

The Great Invitation

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[0 : 00] It's a profound song. You think about the implications of that song?! Christ alone, Cornerstone, He's Lord of all.

! What does that mean for you today? What does that mean for this week? To call Him Lord of all, supreme, all-sufficient, all-satisfying Lord?

If He really is Lord of all, what does that mean? We sing the words, it's a great song, amazing truths, but what does it really mean? I think we know what it means, but connecting the dots to the day-to-day parts of our life, that's where things begin to break down a little bit, I think.

At least for me. I was reminded this week of Jesus' ministry throughout the time of His time here on this planet.

And through the flow of His ministry, there were a number of occasions where Jesus was invited to participate in a meal. He was invited to come over and to sit down, to enjoy fellowship, and many of those times actually were for the sake of making Him look foolish or exposing Him in some way.

[1 : 36] And that's what's happening in Luke chapter 14. Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee. And through the course of the meal, it's interesting that Jesus continues to expose the host and then expose the people who are participating in this meal, and then drawing their attention to the kinds of individuals they should be really inviting to the great celebration, the feastings that they're doing as a people.

And to change the subject, somebody who is a part of the crowd, because things are a little tense, and there's a little tension in the room, and to try to divert the subject on something they can all agree on, someone says, well, tell us about the kingdom.

The kingdom is coming, certainly. That'll be a happy thought, right? And Jesus says, well, let me tell you a parable. There's this parable of this great man who invites a number of people to come and participate in this great feast that he has.

And he sends this invitation out ahead of time so that they can get prepared and so they can all be ready when it's actually time to feast together. Well, preparations are made, and finally the mealtime comes, and now he sends out his servants so that they can know now is the time to show up and to enjoy this meal.

And if you remember the story, you remember that in this parable that Jesus tells, it says that the servants went out and everyone who is invited begins to make excuses.

[3 : 17] There's any number of reasons why they can't come and participate in this great feast. One says, well, I've just bought some property.

I need to go and inspect it. Another says, well, I've just bought five oxen and I need to test it out. I need to take my oxen for a test drive. Somebody says, well, I've just gotten married and so I'm preoccupied.

And one by one, down the list, everyone seems to have a reason not to come to this great celebration. Now, in the Jewish mind in the first century, this was unimaginable.

This never happens. And the reason is because when anyone of significance in a community invites people to come and participate and to fellowship with him, you would be a fool not to comply because business dealings and trade and buying and selling and position in the community are all based upon acceptance acceptance to these kinds of gatherings.

It would have been unimaginable for people in that day to have resisted such a great invitation. And then to shock the crowd of the hearers that Jesus is talking to even more, he continues to elaborate on this story and says, well, in order for Jesus to then have the right kind of people, the right numbers of people at this party that he's throwing, all the preparations have been made.

[4 : 54] Now he sends out word to anybody in the streets. He says, invite the blind and the maimed and the deaf and the mute. Let them participate in this great celebration.

It uses the language. It says, go and tell them to come. Implore them to be part of this great feasting. This great celebration.

This great invitation that has been made to them as a people. In considering this story, perhaps we say, how in the world could somebody think, think or imagine to deny this great invitation?

Certainly that was the thought of those who were in the audience listening to this story. And yet, there they were looking at Jesus in the eyes. Looking into the face of the Messiah who was giving them the greatest invitation of all.

The invitation to participate in relationship with God. They wanted nothing to do with that invitation. And that's the correlation that Jesus is beginning to draw as he tells this story.

[6 : 09] the unimaginable was taking place in the very company in which he was telling the story. It harkens back to what I want to talk about this morning in terms of the great invitation that has been given to you.

The great invitation that has been given to me. And we find that invitation in Isaiah chapter 55. Truth be told, every yes that we make in life is actually a no to something else.

And so often the yeses in life are yeses to property and yeses to oxen and yeses to marriages. And those are good yeses.

Don't get me wrong. But the greatest yes this morning is the yes to Christ. And through the last couple of weeks you're coming along on a journey with me because really this is God working in my own life helping to create within me an affection for the things of the Lord and to put aside the things of this life as important as they are so that there can be a yes to the most important thing.

A yes to the Lord. That is the great invitation this morning. Last week's passage in Isaiah chapter 30 went something like this.

[7 : 49] It says, Thus says the Lord God the Holy One of Israel in rest is salvation.

In quietness in trust is your strength. But you were unwilling. Just as those who Jesus held out the invitation to in that parable the invitation to participate in the great fellowship with himself he offers the same to the people in Jerusalem in 700 years before Christ he offers them the invitation to participate in him.

But at least in the moment in the immediate time it says they were unwilling. The same invitation is to us. Is there willingness?

Is there tenderness? Is there receptivity on our part? A willingness to surrender over the things that we hold so dear so that we can embrace the wonder of our great God?

It's almost imaginable to me that unimaginable to me that God has to plead with us to embrace something so amazing as relationship with him but that is what he does time and time and time again.

[9:16] He shows up to extend this great invitation. So turn with me to Isaiah chapter 50 55. We can see again this invitation of our Lord.

Beginning in verses 1 to 3. Isaiah 55 1 to 3 it says this. Come everyone who thirsts come to the waters and he who has no money come and 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 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 to David here we find again an invitation a great invitation immediately to the people of

Jerusalem immediately to the people living 700 years before Jesus but I want to demonstrate that that invitation that great invitation during Isaiah's day and to the people there in immediate earshot of these words was just the beginning of what God intends and desires to work through in all of our lives even here today it is God's desire for us to set aside the scheduling and the saturated agenda that we have that is so built up with good things with our working for God even perhaps what God is telling us this morning is that instead of working we just need to be waiting we just need to be trusting we just need to be to be offering ourselves yielding ourselves to his invitation enjoying the benefits of all that God would have to give and then we'll experience the salvation and strength of God in a couple of weeks from now we'll look at Isaiah chapter 40 it says those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength real strengthening comes as we begin with waiting so we saw last week in Isaiah chapter 30 that's what we'll see again this morning in Isaiah 55 my guess is as we continue to look at the themes of scripture they'll continue to scream out wait on me trust me stop taking matters in your own hands and begin experiencing the presence and the power of God in every part of your life and here again

God is calling us to the most significant things he is calling us to what truly matters I was reminded even this week as I was reading through Facebook and some of you as you were posting reminded me of the story in Luke chapter 10 Jesus' words to Martha he says Martha Martha you are worried and troubled about many things troubled about many things but one thing is needed and Mary has chosen what is good which will not be taken from her there is one thing this morning that matters and so often my life is about doing everything else but what really matters there is a great invitation this morning an invitation for us to participate to experience to enjoy to delight to savor the relationship that God intends and desires to give to each of us today the question is will we come will we come

I want to look at this passage in three different movements first I want to take a look at the urgency of the invitation that we see in verses one to three I want us to look at the urgency of the invitation look again as it says at verse one 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 now what you can't see in the Hebrew text is what begins this passage is an interjection the ESV doesn't do a very good job translating it for us but the New King James actually does I believe the word in the New King James is the word ho or lo or it's really the word hey listen up pay attention you can't miss this don't let this pass you by this is important hear me hear what

[15:14] I have to say there is an urgency to the invitation not only described by the way this passage begins it it's beginning with an exclamation point you can't miss what's coming next this is essential for Christian life don't let it pass you by so the call of God in our life is to listen up there is an urgent call and we're going to see throughout this passage there are there are 12 commands in the first three verses and they kind of fall within three groups the first group is the call to come we're going to look at these briefly one at a time but first the call to come we see that here come everyone who thirsts come to the waters come by and eat come by wine and milk and then later on we see in verse three it says incline your ear and come to me there should be no misunderstanding what the call on our life is to do and that is to come to come to him for our lives to be bowed down for our attention to be fixated on him and notice how broad this invitation is we see it there the very first line come everyone who thirsts does that include everyone in the world at some point or the other there is a thirsting not only a physical thirsting but as we begin to see through this passage there is a spiritual thirsting that happens for everyone in this life there is a broadness to this invitation notice it says in verse one buy and eat those who are hungry also can be satisfied in some way as they come notice in verse four it says

I have made him a witness to the peoples who are those peoples it elaborates in verse five surely you will summon the nations you know not and that's where you and I come in that's the wonder of this passage this morning is that the initial call is for the people of God in Israel but as they begin to recognize and embrace the call on their lives as they begin to experience the benefits of God's calling on their life now the nations are brought in the nations are affected and you and I as part of those outside of the covenant Israel have been blessed because of this promise and so the invitation is to us as well the invitation for us to come but there is also conditions the first condition is that they come and it's an all inclusive list of invitees those who are thirsty and those who have no money but the condition is first of all you must recognize your need you must recognize that there is thirstiness in you that can only be satisfied in him and second there is an exchange that is being referred to it says come and buy we'll talk about that in a moment we need to understand our bankruptcy that we're buying without the collateral that really is meaningful in the spiritual realm there is personal bankruptcy but there is an exchange nonetheless but fundamentally this is what keeps us from enjoying the invitation is it not what keeps us from experiencing the invitation is that we get in the way we refuse to come as we've been invited to come it's not as though the invitation was not given it's not as though the offer was not extended to all of us the difficulty is that we refuse to do what we've been encouraged and commanded to do we have really no taste for the things of

God and we have no time for the things of God that is what stands in our way but he calls us to come I don't know about you but the thought of a supreme being begging and pleading and yearning with his people to come to him how does that strike you this morning doesn't sit well with me and yet this is the posture of God the posture of God to call us in to what is truly significant it marked the ministry of Jesus as we see in Matthew chapter 23 as he's weeping for this same city this city of Jerusalem and he says oh Jerusalem Jerusalem the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her how often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks but you were not willing sound familiar is there a willingness in us to participate in the great feast this great invitation of experiencing our God what keeps us from the nourishment and the life that is offered by God is that we refuse to come there is not willingness in us there is a call to come but there is also a call to buy notice that here too come buy and eat come buy wine and milk without money and without price on the surface this is a confusing statement how does a purchase take place how does a transaction happen without money and without price what is this exchange that

Isaiah the prophet is talking about how do you make this purchase without money well maybe it would be helpful to see this from a New Testament perspective I think it's easier in terms of proximity and familiarity with the New Testament to understand what God is talking about how about the familiar verse in John 3:16 for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him thank you kids for helping whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life who is the invitation given to whoever believes it's an open invitation there's accessibility it is broad it's expansive in its ability to be applied directly to life but what was the cost what is the cost to you well the cost to us is free right it's a free gift of God's grace but the cost to him was everything it cost him his life now what we don't have the benefit of in

Isaiah chapter 55 is understanding the context it flows from Isaiah chapter 53 and those of you who know what Isaiah 53 is talking about you'll recognize the connection the connection of the crucified savior the crucified servant leading to the joy and the benefit of this broad and expansive invitation Jesus is coming to the earth so many years ago the cost for him was great the cost to us is free the free gift of grace and yet there is an exchange to be made when speaking about discipleship Jesus doesn't mince words the marks of discipleship will play out in life whoever builds a tower and doesn't consider the cost who does that Jesus says what king goes to war and doesn't consider whether or not he's able to stand so likewise whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple that's the exchange that's the exchange for every believer who desires to be a disciple of

[24:50] God to be part of this great invitation there is a great exchange not something that can be bought with money but a price of surrendering your life completely to him what stands in the way of your enjoyment this morning it's not that the offer the invitation has not been extended it is that you refuse!

to take it up that's what stands in the way of enjoying the benefits and the pleasures of God you stand in the way I stand in the way of myself enjoying the pleasures of God my ideas my passions my desires my love for comfort my infatuation with immediate gratification that stands in the way of true satisfaction but what stands in the way of true satisfaction is keeping us this great exchange is so amazing that we if we really understood what the exchange was we would be compelled to it exchanging corruption for immortality exchanging futility for fruitfulness exchanging captivity for freedom and guilt for cleansing aimlessness for purposefulness isolation for fellowship folly for wisdom sorrow for joy anxiety for peace and judgment for grace that is the exchange and it's worth every cost it's worth every cost it is a happy exchange but it is an exchange nonetheless there is a come to buy there is a called there's a called to come being called to buy there's also being called to listen now there seems to be a shift in the language as we get to verse at the end of verse 2 where we move from the dining room to the classroom it seems we move from the table to the lecture hall we move from eating to listening from enjoying and participating in fellowship to this learning that seems to be happening now in the end of verse 2 and 3 and as the shift in language is taking place here the prophet

Isaiah and God himself wants us to understand that what he is talking about are not two competing truths but two companion truths because as we come to understand what this invitation is all about we begin to realize that you can't have one without the other you can't have true joy without experiencing the benefits of fellowship but also the benefits of learning and growing and abiding and being taught by him and in three different ways it's being emphasized at three different times and three different words word constructions are being used to help describe the kind of listening that we're to be doing as God's people it begins with listen diligently to me listen diligently to me now those of you who have the NIV you might have it says listen listen to me and that is to try to emphasize what is really taking place in grammatically is these two words side by side that are reinforcing one another to help us recognize the significance of listening diligently listening diligently it needs to be something that we work at do you find yourself being distracted your mind is kind of going from one thought to the next is kind of this

ADD thing that happens we can't seem to keep our mind focused on any one thing at a time partly because of the culture in which we live but also partly because we just don't put it to practice and Isaiah wants us to understand that if we're going to really listen God's way we're going to listen diligently then he moves on and he says in verse 3 incline your ear and come to me this is the listening earnestly listening eagerly it is the idea the expression of bending towards do you ever do that I'm finding myself doing that more and more the older I get what was that there's a there's a leaning in that happens because there's an interest in what is being said there's a an extending of self that demonstrates the significance of what is being communicated is there listening diligently is there listening earnestly in your life setting aside the time on your day so you can really hear the voice of

God speaking through his word to you speaking to you through prayer God I want to get your wisdom on this because I'm about to make a big decision here I'm listening to your voice God help me to do what is right I'm waiting for you I'm listening for you I want to get the green light before I move before I move forward then it says it says incline your ear and come to me hear hear that your soul may live another command that is the listening actively it is in the present tense it describes this activity that is happening perpetually they're never satisfied with what God is trying to say there's a desire to listen up to him to hear his voice whose voice are you listening to this morning you listening to the voice of good friends philosophies of this world the priorities of this life past experiences whatever it might be my guess is they compete they compete with the true word of

[32 : 15] God he seeks to instruct you because he has a great plan for your life he wants you to experience all that is involved in this great invitation but it only happens through the context of listening will you listen to him listen what's at stake here is what's at stake in verse 3 it says incline your ear and come to me hear that your soul may live hear that your soul may live that is what is at stake there is refreshment to be had in him there is satisfaction to be had in him there is soul survival that is to be had in him if you listen and come and buy at the table of God Jesus says something similar in

John chapter 10 he says my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish their soul will be satisfied there will be soul revival that takes place for those who make the great shepherd their voice whose voice are we listening to this morning so we've seen the urgency of the invitation next we turn to the substance of the invitation we can recognize that there is a sense of immediacy there's urgency to this call but what are we being called to what is the substance of this call and first we find in verses 3 to 5 we see that there is an invitation to savor God the substance of the invitation and the invitation first of all to savor

God we can see this as we move through verses 2 talks about why are you investing in things which don't satisfy listen eat what is good delight yourself in rich food there is a satisfaction that will come as we come to the table it says incline your ear come to me hear that your soul may live and I will make with you an everlasting covenant my steadfast sure love to David an invitation to savor God so what are we being called to we we've seen some of the clues and some of the markers but now it should be pretty clear what the invitation is all about what begins to this general call come to the waters now begins to be a little bit more specific as it says in verse 3 incline your ear and come to me!

Jesus is the end point of everything good God is the culmination of all that satisfies coming to him is where we'll begin to enjoy and to know and to experience all that God has for us knowing him fellowship with him delighting in him and savoring him now I use this word savor for several reasons first I use the word savor because it's not corrupted by my idea of pleasure and delight now do you ever find yourself taking pleasure in something and then later on you are ashamed that you ever took pleasure in that you see when I'm talking about savoring something I'm talking about understanding the true value of something and reorienting all of my perspective it's not what satisfies me as much as understanding the value and the worthiness of him finding that he is valuable not because it makes me feel happy but because he is valuable he is supreme savoring recognizes the inherent value of the

God who is valued savoring is also important because it helps to provide the idea of the time it takes in enjoying something like I find it's really amazing of the Lord that instead of just eating to get nutrition if that was all it was for we'd be just going outside and eating some cockroaches and maybe some grubs because that would provide the nourishment that we need in terms of protein right but how many of us want to do that if it came down to that we'd be wolfing it down there'd be no savoring okay but we're called to savor because God wants us to enjoy the process of him it's not just about the knowledge or the instruction the information it's about coming to appreciate the experience of fellowship with him that's why the psalmist says taste and see that the

[38:16] Lord is good put your senses to work and experience him that can't be done by checking the boxes of life by doing all that God expects we're not talking about discipline here we're talking about having a deep dependence that is soaking in and savoring the Lord like when we savor something what does the experience usually look like how would you describe it I had some meat the other day and it was so succulent and so I put it in my mouth and I didn't just gulp it down just let it sit there and my eyes closed and I just thought about those tastes as they were kind of swishing around in my mouth do you know how much of a grace it is that

God doesn't call us just to this information dump every Sunday and every day you do your devotions he's calling you to experience he's calling you to relationship he wants you to taste him and as the psalmist says in Psalm 19 he says it's sweeter than honey can I just tell you how wonderful the experience of God is through his word taste of him enjoy him and know him that way he is truly savory but it also implies this process this process that involves time it involves meditation that's how it's described in so many places through the scripture it can't happen in the hurry and the flow of life it can only happen as we allow ourselves to soak him in to let his truths cultivate the hard soil of our life and infiltrate and to make their roots down deep so they can begin to grow and to flourish in us we can delight in the richest of foods and even in the foods that are offered the prophet begins to help us understand the expansive experience that we can have with him did you see that what is offered to us in our drinking did you notice the water in the milk in the wine the richness of the foods that are being offered water that helps us understand the necessities of life really the nourishment that we need the life sustaining force of water

I think about the milk and the strengthening process that milk gives to little infants especially but there is also not just the life giving experience and the strengthening experience but notice the wine why does God put the wine there because he wants your life to be marked by exhilaration by enthusiasm by excitement not in drinking wine don't get me wrong and I'm not saying that that's wrong or right that's a different subject for a different time but he's calling us to the exhilaration of the Christian life it doesn't have to be marked with mundaneness or drudgery it can be marked by enthusiasm by excitement taste of him and maybe there will be a smile on your face when you go to work tomorrow and notice this faithful love this faithful love that he's promised to David and extends to us that happening that happens through the listening process it happens through the savoring process as we experience the wonder of all that God has to give to us his incredible love to us are you savoring the savior and in verses six to seven there is an invitation to seek

God an invitation to seek God notice it says seek the Lord while he may be found call upon him while he is near let the wicked forsake his ways 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 seeking it's another one of the the commands in this in this passage the things that God is beckoning us to do to seek after him is not a sense of looking for what is not discoverable but looking for that which has made himself available so that we can find and appreciate all that he has to give but seeking implies orientation it implies direction it implies focus for us there is an objective and that is to seek the Lord unfortunately so much of our seeking today is self oriented even the good things that I do in order for me to seek after God really have at their end point a seeking that is oriented to self not a seeking that is oriented to God we talked about this a little last week

God I have done all of my devotions I have attended every service I have given you all the money that I am supposed to give to you I am kind to my neighbors I am a good employee at my work why in the world are things so crazy in my life you are not keeping your end of the bargain here and when we do that we show that all of our seeking really has self as its motivation not seeking for the sake of him seeking for the sake of me instead of saying God I am seeking you so whatever you invite into my life is a way for me to know you more so if my children walk away from the faith I realize you are pressing me in to trusting in you and not entrusting in this world or trusting in my own formulas for making my family better and Lord if my health is failing away

[45 : 48] I am not going to be disappointed because I understand that you are just helping me know you more and giving me opportunity for the witness of God to show up in my life and to make it resound my focus my desire is to seek you not to seek myself if we seek him we come to discover that finding him involves every twist and turn seeing his grace and favor in the moments of sheer joy seeing his compassion and mercy in the moments of my deepest failures seeing his comfort and peace in the moments of greatest sorrow seeing his strength and stability in the moments of inadequacy and weakness but in seeking him it says we will find him but there are certain conditions here that express a true seeking heart what does a true seeking heart look like in verse seven you shouldn't be surprised to see that involves repentance a repentant heart that turns away from all that will not satisfy so that it can turn its focus to the one who truly satisfies and when we do when we do

God doesn't squash us like a bug notice what shows up the tender mercies of God show up the compassion of God the pardoning of God comes abundantly on all who will turn to him forsake your way correct your thinking return to the Lord and mercy will come and God will be found by you finally finally the benefits of the invitation if all of these things were not enough now from verses 8 to 13 we see benefits and I just need to go through these quickly because we don't have time to expound I'm sure we'll have a chance to do that as the year continues but I want to draw your attention to three benefits to this invitation the first is found in verses 8 and 9 it says for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways declares the

Lord for as high as the heavens are above the earth so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts here we find the benefit of his wisdom the benefit of his wisdom this unrivaled greatness of wisdom that can be yours and can be mine if we come verses 10 and 11 give us another benefit it says for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth making it bear fruit that sprouts forth giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater so my word that goes out from my mouth it shall not return empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the things for which I sent it the benefit of his word the benefit of a fruitful productive enduring legacy as the word of

God is working in your life and having its way not only in you but in the people around you the joy of his word and then finally in verses 12-13 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 and that is the benefit of his beauty the benefit of his beauty now we often think about joy and peace at least I have I think about joy and peace as a fringe benefit of being part of the family of God we're commended to joy and peace and it seems to be this blessing that comes the favor of God is on a life where joy and peace reign but this passage has made me think about joy and peace a little differently because of this last phrase it shall make a name for the

Lord when we wear joy and peace when we wear productivity and fruitfulness when you wear and adorn this this satisfaction in God and when we experience the love of Christ as we find in verses 4 and 5 notice at the end of verse 5 it says behold you shall call a nation that you do not know and nations 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 he has made you beautiful and when you are beautiful you're making much of him when peace reigns in your life not the turmoil and frustration and hardship heartache when there is confident waiting and trusting you might look beautiful but not because you have made yourself beautiful but because he has made you beautiful and your life points to him that's what we were made for to make him look beautiful it happens when we come it happens when we experience it happens when we come to know and love our

[53 : 05] God may we love him so we can make him look beautiful in this world let's pray God is our desire this morning to make much of our beautiful and glorious God who extends to us this amazing invitation the supreme God who condescends to us to plead with us for fellowship not because you need it from us but because we so desperately need it from you in order to be satisfied we thank you for the promise the promise that your word will never return to you void it will always accomplish its work and then as we have looked through this passage we see also that the nations that don't know you shall run to you you are the magnet that will draw the nations to yourself you will have your way in this world so have your way in us first have your way in us

Lord in Jesus name Amen