

The Invitation

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[0 : 0 0] Well now if you would try and take a Bible and open to Isaiah 55 at page 615. If you put the bulletin down, if you can't find a Bible you'll have to share with someone next to you which might lead to very good things after the service.

Isaiah 55 page 615. While returning there a couple of weeks ago a visitor I'd never seen before said to me it must be really hard year by year preaching the same old stuff.

It was a sympathetic comment and I must say coming to Isaiah 55 this fabulous famous Christmas passage the thing about it is not coming up with something new to say nor is it my concern that you're very distracted and pressed right now but it's trying to gather together all the richness of God's goodness and blessing and kind of ruining it not saying it in a way that might be clear.

And the lovely thing is that God understands this completely. So if you look down at verse 8 in 55 he says Which means we can never think our way up to God and everything I say is kind of unless God blesses it and brings it down to us we're not going to experience anything I think of the thrill of it.

The title of the sermon is The Invitation but it really ought to be The Invitation to Experience the Peace of God because the key word that the book of Isaiah uses to gather up all the blessings that God has for you and me is this word peace shalom in Hebrew and that's why Christmas is littered with peace you know Christ comes as the Prince of Peace he brings peace on earth peace will there will be no end.

[2 : 0 5] The problem is we have such a negative, narrow and weak view of peace we think of it as something negative you know it's the absence of war or strife or troubles at least it's being in a neutral state to do what we want.

The Bible view of peace you know is completely different this shalom peace is positive it's translated sometimes as wholeness completeness soundness it's not so much the absence of anxieties and troubles as the positive presence of happiness and welfare and contentment and sometimes it's full health and sometimes it's prosperity and sometimes it's well-being it's the comprehensive blessing of God which we will fully experience then but we experience now of security, happiness, joy and fullness and there's external parts to it and this is very important there's objective and subjective elements to it because you can be secure you can be whole and complete and not experience it you know what it's like you can be in great danger but feel completely secure or you can be completely secure and not experience any trouble of thought or you can be completely secure and be anxious let me quote one writer to dwell in shalom it's very important is to enjoy living before God it's to enjoy living in one's physical surroundings it's to enjoy living with one's fellows it's to enjoy life with one's self this is very different than just knowing stuff you can know the facts of the Christmas story this is tasting participating enjoying resting our hearts in it now and when the book of Isaiah speaks about peace it's not so much peace with God as it is the peace of God peace with God absolutely critical there is no peace of God without the peace with God and the peace with God is something

Christ has brought us through his death and resurrection and if you are a believer in him that doesn't come and go it remains with you you can't you can't step out of that but the peace of God that does come and go Christian believers all through their lives struggle none of us experience it all the time and that's for a number of reasons partly because this sort of peace is just not natural to us so what I want to do is I want to fly over a couple of texts in the book of Isaiah alright so we're going to flick through the book of Isaiah look at a couple of different texts so we can pick up this lead on peace is that okay all in no I won't do that just flick back to page to Isaiah 48 please for a moment Isaiah 48 verse 18 says so this is page 609 this is God lamenting he says oh Israel that you had paid attention to my commandments then your shalom would have been like a river verse 22 there is no shalom says the Lord for the wicked and that makes sense of course because if God is the source of shalom and all goodness if we walk away from him it makes sense that we lose the enjoyment of peace look at chapter 52 over the page over two pages chapter 52 verse 7 a wonderful verse for preachers how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news good news who publishes shalom who brings good news of happiness there it is and publishes salvation who says to

Zion your God reigns so peace and salvation and happiness and good news all come through the message of the gospel from God and how do they come to us how did they get there in the first place what did God do to win it for us that's where the servant comes in look at the next chapter chapter 53 verse 5 over the page speaking this is prophecy about Jesus he was wounded for our transgressions he was crushed for iniquities upon him was the chastisement punishment that brought us shalom and with his stripes we are healed so as we come to the end of this section the section in Isaiah is 40 to 55 the last two chapters go higher and higher in the privilege of God and at the you know at the heart of that privilege is this sense of shalom so look at 54 10 please we're coming to our chapter for the mountains may depart and the hills be removed but my steadfast love shall not depart from you and my covenant of shalom my friendship promise shall not be removed says the

Lord who has compassion on you and then verse 13 this lovely picture of heritage and longevity all your children shall be taught by the Lord and great shall be the shalom of your children one of the commentators says now the floodgates of divine blessing have been flung open and peace flows like a river it's a very clever quote because the water picture is Isaiah's key image for blessing and for peace whenever you come across streams or fountains or wells or rivers or waters or rain or snow in the book of Isaiah this is the blessing of peace that comes down to us and is effective and as you look at chapter 55 which we read a few moments ago we now move from how God has restored peace his peace to us in chapter 55 is God's invitation to us to now participate and receive his peace and I know

[8 : 55] Christmas doesn't feel very peaceful some of you are making lists in your mind right now of things you haven't done you might be doing it on your bulletin I tell you I can see I'm not going to point you out some of us feel I think you know just a sense of heaviness about you know climate change economic troubles instability in the pace of life and I don't want to confuse the peace of God with our current wellness obsession some of which is very helpful I think and I'm not trying to give you something on top of something more to do on top of everything else you do someone sent me a wonderful interview this week on the CBC current show the current all about how we've become enslaved to our technologies of wellness and they use a thing called Fitbit as an illustration some of you are wearing them I guess

Fitbit is a band you wear around your wrist that counts 10,000 paces in the day and you know it can be helpful 10,000 paces is better than 9,000 we went on holidays with a guy who's 6 foot 4 and he had one and while he was pacing out 10,000 the rest of us were walking 100,000 the interview was called the tyranny of Fitbit goals which create an artificial happiness and they interviewed the author of a book called the wellness syndrome Andre Spicer and he says fundamentally the wellness industry works by shame he said the Fitbit bracelet is like a prison anklet they put on someone who's released on parole it's a bit of a hard take I know he says if you listen to the ads to be healthy and to be happy is no longer an option we all have to be happy and healthy that's why we judge each other on the size of our bodies and our obsession for physical wellness he reckons is because we've lost a sense of control we don't believe in

God anymore he's not a Christian writer we can't control the universe we can't control the economy our family or our job and the only thing we're left to control is our bodies and he says and I quote the 10,000 steps a day is the postmodern equivalent of rosary beads so Isaiah 55 is not another rule for mindfulness as helpful as that is it is about receiving it's the practice of how we receive the peace that God offers to us our God our maker our redeemer how do we experience it you know if God has prepared for us the enjoyment of his peace what are we supposed to do and the focus is on how we respond and in the chapter there are three practices three if you like peace practices three disciplines of peace for us to experience now and each one of them has a main verb and then and then a second thing they're kind of double barreled and the first practice of peace is come and then by did you notice as we come to 55 1 that

God speaks the language of desire hunger craving need satisfaction and God casts the net as widely as possible let me read verse 1 to you come everyone who thirsts you're thirsty for this peace come to the waters and he who has no money come by and eat come by wine and milk without money and without peace he says there's no qualification just your knowledge of your thirst and then he says four times come come come come I have done everything to prepare I am offering you something you cannot create for yourself but it means movement on your behalf we have to come it's very important you see in the Christian life the blessings of God don't just if they're there they don't just happen to us automatically God doesn't force his peace on you you have to come to him for it you can be completely convinced in your heart that God can give you the peace and that he wants to give you the peace but that conviction won't bring you peace you have to come and deal with

God you have to move toward him deliberately in your heart go out toward him in peace it's it's almost the same in verse 6 where God says seek the Lord while he may be found the word seek literally means stepping walking treading it's not just a mental exercise to you know to boost ourselves this is a personal seeking where we're seeking the person of God you know he is there you know what he's promised but you need to move toward him and this is this is not a grand and elaborate spiritual exercise we have to go through it's just a genuine drawing near in our heart toward him and when we draw near to him we then come to the second part which is there needs to be a genuine transaction between us and him which is why we are told to buy he who has no money come by and eat how can you buy without money it's a very clever picture whether it means this it means that true peace shalom peace is not a product of our hard work or spiritual insight or our best practices it means that it comes to us from

[15 : 03] God and that it's incredibly costly it cost the life of his son chapter 53 said it all the money in the world cannot buy shalom peace God still says you need to come to me and buy it because there needs to be a legitimate and real transaction this first discipline of peace is not just approaching God but it means somehow dealing with God and taking from him the peace that he offers it's not like a soup kitchen where you line up and just something is given to you somehow God dignifies and honours us and calls on us to bring to him our need and our lack of peace our poverty of peace to draw near to him and interact with him and purchase the peace which he's given us the money for it well there's no money involved it's a good thing and to show how good it is God says it's not really just water it's milk and wine to cover just about all of us nourishment enjoyment and to make sure we understand just how good it is God asks a very searching question at the beginning of verse 2 you've noticed

God asks questions of us in the Bible and the hardest ones are the question why he says why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labour for that which does not satisfy he's not saying don't pay your bills he's not saying don't work and you know work on a retirement or whatever this is much deeper than that he says what is it he said where is your real shalom what do you dream about or where does your mind go when you're really anxious you could track where you think your happiness and wholeness comes from he's talking about where our security is and he basically he's saying we can save ourselves a great a great deal of time and energy by just practicing this first discipline come and then by come and then by the second discipline is simple too it is here here and then eat Jeremy was talking a bit about this let me start halfway through verse two you look down at it listen diligently literally here in hearing to me and eat what is good delight yourselves in rich food incline your ear and come to me that your soul may live now you know what it's like to be in a conversation with someone when they're not really paying attention don't you you know when it's so boring that they start texting or it's so boring you start texting my son my son does youth ministry in Richmond and he has a box for youth group that before they come to the Bible talk he calls it the box of shame and everyone puts their cell phones in it including him before they open the Bible so they can listen together God says incline your ear turn it like a satellite dish tune in to what

God is saying so that you can truly hear this discipline is about learning how to be present with God when our minds are so easily distracted I think it means a number of things it means you've got to stop talking harder for some of us than others you just got to stop talking because you can't hear if you're talking at the same time just talking about sermons when you open the word of God trying to remove other distractions to close out other voices or take off the headphones slow down you're hearing the voice of the living God later in verse 11 he tells us God tells us he says my word is a powerful thing it's never going to come back to me void open empty we have to open our spiritual ears attend to his voice and then as we do we can eat it's when we hear God's promises of goodness and blessing and peace and invitation we don't just move to him and buy but this second discipline is a bit more personal we turn our ear and we eat and as Jeremy rightly said it's a picture of taking the blessing of God into our very system digesting it which means it's not about this very important peace is not about our personal equanimity you know our emotional poise it's about our growing friendship with God and it takes time to so if you look at the end of verse 3 it's very interesting he says God says I will make with you an everlasting covenant which is a friendship term in Isaiah my steadfast sure love for David those of you who are here with us a few years ago will remember that this verse is quoted about

Jesus in the book of Acts Jesus himself he is the Messiah and he often puts himself forward to us as food listen to John 6 Jesus says do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life which the son of man will give you I am the living bread that came down from heaven if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever and the bread I will give for the life of the world is my flesh whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him a couple of chapters later if anyone loves me he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him because the peace of God is not separate from God as he says in verse 2 come to me or in verse 3 listen to me you know that verse that we often use at the end of the service from the book of

Philippians where Paul says the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our peace is in Christ Jesus so I think listening and eating is like abiding and remaining in him it's consciously choosing to walk in his presence and delighting ourselves in the gifts that he has not easy and the third discipline is this it's returning returning and trusting then trusting and I think this is the most active and the most difficult of the three and what makes it the most difficult is that we have to choose to trust God and his word instead of ourselves and we have to be ready to acknowledge that we've turned away from him again again there's a certain I just get tired of doing it again I come back you know my ways have not been his ways I've been self-absorbed again I need his compassion and mercy in humility that's why this is the difficult discipline returning and trusting verse 7 speaking to the people of God 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 you can't return to God unless you turn away from other things and the two things

[22 : 57] God says here are your wicked ways and wicked ways are simply setting priorities in my life and making decisions not based on what God wants I might know what he wants or I might not even care what he feels about something I'm doing it my way and that includes our thinking because when we return to him there needs to be a willingness to bow our imagination and our thoughts toward him we cannot pretend with him and God's thoughts and ways are so vastly different than ours we have to learn how to trust his word we have to continually we have to continually come to his word he says my thoughts and ways are higher than yours this is vast chasm between them and he reaches his hand across them with his word just look verse 7 black and white there it is so you wonder if you can return to the Lord or what he's going to do verse 7 it says in black and white he will have compassion and he will abundantly pardon we might have walked a huge distance away from him our thoughts might be very dark and despairing pardon compassion are so far abundant they are way more than able capably able to deal with our deceptions or our doubts or our disobedience and yes you can't return to the Lord unless you turn away from other things you're not even going to want to unless you hear his promise his invitation his grace and that I think is one of the reasons why the sense of the peace of God this wellness with God this shalom peace comes and goes because God wants to wean us away so that we do trust him this is why I think we don't have it so often and we live our own way and we have our own thoughts and when when he does God kindly and compassionately tests us often through suffering it is the only way that we learn how to save the sweetness of his shalom peace we're going to cover this when we get back to 2 Corinthians but in chapter 12 the apostle Paul is given a thorn in the flesh some form of suffering he prays three times that God would remove it from him but he says but the Lord said to me my grace is sufficient for you my power is made perfect in weakness so I'm sorry to say that the process to get peace is not very peaceful it's going to ruin your equanimity and poise because you see it's about a deeper source of contentment and the peace of God which passes all understanding comes to us through and in our suffering and our illness and our depressions doesn't immunize us against them if you would allow me to be quite personal for just a moment just as an illustration I know many of you face much more but in 2009 I hit the wall as some people say I burned out and it came with deep depression physical pain mental pain emotional pain and I was off work for 14 months or so for the years before that event I was very busy I was doing lots of good things but if you would ask me and press me I don't think I was experiencing the peace of God a great deal but during the time I was forced off work

God the peace of God returned to me I don't know how to explain it really I couldn't do a crossword puzzle I couldn't keep up my end of a conversation I still can't sometimes I couldn't remember things but God waited till that time to give me give me back the gift of peace I really had nowhere else to go and I began to hear his voice saying these kinds of things you know come and buy listen and eat return and trust and it's not all the time I don't have it all the time but I know it more when it is absent than I used to I want to encourage you with two things after church today when you get to speak to your friends ask them about their experience of shalom whether they experience when they experience it how they experience I think that would be a good source of conversation and secondly to encourage us that God is more than willing and able to do this for us I just want to read the last four verses of the chapter I'm going to read from verse 10 to the end notice verse 10 God returns to the picture of water as the blessing of peace he says as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth making it bring forth and sprout giving seed to the sown bread to the eater so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth it shall not return to me empty shall accomplish that which I purpose it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it the same word that spoke creation into existence the same word that holds our universe in its existence now is planted as a seed in our hearts as we listen to it and it will not come it will do what God wants it to and now in verses 12 and 13 God lifts our eyes to way in the future when we will experience the complete and eternal fullness of shalom in ourselves never to be taken away and the lovely thing is creation itself joins us in that glory the freedom of the children of God just listen verse 12 and 13 he says to these people in exile you shall go out of all that bind you you shall go out in joy and be led forth in shalom and the mountains and the hills that often are difficult for us to climb over they're going to break forth into singing they're going to help us on our way and they're going to and the trees of the fields are going to clap their hands that's going to sound like something and instead of the thorn that you know the the desert bushes will come up cypress and the briar shall come up myrtle and it shall be shall make a name for the lord an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off amen