

Isaiah 55:1-3 “The Free, Filling Feast”

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 December 2024

Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Kids, if you'll join me up here on the steps, we're going to talk for just a couple of minutes. So glad that y'all are here this morning. We are talking every Sunday this month about things that kids get excited about, about Christmas, right?

Because you're excited about Christmas? Yeah. Yeah, and we're talking about why we really celebrate Christmas. Last week we talked about lights, remember? And that Jesus is the light of the world.

That's what they remind us, isn't it? This week I wanted to ask you about something else. What food do you like to eat at Christmas? What do you like to eat?

Gingerbread men. Gingerbread men. What else? Cookies. Cookies. Cookies. Pies. Cookies.

[1 : 02] More cookies. Me too. I would pick cookies. Gingerbread houses. Gingerbread houses.

There's so much yummy food at Christmas, isn't there? I like to eat gingerbread houses.

Yeah. I brought something else this morning. I brought, do you know what this is? Candy cane.

Candy cane. Nothing says Christmas like a candy cane, right? I do. The best thing I like at Christmas is candy canes.

Yes. I like candy canes too. And a lot of times we get these at Christmas. Would you like this one?

Mm-hmm. Yeah. All right. Awesome. That'll be \$1. No.

\$1. That's what it said on the box. It said candy canes were \$1. Yeah. \$1. Don't you have to pay for your Christmas candy? Yeah. Don't you all? Don't you all? When you get candy, you pay for it?

No. No? When you have a big Christmas dinner at your house, don't you pay for your Christmas dinner? No. You don't. You don't.

[2 : 00] Well, you know what? You know what? That candy cane, Alex, that's going to be free for you, okay? I'm going to let you keep that. You know why? You know why you can keep that one?

Why? I paid for it. Oh. Yeah. It was one that I bought it at the store. And I brought it so I could give it to you. Do you know why your Christmas dinner is free for you and you don't have to pay when you eat?

What? Who paid for it? What? Probably your parents or grandparents or somebody else paid for it, didn't they? I'm going to let you all have a candy cane, but not yet, okay?

Only at the end do we get candy canes, so pay attention. That's a really important thing to remember when we talk about Christmas, right? Because Jesus is born to give us a free feast.

All sorts of good things like love and forgiveness and friendship with him. And we don't even have to pay for it, do we? Why? We don't have to pay because who paid for all of that for us?

[3 : 02] Jesus. Jesus did. Jesus was born. We've been singing this morning and talking already that Jesus was born not just to be born, but then to live and die on the cross.

That Jesus was going to pay a very high price so that he could give us all kinds of things for free, right? So Christmas is the story of free food and lots of other things for you because Jesus paid for it.

Can you remember that? When your parents tell you it's okay to eat this candy cane, because you're not going to eat it before that, right? When they tell you it's okay to eat this candy cane, you remember that it is free for you because somebody else paid for it.

And that Jesus' love and Jesus' forgiveness is just like that. And when your candy cane is gone and your hands are just sticky and that's all that reminds you that you had a candy cane, you can go wash them and remember that Jesus' love and forgiveness washes you clean forever.

Isn't that awesome? Let's pray and then I'll give you a candy cane. Jesus, we are so thankful that you love us, that you were born, and you paid the price of coming to this earth and then dying on the cross so that we could know you and know your love and have our sins forgiven forever.

[4 : 19] Thank you so much. I pray these kids would understand that this Christmas, that as they celebrate, they will know they're celebrating the free gift that Jesus has given them. We're so thankful and we thank you in your name.

Amen. All right, Miss Angela is going to make sure that everybody gets a candy cane, okay? Be patient and very calm as you get your candy cane. And then you can go back and some of you are going to kids worship, okay?

If you're going to kids worship, kindergarten and first grade, you can go as soon as you have your candy cane. You can walk out the back and they'll meet you back there. Alex, thank you. You don't have to have a candy cane.

That's all right. We'll get you something else, okay? Okay. I learned about candy cane at school.

Oh, you did? Oh, right. That's all right. Because of the stripes mean of Jesus' love.

That's right. It can remind us that Jesus died for us. And the white is... I forgot what the white was. It washes us clean from all our sins. That's awesome.

[5 : 21] Thanks, Bennett. A good candy cane lesson for all of us. Thought you'd appreciate hearing it. I don't know what you look forward to eating at Christmas.

Maybe your idea of a Christmas feast looks more like this picture up here than the candy that the kids and I are... I mean, the kids are looking forward to.

Well, we're going to look at Isaiah 55 for a few minutes this morning. Because God invites all of us to a Christmas feast.

To understand that it's a feast because of Christmas, we're going to have to back up a little bit.

Because when you read it, you might not immediately realize that this is a Christmas feast.

But we're going to go back through the first 54 chapters of Isaiah and later this week when we finish... No, we're going to go very quickly through the first 54 chapters of Isaiah to get us to where we're going to read the first three verses of chapter 55.

[6 : 32] God sends the prophet Isaiah to tell people that exile is coming. There are glimmers of hope in the beginnings of Isaiah's prophecy.

We saw one last week. There's a child coming who's going to be born. And so there's some good stuff like that in the first half of the book. But most of it's pretty dark. It's about sin and idolatry and punishment and exile is coming.

But God also sends Isaiah to tell his people that God is coming. At chapter 40 of Isaiah, if you want to flip back there, if you've got your Bible open, we're going to run through starting at chapter 40.

There's this distinct shift. After all the darkness and heartache of exile, what's the word to start chapter 40? Comfort. Comfort ye my people, says your God.

And the comfort that's offered is that God is coming. In His glory, He's coming. In fact, He's coming in the person of the servant of the Lord, the promised Messiah.

[7 : 38] So we start to hear chapter 42, Isaiah's servant songs. There's several of them. Placing hope in the righteous ruler, the light of the nations.

So Isaiah says, don't fear. Chapter 43. I'm forgiving your sins. Redeeming my beloved people is God's message.

And this message of good news is not merely for the remnant of God's people who will be brought back to Jerusalem. But the good news spreads to the ends of the earth through this servant, this promised light of the nations.

That's chapter 49. As we keep reading, we learn in a very familiar passage that the servant will be obedient, righteous. But in spite of all that, he'll eventually be rejected and die.

And die for others' sins. Chapter 53, right? But he will not only die, he'll live again. Chapter 54 promises the hope of life in his glorious kingdom where Yahweh's steadfast love and his covenant of peace will never be removed.

[8 : 46] That's where it's all headed. It's ramping up. The promises have reached a crescendo. So God has come. And we turn to chapter 55. Listen to how God caps it all off.

He's excited too. 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? 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 for David.

At the pinnacle of it all is a feast. A Christmas feast because God is coming, right? That's the point of this whole section of Isaiah.

[9 : 46] It's a feast and God's people, the Jews, are invited. And in a fresh way here the nations are invited to this feast. And even by the end of chapter 55 the whole creation is invited to the feast celebrating God's presence with us.

Our Christmas feasts, our feast to celebrate the coming of the Christ. That's what Christmas means, right? So is Isaiah 55. There's so much we could say about feasting in the Bible that points us to Jesus.

I want to focus on two things highlighted in these verses that I just read. Two things this morning about the feast. The first is this is a free feast.

It is possible that I get more excited about free food than these kids got excited about the candy cane. But there's a reason that the free aspect of this feast is so important.

Notice verse 1. Listen, don't miss this, friends.

[11 : 03] The greatest feast ever is the one that you sit at for free. Not because it's worthless. It's just priceless.

No money here. No price. Which is really good for us because we didn't have any money that could buy the covenant love of God. That could buy life for our souls.

That could buy relationship with the holy God of the universe. How are you going to buy that? Many of us are well aware we don't have anything we can use to buy that.

We know we don't deserve to feast with God, to sit at His table, to be in relationship with a holy God and pretend we have fellowship with Him like we're on His level.

We know that's not true. We know we've been running away from Him for years. Or some of us, we've tried to run toward Him, but we keep falling on our faces.

[12 : 01] There's no way we can get all the way to His perfection. If that describes you this morning, and I hope one of those does, you're either running from Him and knowing you're far away, or you're running towards Him and feeling like you fall short, then there's good news here, because you're exactly the kind of person that He's inviting to this feast.

Are you thirsty? Good news, you're in. Are you bankrupt? Good news, you're in. Despairing of hope? Ready to give up?

Good news, you're in. This is a feast of grace, where the misfit toys go through the line first and sit in a place of honor.

Listen, contrary to popular belief and many Christmas songs, the Christmas feast that God gives does not celebrate all the good people getting their just desserts.

That's nice list, naughty list. We know how that works. That's not this. No, no, no, no. Christmas celebrates God delivering a feast to the hungry and the undeserving.

[13 : 17] That is grace. That's the way He works. Grace welcomes the prodigal home from the pig food to the feast. Read Luke 15. Grace gives living water to a woman at a well who has been drinking around.

Read John 4. Grace goes out to the streets and the alleyways of the city and says, bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame to the banquet that the king is throwing.

Read Luke 14. So you can actually quit polishing your resume and trying to earn an invite. And you can receive empty-handed the invite of the gracious king of the Christmas feast.

You can come lame in both feet like Mephibosheth and eat always at the king's table. In fact, you can be empty, bankrupt, spiritually dead because grace works by raising the dead, not by rewarding the living.

Amen? That's Robert Farrar Capone. And that is crazy. I mean, seriously, can you think about how ridiculous that is? That if you were going to possibly have a seat at the table with the holy king, that if you were going to get to feast at what he's laid out that is going to give true life to your soul, that if you're going to get to revel in the king's love, I mean, certainly you've got a tab to be covered, right?

[14 : 47] Anybody? Anybody got a tab that needs to be covered for coming into that kind of feast? Certainly I pay something to be there. That's got to be too good to be true.

Someone told me this week, Pastor, there is no such thing as a free lunch. I learned that in high school. There's a free Christmas feast. Isaiah said, it is that good.

It is that true. Look at verse 7. Who comes and eats his fill at God's free feast? What kind of people are there? Let the wicked forsake his way and return to the Lord and find compassion.

Let the unrighteous man give up his lifestyle of a failed performance and his bad ideas and come to God. Because when the unrighteous person comes to God, God will ignore him, right?

No, it's worse than that. God will humiliate him with a guilt trip to end all guilt trips because he's been running the other way. No. No. God will abundantly pardon.

[15:53] That is the way that the God of grace works. His thoughts and his ways are much higher than ours. You've heard this verse before, right? Maybe you thought, that just means I don't understand God.

It means something way more specific than that. It means that God is way more gracious and his feast is way more free than you could possibly imagine. We don't even understand how he gives free food to the hungry.

He's that gracious. His feast is that free. Now, if there's a free feast like that, that you're invited to, you need to be really sure you know who's paying the tab.

Because you've got a big bill you've run up. Tanya and Evan, not their real names, came to Manor House Food Bank just this last Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving.

They came to get some food for Thanksgiving. They're a young couple who's financially devastated recently by Evan's cancer. He's in the midst of chemo, not been able to work.

[17:03] The director was expecting them. She called me over and asked me to carry multiple boxes of food out to their car for their Thanksgiving dinner.

Actually, what had happened is that the executive chef at the new Orion Amphitheater here in Huntsville had decided he had a good kitchen and no events going on. He'd used his kitchen to cook Thanksgiving dinner to give it to the hungry and homeless in Huntsville.

Isn't that cool? And so he made all this food and she'd save some up for them. Then I got to walk with Tanya through the line getting vegetables and bread and so forth to go with it.

And at the end of the line, I said, hey, you want any dessert? She seemed really hesitant to ask for anything more. But her eyes brightened. She said, oh, do you think they might have a birthday cake?

Evan's birthday is actually tomorrow, too. And I don't think I'm going to have any time to make anything for us or any chance. And the lady behind the table heard her and her eyes lit up, too.

[18:06] She said, I just put one down. Stay right there. And she goes in public. She had made a wonderful birthday cake. She threw it on top of all the other food on the box I was carrying. So I carried it out to the car, unloaded for them a trunk full of a Thanksgiving birthday feast.

They could have had all of you over for dinner. And Tanya, with tears running down her face, she threw her arms around me and she sobbed. Thank you so much.

Y'all, the chef at the Orion made the food. Publix baked the cake. I said, um, I just carried it to your car.

I didn't provide the food. Well, you can thank whoever did, she said. I said, why don't we just thank him together? Can I pray with y'all?

Because this feast came from God. And she said, that's for sure. Listen, just like the candy canes that I gave the kids, the food at God's Christmas feast is free to us, but costly to someone else.

[19:16] Someone else has covered the tab. Jesus, the servant of the Lord, lays aside the amazing glories of heaven, right? Think of what it cost him.

He lays aside all the trappings of glory to come down. He humbles himself to be born in a manger, outcast in a way, and then to live in a broken, rebellious, hateful world.

And then he dies in physical, emotional, spiritual torment on the cross to pay the tab for our sins, right?

He takes the ticket. He signs his name. He says, paid in full to Telestai. It is finished. It is paid.

Won't you quit trying to buy your own ticket? To work hard enough to get into the feast? Won't you just rejoice in the one who gave it to you for free and throw your arms around him to say, thank you so much.

[20:21] Oh, come, let us adore him for what he has done. This Christmas feast, like so many other feasts throughout the Bible, they're reminders of what God has done.

That's why we're celebrating his provision that he delivers, that he redeems, that he saves. He invites us to come and buy something that we desperately need, but could never afford for absolutely free.

Hallelujah. What a Savior. One other thing that God doesn't want you to miss about this feast. His free Christmas feast is a filling feast.

You won't leave hungry. Verse 2. 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. Delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear and come to me. Hear that your soul may live. Good food.

[21 : 32] Rich food. Satisfying food. Obviously for our souls, even more than our bodies, it's making clear here. This Christmas feast is going to fill you that deep.

Did you notice what it is that fills you? Did you see God line up, come to the waters now with, in verse 3, come to me? God himself is the fulfilling one.

The thirst quencher. That's why Jesus would stand up at the feast in John 7 and say, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Jesus, the one who comes to pay your tab, to invite you to the free feast, is the one who gives you himself to fill you forever.

He tells the woman at the well this in John chapter 4. Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. And then a couple chapters later, he tells 5,000 plus people who've just eaten their fill, I am the bread of life.

[22 : 38] Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. That's Jesus' promise. And so God asks us this morning why we are not fulfilled when he offers such a filling feast.

Will you ask yourself that question honestly this morning? Are we eating at another table? Why do we work and spend ourselves for things that don't fulfill?

Will you ask yourself that question?

And your mouth is parched and your stomach is aching. And many of you are ready to stop and just give up. When a truck finally pulls up and the driver says, Hey, I come this way all the time.

And I just wanted you to know, you're 30 miles away from a town. But in that town is a wonderful mom and pop restaurant. It's so generous that they love when this happens.

[24 : 06] I'll call ahead and I'll tell them I'll have a group there in about 30 minutes. They love feeding people who get stuck out here. You just hop in the back of the truck and I'll take you there.

Sure enough, you pile in and when you arrive in the town, there are tables full of home-cooked food ready for you, piping hot.

There are pitchers of cold ice water. They're ready. They're free for you. But off to the side of the restaurant a little ways up the hill is a shack with a sign that reads, Sand and sawdust, \$5 a cup. And some from your group drag themselves over there, use their last bit of energy to make their way up the hill, dig in their wallets for five bucks, and then they start trying to pour the sand and the sawdust down their dry throats.

If that happened, would you be at all surprised if the truck driver and mom and pop came over to them and as they poured sand and sawdust down their throats said, Why?

[25 : 19] Why? Why are you spending your money for that which will not satisfy? That seems to be God's perspective here.

He has just set the table with rich food and refreshing drink, all for free, inviting us all to come. And now he's saying, Friend, why aren't you coming?

Sand and sawdust? Don't do that. Come to me and eat and live. I want to ask that why question to both Christians and non-Christians before we close.

First, to Christians, Why aren't you coming to the free and filling Christmas feast? Why do we sometimes still feel so empty?

It's not that God has gotten stingy. It's not that he's run out of food. It may be that we are seeking to feed ourselves, facing the same struggle God's people have often faced through generations.

[26 : 33] In the words of the prophet Jeremiah, Maybe we've forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, wells for ourselves that are actually broken cisterns that can hold no waters.

Buying sand and sawdust instead of enjoying God's free Christmas feast. Y'all, this is a good time of year to consider what we are looking to for fulfillment.

I think Christmas is especially a time where we look to the perfect thing to fulfill us. I know this because every Christmas I start looking for the perfect Christmas sermon.

I feel it. I want everybody to love it and tell me how great it is and that will fill me up the perfect Christmas sermon. That is probably not what's on your Christmas list.

Often we look for the perfect gift, don't we? I'll be, if I just get that, I'll be happy. How'd that go for you the last year?

[27 : 44] You got the thing you asked for that you knew would make you happy. When we look for the perfect home, decorated beautifully, the perfect family, the perfect Christmas card, the perfect Christmas experience, and y'all, they are sand and sawdust.

The whole point of Christmas is that the perfect relationship here by His grace at this feast has already come to us. You don't have to look for perfection anywhere else.

Father, forgive us for that seeking perfect Christmas. It's just a microcosm, God, of our lives all year for digging other wells.

But I think we might need to ask God to forgive us mostly for forsaking Him, for not drinking deeply of the living water of Jesus.

Why aren't we with Him more? Why aren't our lives shaped by Him more? Why aren't we speaking more of Him to others who are thirsty? It must be we're not believing what we say we do.

[28 : 58] That He is the one who quenches our thirst and fills our souls forever. Christians, come. Come to the feast again. And be filled.

To those of you who are not Christians, you may think this is crazy talk. Maybe you've come to church for years and you're like, what is this guy on about? He's actually pretending this is all real. Maybe you've celebrated Christmas your whole life, but you honestly don't believe Jesus lived and died and rose to give you life that is full and free.

The good life in your mind, it's still out there somewhere. You'll find it one day. And I would say to you, why keep looking when this world of sand and sawdust has not satisfied or fulfilled you yet?

The one who told you it wouldn't is still inviting you to His free and full feast. He calls you to come. You've probably heard this invitation before, but Isaiah says, seek the Lord while He may be found. Don't delay. Don't delay. If you think you're thirsty now, a bit dissatisfied with life, longing for fulfillment, God says that hell is a place of unquenchable flames where those who have insisted on drinking sand and sawdust cry out for one drop of water to quench their thirst.

[30 : 32] May no one in here ever taste that agony. When Jesus today stands to offer you water, living water, life, grace, forgiveness, rest, purpose, hope, fulfillment, joy, He's inviting you to come.

Won't you come to Him? Jesus is not insisting you go get your act together before you come back. He is inviting you to come now as you are. His final invitation in the Bible's last chapter is let the one who is thirsty come.

Let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Priceless. Because Jesus has paid it all. There is nothing for you to pay. You throw yourself on His mercy. You receive His grace and you know His life forever. For all of us, coming to God's free and filling feast can be hard for countless reasons.

I don't want to pretend it's not, that there aren't hurdles even now in your own heart. It may be your pride in not receiving grace. I don't take handouts. It's not a charity case. It may be our shame in not deserving it and we know it deeply.

[32 : 00] We feel it. I think for a lot of us, it's our fear of a God that we don't know at all or maybe we think we know Him and we just don't understand Him.

And so we're afraid to get too close. All sorts of things keep us from coming. C.S. Lewis understood this well in the silver chair.

He writes of an encounter of a thirsty girl named Jill and a Christ figure lion. Are you not thirsty? Said the lion. I am dying of thirst. Said Jill. Then drink. Said the lion. May I? Could I?

Would you mind going away while I do? Said Jill. Jill. The lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

[33 : 05] The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. Will you promise not to do anything to me if I do come? Said Jill. Jill. I make no promise.

Said the lion. Jill was so thirsty now that without noticing it she had come a step nearer. Do you eat girls? She said. I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms.

Said the lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting nor as if it were sorry nor as if it were angry. It just said it. I daren't come and drink.

Said Jill. Then you will die of thirst. Said the lion. Oh dear. Said Jill coming another step nearer. I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.

There is no other stream. Said the lion. Come. Everyone.

[34 : 11] Who thirsts. There is no other stream. But at this one. Hear him. Hear him and your soul will live.

His offer stands today for you to come because it is an everlasting covenant in God's love. And this table that we're about to come to together is a sign to point you to that covenant promise that he still makes and to the God who fulfilled it once and for all and he will fulfill it for you.

It's the covenant Jesus told his disciples about on the night he was betrayed. He took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples. As I'm ministering in his name give this bread to you now.

He said take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And then after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant.

It's the way we relate now. It's a covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

That's what I'm offering you. I'm giving it to you. Drink from it.

[35 : 21] All of you. For as often as you eat this bread and you drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. I am aware that if you eat this bread and drink this wine you will still want lunch and coffee when you leave today.

This table is not itself the forever free and filling feast. However it is a sign of that forever free and filling feast that is real and true.

So Christian from this church or any other if that is your hope if you're willing to repent even now of the sand and sawdust you've been pouring down your throat and come drink of Jesus afresh then you come and celebrate with us and look forward to celebrating forever in his kingdom.

If you don't find your soul filled by Jesus or you still have a lot of questions that you would like to ask him before coming what should you do? that's a very fair place to be.

I would say first don't come and take the sign the sample so to speak this morning it would leave you empty and aching for more but in the name of Jesus I invite you to come to him this is pointing you to his body and blood that give you real life and real drink and will satisfy your soul forever why why keep chasing anything else when he has come to give you this you can talk to him right now as we pray if you don't know where to start in talking to him join the club we'd love to walk with you through that at Southwood we are merely beggars telling other beggars where we have found bread and we'd love to talk with you about him the bread of life the living water come and eat and drink and thirst no more let's pray Jesus what a rich promise and yet you stand behind it and you continue to and you've met us here this morning that we might know that it's real and that you still fulfill and you do satisfy forever use these common elements to point us to the forever free and filling feast that you are thank you that we can know you thank you that you're here at this table with us as we celebrate and we thank you in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org