't know what it was. For Mary, that meant that she had to walk a dusty old path for days when she was nine months pregnant. Sometimes we have to walk dusty old paths in order for God to carry out His plans that were set in motion even before we were born.

Our ways, I kind of picture like the COVID, again, we're on the COVID thing right now, so it's kind of like our paths are like the COVID line, the seven-day average.

It rises and falls with good choices, bad choices, things that we have no control over, and there can be very real loss and very real pain. There can also be very real successes and joys in our life that make up that curve.

[15 : 39] But no matter how intense those highs and lows get, they pale in comparison to God's very ways and thoughts. If we were to add a graph for God's ways compared to our little wiggly line down at the bottom of the page, we would have a solid, straight line that goes across the very top of the page.

His ways are higher than ours, like the heavens are above the earth. His ways are better than ours. His ways are unchanging. His ways are utterly reliable. His ways follow His steadfast plans.

Our ways are small and insignificant compared to God's ways. Now, this is not to minimize your pain or your loss. The pain that came from the loss of a loved one, the shame and guilt that comes with improper sexual gratification, the embarrassment that comes from losing your job, the desperate emptiness that comes from cycles of addictive behavior, the hollow emptiness that led you to harm yourself, the daily struggle of gender confusion, the anger and judgment that devours you from the inside, those are all very real pain.

Even the high points in life aren't really that pale in comparison. So the joys of a new job, a marriage, a baby, time with family and person during the COVID period, period, they all are pale in comparison.

I find that this text of God's ways versus our ways also helps to melt away that existential question of why.

[17 : 13] When we call out to God and we say, why me? Why now? Why not? Why God? Why, why as it echoes into the universe and never responds. The answer sometimes is simply, turn from your wicked ways and return to the Lord.

You're following the wrong path. Other times it's not outright rebellion, but we have lost track of our path and find ourselves in the rough. We have set our hopes and dreams on something other than what God has for us.

We haven't pulled up a chair to sit at the table and feast on God's saving word in a while. We spend our money on that which is not bread, on that which does not satisfy, as our text says.

We need to reorient our way of thinking. We need to turn from our limited self-serving way of thinking and let our thoughts be shaped by God's word and his thoughts and walk in God's ways under his rule.

When we turn to God and walk in his ways, we gain a whole new perspective. Our losses, our pain begin to melt away. You may still find yourself wandering a dusty old road like Mary did, wondering why, but you can find hope in his steadfast love and in his ways that are higher than ours and that he has a plan.

[18 : 33] When we feast on God's word, forsake our wicked ways and walk in his path, we learn to celebrate. So the second way that we can celebrate is that his word is effectual.

In verses 10 and 11, we'll take a look at that. We have this metaphor where the rain doesn't just fall and then rise back up. I think when it sits in the air too long, that's fog or something.

But the rain is effectual in that it saturates the ground. It brings life to the sea. The sea grows and it bears fruit. We then can harvest, pick the food, the fruit, and eat it, and it sustains our life.

The rain is effectual like the word of God. When God's word goes out, something gets done. God breathed the universe into existence with his very word.

In the beginning, when God spoke, there was light. When God spoke, there was heaven and earth. When God spoke, there was life. When the kingdom of Judah under Hezekiah's kingship called upon the Lord, God spoke and struck down 185,000 Assyrians while they were sleeping and camped outside of the city because they were going to destroy the city the very next day.

[19 : 46] When God spoke, he extended King Hezekiah's life by 15 years. But, on the other hand, when the kingdom of Judah clung to their wicked ways, God spoke and they were carried off into Babylonian exile.

God's word will always be effectual even if it doesn't have the same outcome that we hope for or that we want. God's word was effectual when His very word became flesh and dwelling among us to accomplish the purpose of God which was to become the salvation of His people.

God's word is effectual. When we are caught up in our pain and losses, our unanswered questions of why, we can be assured that if we walk in His ways and think His thoughts, then we will find joy and peace in the knowledge that His ways are effectual.

So, the third reason for celebration when we return to the Lord is because His ways lead to joy and peace and everlasting life. We see that in verses 12 and 13.

I'll read that. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

[21 : 00] Instead of the thorn shall come up cypress. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle. And it shall make a name for your Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. When we walk in His ways, we can experience true joy and true peace no matter what our circumstances are.

We will probably learn that joy and peace look a lot different than we thought when we were walking in our own ways. These verses tell us that creation itself will celebrate because someday the results of the fall will be reversed.

The hills and the mountains will sing and the trees and fields will clap their hands because the name of the Lord will be glorified. The idea is that even creation will be celebrating because the curse of the thorns and thistles will be removed.

Where there is death, there will be life and life forever. How can we possibly go wrong when following His ways? May you be encouraged today as you hear this word, especially if you are feeling hurt or pain or loss.

The things that confuse us, that make us angry, things that cause fear, isolation, anxiety, abandonment, things that make us feel unloved or hopeless or useless, these are all very real experiences and affect us deeply.

[22 : 19] They can be debilitating and they ain't nothing. Oh, that you would look to God in your pain and loss. His ways are higher than our ways and He invites us into His ways.

Come, drink, eat, come hear His word that you might experience joy and peace in Jesus Christ's name. Oh, that you would turn to the promised forever King, Jesus, in your time of darkness.

You can't do any of this on your own. You need Jesus, the promised servant King, the Word made flesh so that He could pay the price that you might feast on the Word of the Lord and live.

Our text is dripping with references to Christ here, as so many of the servant King texts do. And so let me just kind of run through and highlight some of them.

Jesus is the living water that satisfies your thirst. Jesus is the bread of life that you might eat of it and never hunger. Jesus is the one who paid the price through His death and resurrection that you might buy and eat for free and live your life in His abundance.

[23 : 27] Jesus is the forever King in the line of David. Jesus is the one who invites people from every nation, tribe, and language into His community. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus is the living Word who walked among us. Jesus is the effectual Word that goes out and accomplishes what it set out to do, that it brings His people into a new and everlasting covenant life in His presence.

Jesus is the source of our joy and peace, true joy and peace. Jesus will return and bring life to that which is dead. And Jesus promises a forever new heaven and new earth.

Remember we said that God Himself would pay the price so we can enjoy the feast? God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, so that He would pay the price with His very life through His death on the cross.

And with His resurrection, He conquered death so that He might offer us salvation and everlasting life in His presence. If you're caught in an endless cycle of asking, why me?

[24 : 34] Why now? Why not? Why God? Why? Turn to the Lord. Listen and hear His Word. Acknowledge His sovereignty and His ways, which are higher than your ways.

Know that His ways lead to joy and peace. So call upon the Lord while He's still near. He will have compassion and pardon abundantly. If you've never called upon the Lord, what are you waiting for?

How can you resist an invitation of this kind of feast? His ways lead to joy and peace. His ways lead to life. There's an expiration date on this invitation.

You don't know how much longer you'll be around. Your life is a vapor carried off by the wind. If you are not ready to call upon the Lord and repent, then I encourage you at least listen and hear the Word of God as you are today.

The Word that is served to us through the Scriptures continue to seek Him until He gives you understanding. God's ways are better than ours. Seek the Lord and call upon Him while He is still near.

[25 : 42] Feast on His Word daily and celebrate the abundance that comes from His Word. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your living Word.

We thank you that because of Jesus Christ, we may have salvation and live forever in your presence and that you might be glorified as each one of your people come into the fold and join your community.

We pray for those who are here, have heard your Word, if they have not committed their lives, that they would do so today. We pray for those who are hurting and suffering losses and pain, that you would help them to look up to you to get an understanding of your ways and your thoughts and that they might find peace and joy through that.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.