

Water for a Thirsty Soul

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[0 : 00] As the great Jim Saladin used to say, good evening everybody. Good evening. Hello, my name is Ben and welcome to you.

Welcome to you. I see there are some faces that are new here, particularly a warm welcome to you. There are some faces that are back here from holidays, I think university holidays and things like that.

And it's good to see you here as well. Before I begin preaching, let's pray together, shall we? Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that it speaks to us. I pray that your spirit would be very active tonight and he would speak through me and he would speak to us together.

Amen. Amen. Well, again, welcome to you at St. John's. Here at St. John's, we've been going through the book of Mark together.

[1 : 09] We've been doing that since the beginning of the academic year and we've just had Christmas and that was a break from Mark and now we're taking a break from Christmas. It's the Sunday after Christmas.

You know, what do you preach on the Sunday after Christmas? Everything good's been said already, right? Aaron Roberts, who is the minister here, said, you know, Ben, I'd love you to preach in the evening service.

And I said, that's nice. And then he said, it's December 30th, which is in preaching terms, the graveyard shift. And I say to him, rubbish, this is not the graveyard shift.

It's very good to have you here after Christmas. Well, we're taking a quick break from Mark and we're looking at Isaiah 55. It would be helpful if you had your Bibles open to the page 615.

I wonder if you ever feel a deep sense of discontent, discontentment. As we live our lives day to day, they're often very busy, aren't they?

[2 : 16] They're filled up with stuff, jobs and goals and studies and friends and family. And I don't think that you go around your whole life moping and being sad.

But if you're like me, you probably look over your shoulder sometimes and you say, I wish I had this, or if only this part of my life was different.

I don't know what it is for you, but I think we all sometimes have a deep sense of unsettledness I wonder if you ever feel a deep sense of discontent.

We've come to Isaiah 55, which is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. It's the pinnacle of Paul's preaching in Acts chapter 13. And it's actually the metaphor on the very last page of the entire Bible.

And tonight, God is calling us, you and me, into a deep and satisfying relationship with him. I have three points tonight.

[3 : 18] Firstly, the thirst. Secondly, the water. And thirdly, the requirement. So the thirst, the water, and the requirement. For those who take notes.

Okay, firstly, the thirst. The need that we have. I think we agree that there is a universal human need for something, something deep. Philosophers have talked about sort of like physical needs, base needs, and deeper needs like love and esteem and self-actualization.

It's a guy called Maslow, for those of you who don't need to look things up on Wikipedia. And in verse 1, there's a picture. Let me read verse 1 to the beginning.

It says, come everyone who thirsts. What's it talking about? Well, we in Vancouver and the Western world, when we thirst, what do we do?

We go to the tap, get the cup, put the tap on, we get some water, right? It's not that big a problem. But imagine you're in the Middle Eastern desert, right? There, thirsting is powerful.

[4 : 26] It's hot and dry, and water just isn't everywhere. Thirsting is a matter of life and death. You have to battle to get water. And this is talking about a deep thirst.

And the Bible is talking about a deep soul thirst. Many of us have read and heard about the Vancouver Foundation's report on loneliness and disenfranchisement.

That came out, and that was quite popular. Maybe you've also seen the McLean's report that came out a few months ago on university students in Canada. The report is called The Broken Generation.

A study was done of 1,600 university students at the University of Alberta. And the results are quite scary, actually. Half of the students they polled felt things were hopeless.

Eight and nine felt overwhelmed by all they had to do. Two-thirds felt very sad. A half had overwhelming anxiety.

[5 : 35] Two-fifths had overwhelming anger. And 6.8% seriously considered suicide. Those numbers are quite alarming.

It's about the bright hopes of our future university students, right? The picture is one of a lack of fulfillment, of sadness, anxiety. The study shows that there's a deep sense of discontentment with our life.

That's the statistics. There's also a Vancouver author whom I like very much named Douglas Copeland. Maybe you've heard of him. He wrote one of his most famous books called Generation X.

So it's about people who were born sort of in the late 60s to 80s. And really, the book is about discontentment. That's really what the book is about. So there's three main characters and two dogs.

There's five people, five characters. And it's set in the Mojave Desert. And they're sitting together. And they're watching the sun rise.

[6 : 43] And one woman has just come back. She's just come back from a date. And she says it was the date from hell. And the main character is sitting watching the sunset.

And he observes this. So he says to his friends, Shh. And the five of us looked eastward. I shiver and pulled a blanket tight around myself. For I am colder than I realized.

And I wonder that all the things seem to be from hell these days. Dates. Jobs. Parties. Weather. Weather. Could the situation be that we no longer believe in that particular place?

Or maybe we were promised heaven in our lifetimes. And what we ended up with can't help but suffer in comparison. Maybe somebody got cheated along the way.

I wonder. What's he saying? What's Douglas Copeland saying? These stats in this story saying exactly what the Bible has always said.

- [7 : 44] That people, humans, have a deep-seated need. A thirst. We're looking for meaning and purpose in our lives, aren't we? I think that's true. And we're looking for meaningful connections with people.
- For loving and deep relationships. Different societies value different kinds of relationships. Some value romantic relationships. Some value family relationships.
- Some value community relationships. But everywhere you go in the world, the one thing you will find in common is everybody is looking for something deep to connect with other people.
- And when this thirst isn't fulfilled, that leads to our deep problems. Anxiety, anger, loneliness, fear, disconnection.
- That's where it comes from, this deep thirst. Thank you, Kathy, for reading so well. She read John 4 for us, which is a story where Jesus is talking to a woman.
- [8 : 45] And in the story, he says something very interesting. He uses this picture from Isaiah 55, right? He says, I am the living water. Or if you come to me, I will give you the living water.
- He's talking about that deep soul thirst. And in verse 16, she says, that sounds great.
- Give it to me. And in verse 16, he says, go call your husband. It seems like a non-sequitur, right? Like kind of a weird thing. Why does he say that?
- Well, what he's doing is he's pointing out to her that she has been trying to satisfy that thirst with her romantic relationships. And it hasn't worked.
- And for her, she went from one relationship to another. And it failed in her life. And when we try to satisfy this deep thirst with something that's not God, we will remain thirsty because Jesus is the living water.
- [9 : 46] So that's our first point. Thirst. Our deep soul thirst that we have. Secondly, the water or the feast. Let me read for us verse 1 from Isaiah 55 again.
- I'll read that for us. 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, without price. So the pictures continue, right? The first picture is the picture of thirsting.
- The second picture is like water overflowing or a feast that's abundant and wonderful. There's water there. And that's kind of like necessities of life.
- And then there's milk and wine. That's the luxuries. The things that are the best that you can buy. The things that are lavish. And there's kind of an interesting thing at the end that says, come buy without money and without price.
- [10 : 49] So it's like it's a sale where things are reduced to nothing. It's free. God is calling people to come. It's an invitation from God to us.
- And the invitation is to drink deep. To eat at a feast. And it means at least two things. Firstly, notice that God is calling us individually into a relationship with him.
- Verse 3, he says, he explains the metaphor sort of. In verse 3, he says, incline your ear and come to me. Hear that your soul may live.
- So God says, I'm speaking. Will you come and listen? My words are there. Will you hear me? Some people think that Christianity is like a nice idea.
- Or it's like a really interesting philosophy. Or even it's a good religion. But until you've gotten personal with God, you haven't gotten the real deal.
- [11 : 56] Because God is trying to get personal with you. And when you respond to God, when you truly listen to him, it's like having a feast for your soul.

Christianity is a personal experience. The Bible struggles to talk about what it's like to experience God. And it always talks about taste.

There's a psalm that says, come and taste that the Lord is good. Because that's how the Bible can talk about it. Some people have sort of a consumerist view about Christianity.

So it's a little bit like McDonald's, right? Like church, I come and, you know, I give this bit to church. And then I get some stuff back out of it. You know, I come and I get nice music or nice preaching or whatever it is I get out of church, right?

And we treat Christ this way as well. I'll come to you when it suits me. But this is not what the Bible is inviting us to, right? This attitude is corrosive to community.

[13 : 04] It means it's really hard to develop deep friendships. It makes it difficult for us to live together. But more importantly, God wants you. Do you want Him?

Or do you just want the stuff that He offers? That's the first thing. Secondly, the second thing this means, God is offering us relationship, right?

That's what He wants. And it means that we don't just come once. He says, come, everyone who thirsts. He's saying, I want to be in a relationship with you.

And that means we go deeper and deeper. C.S. Lewis had a phrase. It was further up and further in. I think it's a wonderful phrase.

And true Christianity is about going further up and further in with God. In verse 3, God says something that might be funny for some of us.

[14 : 03] Halfway through verse 3, He says, I will make with you an everlasting covenant. Well, what is a covenant? A covenant is a relationship with teeth.

A covenant is a deep and lasting, loving commitment. That's what it is. The most famous covenant that we know of is marriage, right? So two people get together and they say, no matter what, no matter what happens, I will give myself to you and I will love you.

And when it's done well and properly, it's beautiful and freeing and amazing. But the greatest marriage that's out there is just a shadow of what God offers with people.

When God wants to show His deepest love and commitment to people, what He does is He makes a covenant with them. He says, I will make a covenant with you. And here He says, I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, my steadfast, sure love for David.

So He's talking about a particular covenant that He made with one particular person. That's David. David was the king, king of Israel, who was sort of like the good king. And God came to him and said, David, I want to make covenant with you.

[15 : 21] It's kind of the second biggest one in the Bible. And He says to David, your descendants will be my son. They will be my sons. And God is saying, that is the deepest, most close relationship that I can have with a person, right?

Like a father and a son. That's as close as that you can get to God. But this is saying, that that covenant that was made with David, comes to regular people like you and me.

That's amazing. And Paul, the apostle, picks this verse up. In Acts chapter 13, he says, that Jesus has taken this promise, and He has given it to the world.

This promise is an offer to the world, through Jesus. It's amazing. I don't know, the hopes and dreams of your hearts.

I don't know the things that you most deeply desire. And it has to be clear, this passage is not promising that everything that you want, you'll get, right?

[16 : 24] It's not like, I want to have a really nice car, I'll get a really nice car. That's not what the passage is saying. Maybe you want a better job, a better marriage.

Maybe you want a marriage. Maybe you want approval of someone. I cannot promise these things to you. But, what I can say is, that what you're looking for in those things, the deep things, fulfillment, meaning, love, respect, and approval, these things, we get those things most truly in Jesus Christ.

because through Jesus, we see God. C.S. Lewis, right? I can't stop quoting him. He wrote a book called *The Last Battle*, and it's a great book.

I recommend you read it. Towards the end, the main characters sort of get into heaven, and this section I'm reading is sort of their first impressions of what heaven is like. So, C.S. Lewis says, they stood on grass, the deep blue sky was overhead, and the air which blew gently on their faces was that of a day in early summer.

Not far away from them rose a grove of trees, thickly leaped, but under every leaf there peeped out of the gold, sorry, under every leaf there peeped out the gold, or faint yellow, or purple, or glowing red of fruits, such as no one had seen in our world.

[17 : 54] The fruit made Tyrian feel that it must be autumn, but there must be something in the feel of the air that told him that it cannot be later than June. They all moved towards the trees, and everyone raised his hand to pick the fruit he best liked the look of, but then they all paused.

This fruit was so beautiful that each felt it can't be meant for me, and surely we're not allowed to pluck it. It's all right, said Peter. I know what we're all thinking, but I'm quite sure we needn't think that.

I have a feeling we've got to the country where everything is allowed. Here goes then, said Eustace, and they all began to eat. So, what was the fruit like? Unfortunately, no one can describe a taste.

All I can say is that compared with those fruits, the freshest grapefruit you've ever eaten was dull, and the juiciest orange was dry, and the most melting pear was hard and woody, and the sweetest wildflower strawberry was sour, and there was no seeds or stones and no wasps.

If you had once eaten that fruit, all the nicest things in this world would taste like medicines after it. But I can't describe it. You can't find out what it is like unless you get to that country and taste it for yourself.

[19 : 08] Great, isn't it? So, how would you describe your relationship with God? Is it a soul-satisfying thing?

Does it seep into every crevice of your being? Does it quench your thirst? No matter who you are, no matter where you're at spiritually, God is calling you to go deeper with him.

He is calling you to go further up and further in. Come, he says. Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. So, that's our second point.

But there's one more point. I said three points. And that's the requirement. Because here, God is giving us an invitation, isn't he? He's offering something to us.

But that's not the end of the matter. In verse one, he declares what he wants to do for us. He wants to give us a feast. But in verse six, he calls us to respond.

[20 : 09] There is an invitation, but there's also a demand. It's sort of like God is coming towards us. He's walking towards us and seeking us.

But he doesn't go all the way. He goes almost the whole way. And then he stops. And he wants us to go that final little bit with him. Let me read verse six and part of seven.

The prophet says, 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.

So there's sort of two ideas here. Firstly, the prophet says, Seek the Lord. Call on him. So the idea of seeking is not the idea of just asking one question.

It's more like taking a step towards a person. It's pursuing him. It's going after him. Christianity is not mindless and it's not actionless.

[21 : 10] We need to do something. Christianity is not let go and let God, you know, just let him do everything. God is seeking us but we need to seek him back.

We need to take a step towards him. And there's a second image, right? There's another image. And the second image is forsaking sin and turning to him.

So the picture is a picture of repentance. It's repentance. Now, when I say repentance, you might think something like this. Oh, those bad people who are out there, right?

And you might fairly say, you know, I haven't, you know, murdered anyone recently. I probably haven't gotten into a fight. I haven't cheated my spouse.

I haven't stolen anything recently. You know, I don't need to repaint of that stuff. You know, maybe I haven't done that ever. You know, I don't know.

[22 : 06] I don't know who you are. Maybe Ryan's done something bad recently. No? No, okay. Okay. I'm glad if you haven't done that stuff.

That's not really what Isaiah's talking about, right? He's not saying, you know, it's a good thing that you're not like Hitler. You know, it is a good thing you're not like Hitler. I'm very glad about that.

This is what Isaiah's talking about. He's talking about when we try to satisfy our thirst with anything that is not Jesus. That's what he's talking about.

When we try and satisfy our thirst to anything that's not Jesus. In verse 2, Isaiah asks us a very pointed question. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which is not satisfied?

It's a good question. There are different ways of trying to satisfy this thirst. People look for it in different things. And there's sort of like a liberal sort of way and a conservative sort of way, right?

[23 : 15] So, liberal sorts of people often say things like this. I've got this desire, a deep need, and I'm going to try and like live a life of self-fulfillment.

I'm going to experience lots of the world. I'm going to make choices for myself and I want to find beauty. And that's how they try and satisfy their thirst. But there's also a conservative way of doing it.

They'll say something like this. I want to be a good person. I want to work my job and do really well at that. I want to raise my family well and achieve. And I'm going to achieve stuff.

And I'm going to try and satisfy my thirst through my achievements. And those are both good things to do, but they both miss the main point. That the way we satisfy our thirst is through Jesus Christ and relationship through Him with God.

And verse 2 is a call to us today. Why do you labor for that which does not satisfy? Why do we drink salt water?

[24 : 21] Sometimes we think that we ask questions of God that when we talk to Him He's on the back foot. But here God is asking a question of us. Now, I don't want to make you just feel bad.

I do want you to repent. I do want you to turn away from seeking things that are not God. But what I really want, my aim in my heart is for you to see the wonderful feast that God is offering to us today.

Maybe you feel like Christianity is a bit of a straight jacket, right? So, it stops me from doing the things I want to do. It doesn't let me to be free to be who I am.

But what God is offering is so wonderful. Again, in the end of verse 2, God says, listen diligent to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food.

In verse 7, He says, let this man return to the Lord that God may have compassion on him and to our God that God will abundantly pardon.

[25 : 28] God is willing to satisfy us deeply. He wants us to come to him so he can give us Jesus Christ. Again, C.S. Lewis says, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea.

We are far too easily pleased. God is calling us to drink deep and to do that we need to seek him to bring our hearts to him to bring the fears and hopes of our lives before him and to turn away from seeking things that are not him.

And he promises to us, he promises mercy, abundant forgiveness and a feast for our souls. Now, do you know how God can promise this?

Because there's a problem. The problem is this. We seek God half-heartedly. He calls out to us personally and he seeks us so fiercely and lovingly that he sent to us Jesus.

[26 : 53] Jesus. And Jesus came as a man offering us that living water that we heard about for our souls. But we are half-hearted. We are dying of thirst and yet we keep going to other sources for that which is not bread.

Let me give you the answer. Let me tell you how God can offer this to us. When he sent Jesus, at the end of Jesus' life, Jesus was killed. He was hung on a cross and as he hung on that cross, he said, I thirst.

Do you know what that means? Jesus is the Trinity. He's in the deepest, most free, most loving, most wonderful relationship that ever existed and ever can exist.

And when he said, I thirst, that wonderful thing was torn away from him and his soul felt deep need. every loneliness, every need, anxiety, abuse, abandonment known to us was poured onto him so that we could drink deep of the very Trinity itself.

He thirsted so that we could be quenched. So friends, tonight, through Jesus, God is calling us. He's calling us to go deeper, to go further up and further in through Christ.

[28 : 22] Will you come? Let me pray for us. Dear Father, we thank you for your Son.

We thank you that you sent us Jesus Christ who has taken on our thirst. I pray that you will give us repentance and come to seek you and to seek the feast that satisfies our deep thirst.

In your name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.