

The Invitation

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- [0 : 0 0] And turn with me, if you will, to the second lesson that was read, that being Isaiah 55 on page 615. Having a series of sermons titled, The Gospel According to Isaiah, this being the third one, from again Isaiah's 55th chapter.
- And one commentator described this chapter as a call to the needy that is unsurpassed in warmth and welcome, even in the New Testament.
- And I hope you found it that way. In some ways it doesn't have the same impact in some respects that it might have on those first hearers. In light of the first verse it says, Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.
- The waters in that land were much more sparse than they were in ours, especially on a morning like this. But nevertheless, it's important to bear that in mind as we come to this.
- And note that Isaiah 55 is full of hospitality from the beginning. But it's matched by God's holiness in the end. And on the one hand, it is down to earth with food and drink.
- [1 : 1 3] And at the same time, it's downright heavenly with the high thoughts of the Lord. Isaiah 55 is about the promise of renewal, verses 1 to 5, and the priority of repentance, verses 6 to 9.
- Renewal and repentance point us to the glory and the grace of the Lord. Grace abounding is one way. Another author captures the message of Isaiah 55. But glory abounding could be another way that we could express this whole chapter as it conveys the gospel of Christ.
- At first, I didn't know what our series, The Gospel According to Isaiah, had to do with Advent. Advent, of course, is preparing ourselves for the return of the Lord. That Advent when he'll come again to judge both the living and the dead.
- But the beginning scripture sentence for morning prayer during the season of Advent in the ancient tradition is this. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- So Isaiah 55, I think, is central to the practice and the discipline of Advent. With this, again, the first half of this is the promise of renewal, but then the practice or the priority, the priority of repentance.
- [2 : 2 6] So we look at that now, verses 1 through 5. The promise of renewal. Renewal is about the Lord. Renewal is something that begins and ends with God.
- In the 20th century, we saw a lot of renewal movements, including the charismatic, liturgical, missional, church planting, ecclesial. Isaiah 55 shows us the essentials of renewal.
- Renewal starts with the Lord's invitation. Hence the title of this sermon in your bulletin. It begins with, Come, everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters.
- He who has no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk. Without money, without price. Renewal happens at the call or the invitation of the Lord. And verse 1 shows this fourfold invitation of the Lord.

The Lord invites the needy. He invites the thirsty, hungry, and poor. And the needy know their condition. And they can't deny their need for the renewal that is by the grace of the Lord and at His invitation.

[3 : 33] And so it begins with this invitation. But not long after that, there is a question that's raised. Renewal often raises questions. And so we have this, Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

And so often the needy spend what little they have on the superfluous at best or the sinful at worst. And the rich can be the same as well.

We're not always the best stewards of the gifts that God has given us. But more importantly though is our motivation for labor, work, vocation.

And so Isaiah says, Why do you spend your labor for that which does not satisfy? Notice that the question isn't what or how. But it is why.

Why do we labor, work? Why do we do what we do? Renewal has an end, a goal, an outcome in mind. And the Lord knows that He is our satisfaction.

[4 : 35] Subtle is the purpose and the mystery of our labor for renewal. That is for life. And so the Lord prepares us for works in advance that He has in mind for us.

Our good works, Matthew says, or reports Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, Our works give glory to the Lord. So the relationship between labor and faith then is very critical when we think about the subject of renewal and God giving us life.

Think about your own work. Paul Stevens writes this about the relationship between our work, our labor, and satisfaction. He says this, which I think is quite insightful. He says, We will not find satisfaction in our work through faith in God.

Think about it. Is that how you go through the work? But we will find satisfaction in God through our experience of work. And so apart from the renewal of our faith in the Lord, we won't know the satisfaction of God because our satisfaction is in Him first.

And then our labor follows from that where we find our satisfaction back in God. And so we won't know the satisfaction of the Lord and the impact of the labor of it apart from what He gives to us by grace through renewal.

[5 : 54] So that's the second thing. Renewal reveals then also what we see here, the Lord's exclamation. The promise of renewal is for those who will listen, delight, and incline, and hear the words of the Lord.

Those are in verses 2 and 3. And why is this? And this is where the key verse is for the idea of renewal in these verses. It's that your soul may live.

That's renewal. This is the key verse for these first five verses. It's the promise of renewal. Renewal is a soul alive to the Lord.

It is a church alive to God. It is a nation that's awakened to the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. It's the promise of renewal. Or that other word that we don't hear so much these days, which is revival.

Implicitly, we are dead then in our trespasses and sin if we're not alive and we need to be renewed. And we are made alive at the invitation and the initiation and the inspiration of our Lord.

[6 : 59] The Lord makes us new through his work of salvation by grace. It is the Lord who can do this and we can't do this for ourselves. Renewal and the promise of it is the Lord's then welcome work of grace, a grace that is abounding.

Abounding in the soul of men and women, the soul of a church, and maybe even the soul of a nation. That's the Lord's explanation that we may live. But then there's an explanation that follows as well in verses 4 through 5.

Why does the Lord renew? He renews and revises because he is the Lord. Look what it says at the end of verse 5. Ruling like a God who is a glorious king.

Why? Because he is holy and he purifies like clean water for bathing. He transmits his glory to those he renews. And we are made to the Lord's glory and for the glorification of him.

So, who does the Lord glorify? Not only why though, this is what's so abounding about God's grace. It is for all the nations through this one nation of Israel in two parts, north and south, which includes Judah as well.

[8 : 13] And so here in these first five verses, the promise of renewal by grace and the glory of the Lord which is abounding. And then we turn to the next section.

Which has to do with repentance. Verses 6 through 9, we see that after renewal, the promise of renewal then is the priority of repentance.

And so in these verses of repentance, there's this priority and even this pattern that's sent out. I think that there's kind of a three-fold pattern. If you think of repentance, think of it in three A's with me if you will.

Well, first of all, it's acknowledging that there's sin in our life. Secondly, it's accepting the forgiveness of the Lord. And then finally, it's amending our lives according to God's ways.

So look with me then at this first verse of this. 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.

[9 : 21] Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. Verses 6 and the first half of verse 7, we get this acknowledgement that we are sinners.

We've gone a different way. And so in that, we see that we are identified as something that we don't like to think of ourselves in verse 7 as wicked but also as unrighteous.

Mindful of John Newton and his great hymn, Amazing Grace, who dared to call himself a wretch. Here we see Isaiah identifying us as wicked.

But we've gone a way that is wrong. And we're unrighteous in our own thoughts and in God's sight. And so the first pattern of repentance is that we acknowledge that in fact we are headed in the wrong direction.

And we're unrighteous. But no more do we admit that, come to terms with that, except that, that Isaiah then brings to bear this idea of repentance when he says, then let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

[10 : 36] Therein is repentance, headed in one direction, calling us back to return and go into a different direction. And what is it that we find when we head in that different direction, when we return to the Lord, we find that he'll have compassion on us as he promises and pardon.

Compassion on those who are sinners and gone the wrong way, but also pardon for those who are actually like criminals as it were in our sin. And pardon is given to us very freely. So the second part of repentance is given there.

That is that we're accepting the forgiveness, the pardon, the compassion that we so desperately need from the Lord. And then finally after that, we're drawn to the amendment of our lives according to God's way.

And Isaiah writes this, 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 yours, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Finally, after accepting this forgiveness, we are invited, again, by invitation to amend our lives. We can boast no good works, but once we've turned and received God's pardon, we see how different the Lord's ways really are from our ways.

[11 : 54] And our ways and thoughts will never match the ways of the Lord, but would we worship the Lord if he weren't so far beyond us? As it were.

However, the Lord wants us to think after and like him, and so we repent. And why do we repent? Well, because it honors the Lord who is all-powerful and all-knowing.

He's the one who knows all. And when we know that, then we amend our life by the invitation that he issues to us. And it's because he is so different than us, and his ways we recognize are not our ways, that we then want our ways to become like his ways as we amend our lives.

Let me put it kind of this way to us as we think about this, accepting our sin in our life, acknowledging that we're depending on God's forgiveness and amending our lives. C.H. Spurgeon said this on one occasion.

If you are renewed by God's grace and were to meet your old self, I am sure you would be very anxious to get out of his or her company.

[13 : 08] See the insight of repentance into that and the renewal of our lives. And here we are, and we're confronted that God's ways are not our ways. We come to him by grace. We accept his forgiveness in our life, and we're confronted with our old self, as it were.

And no longer do we want to remain in that kind of place, in that position, but by the power of the Lord's work in our life, we go his ways after we think his thoughts and live what it is that actually the Lord actually has in mind for us as he renews us through the priority of repentance according to his revealed word in our life, which is actually how the end of this chapter closes.

Well, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.