

# AM Isaiah 55 The God of Grace

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[ 0 : 00 ] Isaiah chapter 55, you'll find this on page 744 of your pew bible. Isaiah 55, this will be our sermon text this morning.

The title of the sermon will be The God of Grace and we will read the whole chapter. Isaiah 55. 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 labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves 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 have 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.

[ 1 : 19 ] 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. 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.

[ 2 : 26 ] 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 thorns 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.

I'm with the prophet Isaiah. In this wonderful chapter which summons us to behold the grace of God. Where the prophet is declaring to us the free offer of mercy to everyone and anyone. Many of the verses in this passage might be familiar to you. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Or for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways.

These are verses that many know well. Or perhaps you're someone who doesn't spend much time in the Old Testament. And in this chapter might be new to you.

[ 3 : 37 ] It's not uncommon to avoid the Old Testament prophets. They are men who were wild and untamed. They often spoke of impending judgment.

Even at the time that Isaiah lived, people would point their finger at him and stick out their tongue. They were men who lived in the wilderness.

But they had one mission. And that was to proclaim, Thus saith the Lord. And Isaiah himself had a very difficult calling. We see that in chapter 6 of Isaiah.

Where he discovers that his role to Israel is not repentance so that they may be restored. No, what we find is that in these early chapters when they're called to repentance, the effect on the hearers is that their hearts would be hardened.

And these are words which are repeated by the Lord Jesus when he speaks in parables. And that's recorded for us in the Gospels. So Isaiah can be split up into three main sections.

[ 4 : 42 ] The early chapters of Isaiah are dealing with the early Assyrian invasions to the nation.

The second section, which we'll find that Isaiah 55 is in, is addressing those who are in Babylonian

captivity.

And then after chapter 56 and onwards, you're dealing with what it is to be in the kingdom of God when they have returned to the land.

And so our chapter rests in this position where the people are in exile. They are in a foreign land. They have been judged because of their sinfulness.

Because the nation to which they belonged previously had fallen for idols. They were proud. They had forsaken God. And they tried to make the nation go after their own way and not God's way. And God brought them low. And God judged them. Now perhaps we can draw parallels with our time because we are in a society which has largely abandoned God.

[ 5 : 51 ] We are in a country which is perhaps one of the most secular in Europe, which would make us one of the most secular in the world. Pride is a virtue. Sin is celebrated.

And human autonomy is the highest good. Now in previous generations, the expectation was that as we cast off the burdens of religion and morality and tradition and we embraced an increasingly liberal society, that things would keep getting better and better.

Yet as time has shown us, this isn't the case. We don't have to go into the national crises of mental health issues, drug deaths, poverty or hopelessness that many people face.

In particular, young people are increasingly less happy and more restless than previous generations. They are concerned about their quality of life, finding a job, facing poverty or social exclusion.

And we have seen the results of this in recent weeks where back in 2019 when there were elections in Europe, the vast majority of young people voted for green parties because of the fear of climate change.

[ 7 : 01 ] But recently in the elections in Europe, we have seen a shift towards parties which are characterized as the far right. Perhaps this is because of the failure of our liberal elites.

And so into this world of confusion, we can hear God speak if we can listen. Isaiah says to us, Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

Perhaps you are one of these miserable and restless people. You are told to come. You may be someone who has no hope for the future. You are told to come. You may be weary.

Come. Come and listen to the invitation that God gives. You know, this passage comes after judgment, but it also comes after a promise of glorious restoration of the kingdom of God.

Specifically after the promise of the Messiah, the suffering servant who would come and who would deliver his people. So this chapter, chapter 55, is all about the God of grace.

[ 8 : 13 ] And we're going to break this down into three headings. Firstly, the grace of God that welcomes. Grace that satisfies. And thirdly, grace that delivers.

So firstly, grace that welcomes. We see this in verse 1. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. You might ask the question, who can come to God? Who does God invite to come to him? Am I someone who is able to come to God? Is God's grace for me? You may think that you're not good enough to receive God's grace. You may think that you carry with you too much guilt.

Well, God's grace is for you. The real question is, are you thirsty? That's the qualification that we're given. Because God says here, that everyone who thirsts is invited.

Now there are many people who are searching for meaning in life. There are many who are totally hopeless. We live in a world where we are told that climate change will destroy human civilization as we know it.

[ 9 : 21 ] that the universe originated from meaninglessness, was an accident, that the universe will end in the heat death, and that we are to somehow find meaning with the bit in between.

And this leaves people hopeless and restless because they see emptiness. And people are looking for more. Many see the suffering in the world and they want justice and they don't find it in this life.

Some people chase the next thrill or they dull their hopelessness with alcohol or drugs or try to pursue psychedelic experiences or death-defying adventures.

They set for themselves fitness goals or look for a career that will make them happy. But there has to be something more, something better, something that will satisfy a better way of life.

Well, this invitation which is given, it's for you and it's for the world. You see that it's a global call. It's a call for all people.

[ 10 : 31 ] You don't have to be brought up in a Christian home. You don't have to belong to a particular ethnic group. This isn't just for the Jew. It's also for the Gentile. We see that where it

speaks of the nation which you do not know shall come to you.

The only question is, are you thirsty? Now the invitation is for everyone, but it's also free.

We see that where he says, he who has no money, come, buy, and eat. You see, when it comes to God, there is nothing that we can do to gain God's favour.

What can you give to God? Your money is useless here. Your works are useless. Your name and your reputation, useless. The Lord Jesus said, come unto me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

If you are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, if you are hungry for God, if you are thirsty for God, have you been trying to exchange your good works, or what you can do to earn his favour, then come to God and rest.

[ 11 : 44 ] It's free. Now it's free for you, but it wasn't free for God. We see that in chapter 53. I think it would be helpful to turn there, just over the page, to chapter 53, in which we see, in verse 3, he was despised and rejected by men.

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, but he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. You see, Jesus is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. If you were to read this to someone who doesn't know whether there is an Old Testament or a New Testament, if you were to read this to them, they would be able to identify this as Jesus Christ.

They are so self-evident. And Isaiah predicts the Messiah who would come, and he says that you are to come freely to God because the suffering servant has paid the price.

[ 13 : 05 ] Jesus was the perfect son of God. He was truly a son of Adam like us, and yet he was without sin. And although we may turn away from God, Jesus was perfectly obedient even to death.

And the invitation goes out, come, free thee, because Jesus has paid the price. Jesus has defeated sin, and Jesus has crushed death.

We are to believe on him and live. Now, I've had a conversation with someone discussing the gospel in this free offer, and they said, you know, this is wonderful, it might even be true, but I want to live my life how I want right now, and on my deathbed, that's when I will confess that Jesus is Lord, and I'll get all of these benefits that you tell me about because it's just about believing, right? Now, this isn't an uncommon position to take. Many people think that religion is just for old people, that it's something that you can just tag on at the end of your life to make sure you get to heaven. And we know that like the thief on the cross next to the Lord Jesus who believed in those final moments that he was promised today, you will be with me in paradise.

[ 14 : 26 ] But that's not the norm. And if that's the only information that you had, you might think that you've made it by saying that, well, I'll just confess Christ later on. But in verse 6 of this chapter, we see the urgency of this invitation.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. You see, this glorious message of grace that anyone who thirsts can come freely to receive all the promised blessings of God, it's a message of urgency.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. You see, when we have this invitation, we need to accept it. When God is near, we need to take hold of him. When you're thirsty, you drink.

We're not supposed to wait around because God may never seem this close again. You may never be thirsty for him again.

And perhaps in that moment of need, when you are on the verge of eternity, you have no desire to know God and to be reconciled because your heart is hardened to sin and cannot repent.

[ 15 : 44 ] You see, this grace which welcomes and invites you to come is an urgent call. It's a cry to immediate action to not put it off and to not continue on the same path but to turn around and embrace the God who loves you.

You see, God wants to welcome you. He wants to give you his grace. So that's the grace that welcomes. Secondly, grace that satisfies. In verse 2, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food. Now I've already mentioned that there are those who are seeking more in life for meaning, for hope, for contentment, for a better life.

But this verse communicates disappointment in the world. Disappointment in embracing what the world has to offer because it fails to satisfy.

What this verse warns against is looking for satisfaction in the wrong place. It tells us that we're not to buy bread that perishes.

[17:04] The message translation says of this verse, why do you spend your money on junk food? Right? You see, what God has to offer is that which is good.

Delight yourselves in rich food. Come and buy food that nourishes. Right? Food that lasts. Not junk food but delightful food. What Isaiah is communicating to us in this analogy of bread and wine milk and food which might be making you hungry for your Sunday lunch.

What he's communicating is it's complete satisfaction. God offers to us complete satisfaction. Now, the first verse starts with come to the waters.

Now, when you speak of the waters this is actually something that Jesus refers to in John chapter 7. It would be worthwhile to turn to John 7.

John 7 37. And he says this, On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

[18:19] He says, Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. You see, Jesus here is saying and trying to make it abundantly clear that to receive the waters is to believe on him.

He's repeating what he said to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 and he is saying that this invitation to come to the waters is an invitation to believe on him.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. He's saying that unless that you have faith in him, you will die in your sins and you cannot inherit eternal life.

And we are all sinners. We are like a man who is dehydrated and who is parched, who is even dead, and Jesus offers living water and bids us to come. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and labour for that which does not satisfy?

You see, God offers that which satisfies and it's a promise. It's a promise of God. Jesus says that blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.

[19:41] It is a promise of God. The world cannot satisfy. Whatever you can buy with money, that will not satisfy. Only God can satisfy because God loves you, God created you, and he is our loving father who knows far more than we do, and he knows how to satisfy us.

We get a hint of this in verse 8 where it says, 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.

God is far above us, and his promises are complete and sure, and he is faithful to them. And we may not understand or know how he can satisfy us, but it is a promise that he gives us.

If we just humble ourselves and come to him and trust him. Now this is something which is a daily practice. You see, grace is something, grace ought to be the very air that we breathe.

The roots of grace need to be planted very firmly in our hearts so that it may grow and flourish and satisfy. And for this to happen, we need to do a few practical things.

[21:06] The first thing we need to do is hear the invitation and to come to him. And we ought to delight ourselves in God. We ought to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and we ought to try to know more of him.

So when we see this, it says, seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. So we are to seek him, we are to call on him, let the wicked forsake his way, that's repentance, that's turning from sin, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

Now perhaps this is something that's a bit of a neglected area of the Bible's teaching, which would be our thought lives. Now if any of the political candidates who are running for office in this coming election said that they were going to have the thought police, I'm sure that we would all vote against them, or I hope we would, because we don't want people policing our thoughts.

It's part of the freedom that we have as human beings, but God knows all of our thoughts, and he commands us to forsake all unrighteous thoughts.

I'm reading a book at the moment by John Flavel, the Puritan, and he has a book which is a very long title, but the shortened title is Keeping Your Heart.

[ 22 : 22 ] What he describes in that book is the importance of watching over your thoughts, and one of the analogies he uses is that if you have a great stone on top of a hill, and it begins to move, when it begins to move, you can quite easily begin to stabilize that stone with that much effort, but if you allow that stone to roll down that hill and gain momentum, it is much harder to stop that stone once it gains momentum.

You see, you have a chance when it starts, but once it goes, it's much harder to resist. It requires far greater effort, and so it is with our sin. Now, Jesus alluded to this in the commandments.

He said that you violate the commandment against murder when you hate another person in your heart, or you violate the commandment against adultery by lusting after another person because Jesus is concerned about the heart.

He is concerned with your thoughts. And so we must be concerned. You see, we should be concerned to put God first in our thoughts, that we are to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

We sang in that psalm of David, how precious to me are your thoughts, O God, how vast the sum of them. And so we ought to be people who are looking after our thoughts.

[ 23 : 48 ] We should be nipping sinful thoughts in the bud to stop it becoming something which snowballs into a much bigger sin that is visible to all because all of our sins, the root of our sins is in our heart.

Another analogy he uses is that the heart is a pasture and that many of the thoughts that we have each day are like things which are growing in this pasture and that we are to be like the gardener who cuts off all of the sinful influences and that we should nurture the many precious thoughts of God, that we are to delight in God, that we are to hold tightly to Jesus because he is of course the gardener, he is the one who has planted the vineyard, he owns the vineyard.

And he has established it by grace. And so our hearts then are to be gardens of grace. And so in the same way that it is easier to commit sins if we don't catch our thoughts early, so too that when we cultivate thoughts of love and faith and hope and thankfulness, then when we are satisfied by his grace then it is far easier to do good.

It just becomes something that wells up within you, so it is like this stream, this source of living water, this fountain which overflows into the lives of others.

Now you may say well what tools do we have at our disposal to do this? And we can read on in verse 10 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.

[ 25 : 40 ] It shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

You see God gives us his word. We have the word of God. Because this grace that satisfies is something which has to be nurtured.

Jesus speaks to us through his word. Every time we open our Bible Jesus speaks. Calvin describes the Bible as the training ground for the children of God.

Because it's where we are instructed to know more about God and ourselves, to be reminded of our identity as children of God. God. Without the word we are prone to forget.

But when we read and when we meditate, when we see and when we seize these promises of God and make them ours so that our weak faith will be strengthened, so that our fortification against sin is strengthened, and we are told in this verse that the word of God accomplishes.

[ 26 : 48 ] It's not just a guide. It's not just a spiritual sugar rush. The word of God creates. It changes the world. As the word of God comes into our hearts and transforms us, as we are seeking to live obediently to him, so we change the world around us as we nurture this garden of grace in our hearts.

Now the word of God, it's a means of grace. It redeems the lost soul and it never ever fails. And if we desire to be satisfied by God, we need to come to him in his words.

And we need to hear the words being preached. We can take opportunities like coming here to this pulpit, although we don't have a minister here, the same minister preaching every week. There are many gifted men who will come here and who will preach the word of God faithfully.

And we are to encourage each other in fellowship. The grace of God that satisfies. Finally, the grace of God that delivers. The grace of God that delivers.

What is the climax of this chapter? Where is this all leading? This life which is filled with grace, with thankfulness, with satisfaction, that denies self and puts on Christ and imitates him.

[ 28 : 07 ] So you see, we are welcomed by God's grace. God's grace satisfies. And then we read on, for you shall go out, in verse 12, 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 the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorns 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. Now Isaiah is speaking to these words to people who were in exile, who are going to be under God's judgment. They are a conquered people in a foreign land, and yet God is a covenant God who loves them and who will deliver them. You see, God will lead them out.

And this is God's invitation to you. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, come and be delivered. Be delivered from bondage to sin, be delivered from fear, be delivered from hopelessness, be delivered from pursuing the next thing.

[ 29 : 11 ] to be satisfied in your thirst. God's grace is sufficient for you. And when you receive Jesus, when you accept this invitation to come to him, you are delivered, and all creation rejoices.

You remember when the Lord Jesus said, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Hear the mountains sing, and the trees clap their hands.

The thorns of judgment are replaced by the evergreen cypress tree of eternal life. There is life, there is hope, there is rejoicing, because there is a man or woman who has been delivered from sin.

Someone who is the object of God's grace, who has been given abilities and talents for use in the kingdom of God, who reads the word to water the garden of grace that is in their hearts, who thirsts after righteousness and who has been given this most precious free gift, a gift of salvation, a pearl of great price for which they have given up everything they have to obtain.

We are to be stewards of God's grace, so how then will we use it? that is the challenge. We have been given abilities and talents for use in the kingdom.

[ 30 : 43 ] And we are to read the word in a way that it nourishes this garden of grace and changes the world around us, changes the relationships and the lives of the people around us so that they too would come to know Christ.

Christ, and who when the time comes to depart this life, they are welcomed into the eternal kingdom and they have stewarded these good gifts and they are told, well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much, enter into the joy of your master.

Now finally, we just have to end with these final words in which it says, and it shall make a name for the Lord. You see, it all is for God's glory. God's grace is for his glory.

He welcomes, he satisfies, he delivers and he does it for his own glory. And this is the way that he transforms the world. It's the way he accomplishes his purpose.

Purposes, it's by grace. And he gets all the glory. So isn't this a marvelous passage which shows us God's grace because God's grace is beyond all human imagination and we are invited to come, come to the waters.

[ 32 : 02 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. minister