

God's Grand Vision: Total Satisfaction

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[0 : 00] Good morning everybody. I'm going to ask you to bow your heads and pray with me. Heavenly Father, as we come to your word now, as we come to you, we pray that you would speak to us from your word, by your spirit, that we would be grown in Christ, that we would be drawn closer to yourself in truth.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Queen Marguerite got one. Barack Obama didn't. Tim Matheson got one. Tony Abbott didn't. Martin Fieldler, the butcher, got one. Princess Mary didn't. Brian Naylor, the postman, got one. Chris Jones didn't.

What are we talking about? But I've got one, look. And if I'd got one, it would say something like, if you got an invitation to the royal wedding, if you were lucky enough, the invitation would read something like this.

The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by the Queen to invite Brian Rowe to the marriage of His Royal Highness Prince William of Wales, KG, with Miss Catherine Middleton at Westminster Abbey on Friday the 29th of April, 2011, at 11am.

[1 : 20] And in case you didn't notice, that was last Friday night. You mightn't care. And maybe you do. I think a lot of people did care.

But an invitation is something which demands a response. So somebody makes an offer to you, and you have to decide how you're going to respond to that offer.

So you're asked to come, and immediately the question sort of hangs in the air, what are you going to do? How are you going to respond?

And I imagine that if any one of us here received an invitation to the royal wedding, the first time we would have asked is, or the first thing we would have asked is, is this for real?

Is somebody taking the mickey out of me? It just seems too good to be true. When you come to Isaiah 55, which I hope you've got your Bibles open because that's what I'm preaching from this morning, the invitation to come is a striking and surprising one which really sounds too good to be true.

[2 : 36] So verse 1. Come, come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. And come is the very first word used here. I think this is one of the great words of the Bible.

It's such a, it's a winsome word. It's an invitational word. It's God speaking and there is this wonderful invitation to come into his presence. And it's an invitation to those who don't have to come and to receive.

And if you're thirsty, come to me for water. And if you haven't got money to shop with or a credit card to put it on, come and buy and eat and it's free and there's no cost.

It's just zilch. Now, if somebody offers me something for nothing, as they do all the time on the phone, I'm looking for the trick.

[3 : 41] I'm looking for the catch, the snag. You know, what is it that they really want from me? Show me the fine print. Tell me what the bottom line is. Somebody's on the phone the other day and you just know they're reading off their script.

And I'm saying, I'm very sorry. I don't want this. And if you don't stop talking, I'm just going to hang up anyway. And did. But when a free gift is real, it is an enormous relief.

It is just such a blessing. I experienced much-needed kindness and generosity in Chatswood the other day. I was in a borrowed car with my elderly mum and my nephew and the engine blew up suddenly and unexpectedly in the middle of Daisy Street.

I only had to drive two spaces to get the car off the road and I stopped dead because I just thought it was on fire that there was that much smoke pouring out from underneath the bonnet. And I was stranded.

I hope it doesn't happen to you, new car, Asher. But I was stranded. It won't. It's a lot newer than mine. I was stranded without NRMA in somebody else's car with the phone battery going flat and fairly desperate to get to my daughter's graduation in two hours' time.

[5 : 06] And I was at the mercy of others. I needed the generosity of others. And even when I ring the NRMA, I said, we'll give you a table. It'll be two hours. I won't tell you the whole story, but within an hour, Karen from the office had taken my mum to safe care.

Brian Tung had helped me push the car. He's really good at pushing cars. He does have muscle underneath that slight body. And I received a free tome.

Didn't charge me, even without NRMA on that car. And I made it to my daughter's graduation with half an hour to spare. But I was completely dependent on the help of others and was relieved to receive what I urgently needed.

And Isaiah 55 is this invitation from God to come to his abundant banquet and he invites us to receive all that is on the table and he says, you can have it for free.

And so you say, well, what's on the table? What's for dinner? What's the menu? And that takes a bit of unpacking.

[6 : 30] So you look at verse two. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me. Eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fear.

Give ear and come to me. Hear me that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. Now big to the background of Isaiah are the four kings of Judah who reigned during the time that Isaiah prophesied.

So he prophesied over the reign of four different kings of Judah. And the kings struggle with what all governments do. They're a bit of a minnow compared to the size of the surrounding superpowers. And the question for them is, who do you trust? What alliances can I make that will keep me safe into the future? I think Julia Gillard was probably doing something like that when she was in China the other day and making bilateral agreements on us warship exchanges and visits to one another's countries.

We have a lot of trading interests between us at stake. We seek friendship for protecting our interests. But Judah is God's country.

[7 : 51] And the people of Judah are God's people. And the prophet rebukes them and he says, why spend money on what is not bread and your labour on what does not satisfy?

He's referring to the tribute money that they have been paying to the Assyrian king to keep him from invading. They've been paying real money.

And they've also been doing real work, building for themselves some of the golden idols of the surrounding nations and they're getting nothing for their efforts.

And that's sort of the emptiness of religion, isn't it? You know, you can invest in something big and you think it looks really great, something that looks pretty fancy and delivers nothing. If it's fake, it doesn't work no matter how good it looks.

But the prophet calls the people of God back to trust the promises of God and the word of God. God's not unknown to his people, but he is forgotten.

[8 : 57] And Isaiah reminds the people how God has revealed himself and he's done that through a series of covenants, ordeals, which he's made with them throughout history. And so you see that in Isaiah chapter 54 and now in Isaiah 55.

So back in chapter 54, in verse 80, he says, In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness, I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.

To me, this is like the days of Noah when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. Now, it's sort of hidden, so you've got to draw it out.

But in Isaiah 54, he speaks about things like enlarging your tents and he refers to himself as Yahweh, their Redeemer. So he uses language which reminds the people of three different covenants and promises that God had made.

That's in chapter 54. So with Noah, I walked across the harbour bridge the other day and coming right down into the harbour underneath this was a rainbow. Couldn't see the gold, but you could see the rainbow hitting the surface of the water.

[10:08] Really beautiful. Well, that's the sign that God gave Noah to say that he would never again destroy the earth in such a way. And with Abraham and his promises, he promises to enlarge their tents and to make them a great nation.

And with Moses, when he gave the sign of circumcision, sealing the nation that God had redeemed out of Egypt. And so he's saying, God has spoken to Noah.

God has spoken to Abraham. God has spoken to Moses. And now in chapter 55, God has spoken to David and God's word and God's promises are still valid.

They still stand. And so in verse 3 of chapter 55, I will make an everlasting covenant with you. My faithful love promised to David.

See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and a commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not and nations that do not know you will hasten to you because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.

[11:22] He's saying, this is 300 years after David, the promise of an everlasting, and they're about to go into exile and the northern kingdom already has.

But he's saying, the promise of an everlasting covenant with David still stands. God's promise is firm. It will be an eternal kingdom that will never come to an end, and it will be a kingdom to whom nations will be drawn and they will submit to the king.

There's a lot of parallels between this part of Isaiah, the last, you know, from Isaiah 40 on to the very end of the Bible in the book of Revelation.

A lot of very similar images which are expressed. And here, Isaiah is talking about a kingdom which will never end and to whom the nations will be drawn.

In Revelation chapter 11, there's a great cry in the heavens, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ and he will reign forever and ever.

[12:35] Sing it. It's the Messiah, isn't it? And he will reign. Go on. That's all you're getting. And then in Revelation 22, I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony to the churches.

I am the root and offspring of David and the bright morning star. The spirit and the bride say, come, and let him who hears say, come, and whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

So at the end of the Bible, the eternal promises of God to David are affirmed as still current and relevant just as they were by Isaiah in his time.

And at the end of the Bible, they are declared in the kingship of Christ. And so this free banquet is an invitation to return to the word of God and to trust the eternal promises of God.

And he is effectively saying what Paul writes to Christians in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20, for no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ.

[13:59] And so through him, the amen is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now there might be a lot of reasons why you are sitting in church this morning and perhaps have forgotten God and his word.

And you might be playing around with temptation and sin which is ripping the heart out of your walk with Christ.

And he hasn't walked away from you, but you have been walking with your back turned to him and you know it. Or maybe differently, maybe you have been bitterly hurt in life.

You might be like my friends whose son was tragically killed at 15. And brought to a place in life where it is very difficult to think that God is nearby and even cares about what has happened to you. And perhaps even asking the question that Philip Yancey asks in his book, what good is God? You might be like the people in Isaiah's time.

[15:24] Very clever in the world of politics. Savvy in the business world. Able to make your way safely with the security of wealth or education.

You might have walked away from Christian faith in some measure and started to design your own. All religions are the same.

We worship the one God, don't we? And so we take a bit of Islam for its law and order stance. We like that. And yeah, reincarnation sounds pretty good because you get another chance.

Oh yeah, and Jesus, he said a lot of stuff about love, didn't he? We'll take that too. Or maybe you have stuffed up your life so badly that you don't think that you can come near God.

That he just would not want to deal with you. God's people have terribly offended him. And yet he offers this exceedingly generous invitation, come back.

[16:32] Verse 6. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.

Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him. And to our God, for he will freely pardon. Come back to Christ. When my car broke down the other day, I was enormously helped by the generosity of a number of people.

And to get the benefit of that help, I had to humble myself and ask for it and then rely on them. God has spoken. His word is clear.

His invitation is generous and we are called to respond to it. And the offer is sealed by his son who laid down his life for our sins.

So in Isaiah, it's God's servant and we preached about him last week in Isaiah 53. The one who was bruised for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

[17:38] The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. You come forward into the New Testament and you see the servant revealed as God's son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. And back here in Isaiah 55, let the wicked forsake his sin, turn to the Lord and he will pardon freely.

See, Isaiah speaks to us with enormous confidence in the character of God to forgive and to freely pardon.

He's not this weak parent who forgives a child that keeps spitting in their face. He is enormously forgiving of the child who turns back and says like the prodigal son, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Friends, hear the invitation of God to come back, to trust his eternal promises, to see his power and his will to pardon all our offences against him.

[19:00] He is approachable but only on his terms. It sounds like the impossible.

It certainly seems too good to be true and God responds to our unasked question, you know, how can this be possible?

Well, look in verse 8. My thoughts are not your thoughts and neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

You know, as smart as we like to think we are, we are not even on the board as far as God is concerned. There is a vast difference between people and God and it's expressed right here.

Sometimes, you know, you listen to people, you listen to us, you listen to the way we speak, we treat him as an equal, you know, another person and it's almost like we stand over him, we demand a reckoning from him, we question his decisions, we question his justice, we question his purposes, we question his plans.

[20:14] And God speaks here and he says, I'm way above you people. My ways and my thoughts are way above yours. And it's a good reminder and not unlike what God does with Job in Job chapter 38 and just after he says, you know, brace yourself, you want an answer?

Brace yourself like a man, I'll give you an answer. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? And on and on and on and on he goes. It's stating the obvious but God is vastly superior to us and it takes humility on our part to assume our place before him and to recognise his glory.

And part of that humility means that we don't get to understand everything about God. We only understand what he chooses to reveal about himself and he can only be known as he chooses to allow.

He sets the boundaries. But on the other hand there's nothing which is hidden from his sight and he knows everything about us.

And even the secret thoughts of our hearts. Every intent of our heart. And I think I wonder is that a terrifying thought for you?

[21:38] That God knows every rebellious thought and inclination, every bit of pride where we exalt ourselves over him or others, every secret sin and with that the fear of a just judgment.

Or is it a comforting thought? In fact for me it is. It's a deeply comforting thought. God knows everything.

every wicked inclination of my heart and despite him knowing those things, the things that I would never want you to know, he is my redeemer.

And I know his ability to freely pardon my sin when I turn back to him. That's a safe place to be, isn't it?

Verse 9, as the heavens are above the earth, try measuring that. God is a fantastic God with the amazing ability and desire to pardon our sins.

[22 : 53] I think that makes him very, very good. And the sort of forgiveness that he extends to us is incomparable to any forgiveness that we might need to show one another.

You carried stuff to church this morning, lack of forgiveness for a brother or sister in Christ. As serious as it might be, it is puny in the economy of God.

And that is very New Testament. The parable of the servants are forgiven a vast sum who goes and beats the living daylight out of the man who owes him a tiny bit.

The extravagant pardon of God and by implication our need to forgive people who offend against us. And so, Isaiah 55 is a wonderful invitation to return to the Lord God and to trust in his word and in his promises.

It includes the amazing offer of sins forgiven and offences pardoned. And it is true even though it sounds too good to be true. And it finishes with a powerful declaration of the supremacy of the word of God to do its work.

[24 : 05] Verse 10, as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

And so, God's word is powerful to achieve every purpose for which God sends it. And so, for a king like Hezekiah struggling to figure out which alliance to go with, God calls him and his people to trust his word, which is what Hezekiah ultimately did as the Assyrian army besieged the walls of Jerusalem.

And God did the incredible, he did the impossible, he defeated the Assyrian army without the people of God lifting a finger. The New Testament declares the ongoing power of the word of God, something that cuts to our hearts for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword and it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow and it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart and nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight and everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. The dark side of the car the other day, I'm selling it for my sister, selling it in good faith not thinking anything's wrong with it. The day before I put my head underneath to change the oil and I saw some of this green stuff which suggested there must be a leak.

Do you think I wanted to know about it? And so I was struggling with my conscience what I do about this. Will God help me out? He brought it to everybody's attention.

[26 : 02] He forced me to face my own sin. Severe mercy of God isn't it? I felt very protected through the process but he certainly dragged me out into the open.

The final words of this passage are similar to the final words of the Bible. He says verse 12 you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands and instead of thornbush will grow the pine tree and instead of briars the myrtle will grow royal wedding the other night the trees down the aisle myrtle trees and this will be for the Lord's renown for an everlasting sign which will not be destroyed.

New creation joy delight great trees replacing thorns beautiful myrtle replacing weeds God's covenant sign a new world a new creation a place without death or mourning or crying or pain a new world that will never pass away and Isaiah invites people to it come all you who are thirsty come to the waters and you who have no money come buy and eat buy wine and milk without money and without cost and Jesus invites us to it the spirit and the bride say come and let him who hears say come and whoever is thirsty let him come and whoever wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life not only does he invite us he enables us to enter he is the one able to pardon our offences turn to him come to him accept his wonderful invitation amen t