

God's Invitation

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. It's good to be with you all this morning. Would you turn with me to Isaiah chapter 55? That's page 576 in the Pew Bible.

Today we come to the end of this great middle section of the book of Isaiah, and it ends with an invitation. So let me read this for us. Isaiah chapter 55.

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, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Lord, 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.

[1 : 08] Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you.

Because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. 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. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 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 your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace.

[2 : 20] The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Let's pray together. Father, we ask that as we come now to your word, having heard it in our ears, we pray that by your spirit you would move in our hearts, and in our lives, and in our words, and in our actions, to do the very work that you have set out to do, to create a people for yourself, to bring you much praise.

So God, be with us in this moment. Help us to receive what your spirit is saying to us. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, maybe you've had the experience of going to your mailbox, and finding in the midst of all the junk mail, and the coupons, and whatever, one envelope that catches your attention.

It's kind of thicker than all the rest of them. The envelope seems to be made of like really nice paper, and the address is handwritten, and you open it up, and it's an invitation.

Something wonderful has happened or is about to happen, and this invitation says, we want you to come. Come celebrate. Come feast with us. Maybe it's a graduation, or a birthday, or a wedding.

[3 : 57] Whatever it is, something wonderful has happened, a big life-changing event, and we want you to come and join in. You know, if you step back, that's really the message of the whole Bible.

Something has happened. Something wonderful, something life-changing. God, through His Son, has done something in history that has changed history and can change your life, too, forever.

And now you and I are invited to come. And Isaiah 55 is just that. It's the invitation of the gospel, the good news.

Since chapter 40, Isaiah has been laying before us and unraveling and unfolding all that God was going to do to redeem His people, to liberate them from exile, to bring them home.

And all of this came to its climax, you remember, in Isaiah 53, with the suffering servant who would atone for His people's sins once and for all. And now, with all of that prepared, with all of that completed, the invitation goes forth.

[5 : 09] You see, Christianity isn't like the junk mail that you and I get. You know, you pull out the flyer and it's like, oh, look, I could save 20% the next time I go to Target. Isn't that kind of nice?

Well, I don't really need anything at Target, so, meh, and we just chuck it, right? Now, maybe you're thinking, 20% at Target? Why are you throwing that coupon away? That's a pretty good coupon. You've got to put that thing on the fridge. Save it for next time.

But here's the point. Christianity is not a nice little offer that might make our nice little lives a little bit nicer. Christianity is a summons.

It's an invitation to which you and I must respond. And if you have not explicitly and consciously responded to that invitation, then you're not a Christian.

But what we're invited to, what this God calls us to is so great that we can't just pass it by like a piece of junk mail.

[6 : 16] We have to consider. We have to respond. So, let's look at this invitation together, then. First, in verses 1 through 5 of our chapter, God calls you and I to come.

In the first five verses, we hear the invitation. But notice that this isn't a summons to a court hearing that God is making. It's not calling us to jury duty, you know, or any kind of invitation like that.

It's a summons to a feast. Are you thirsty? Isaiah says. Come and drink. Are you hungry? Come and dine.

And it's not the cheap stuff that's being laid out. It's wine. It's milk. It's rich food that brings deep delight. But there's also something curious about this invitation, isn't there?

We're called to come and buy this wine and milk without money and without price. It is something that must be purchased.

[7 : 23] It must be bought. But the price won't be paid by us. It'll be paid by another. This is an essential part, you know, the nature of the gospel invitation.

It comes free to us, but it's costly to another. We come and buy this wine and milk without money and without price. And then Isaiah asks us this question.

You know, think of all that you're spending yourself on. Does it really satisfy? As you spend your money, as you spend your labor, as you spend your life on earthly pursuits apart from God, yes, maybe they're good and they're proper place, but is that bread really feeding your soul?

Is that water really quenching your thirst? Jesus, in the midst of his wilderness temptation, said, man cannot live on bread alone, quoting the book of Deuteronomy.

The human heart was made for more. We were made for God. And the great tragedy of human existence is that we would spend our lives on something that does not satisfy rather than come and get the wine and milk that God offers us free of charge, without money and without price, because it's been purchased by him in our place, by his son.

[8 : 47] Of course, this sort of invitation is humbling, isn't it? To admit that everything our labors can afford is nothing but bread that can't satisfy. That's kind of humbling. To admit that the only way to get the wine and the milk, the real things our hearts long for, is to accept it as a gift from God that we cannot earn and cannot buy.

You know, maybe that's the hardest part, to admit that we need someone else to pay our way. But while the gospel invitation may humble us, it doesn't humiliate us.

Because what God offers us in verses 3 through 5 is the very opposite of humiliation. What is this feast that God is inviting us to? What is it? Well, in verses 3 through 5, we see that it's the ancient promise of glory.

This invitation is to glory. Listen again to verses 3 through 5. Here it is.

Here it is. Glorified you. Now, in our ears, these verses may sound a bit confusing, right? But to an ancient Israelite, what was being laid out here in these verses was what it was all about.

[10 : 22] You see, if you go all the way back to the beginning of the biblical story, when Adam fell in the garden, all creation went down into the curse with him. And that kingdom that God had established in creation with Adam at the head seemed in the moment of the fall to be lost.

Now, instead of life and flourishing, all was sin and judgment and death. But God in that moment made a promise. He made a binding promise.

He made a covenant. And this promise began in the garden and was carried on through Noah and Moses. And eventually, God reiterated this promise to David.

And he reiterated it in a fresh way. God promised that God's kingdom would be established forever through David and David's line. That there would be a king from David's line who would sit on the throne forever, a new Adam.

And that king would establish God's kingdom and he would restore God's people and he would even heal creation. But it wouldn't just stop with the people of Israel. Like a river kind of overflowing its banks when the rains come, this promise, this covenant of an everlasting kingdom would overflow out to all the nations of the earth.

[11 : 35] And they too would come and they would enter the covenant people. They would come into the kingdom and at last, they would know God. In other words, God promised his people that he would glorify them.

that they would be restored back to what he had created them to be. That he would raise them up from the ashes out of death and shame. That he would restore their fortunes, renew their joy, and make them that light to the nations.

And we know from the perspective of the New Testament that this covenant with David was fulfilled when at last the eternal king did come from David's line. The Lord Jesus, who in his resurrection now lives forever, never to see decay.

That's what our first reading in our service was all about. It was the apostle saying, that king you've been waiting for, the one who is going to reign forever, he's here. The Lord Jesus, how do you know? Because he's been raised and he's never going to die.

So you see, responding to the invitation of God's gospel, you know, it's not like taking up some new hobby that might provide a few hours of interesting distraction. You know, I've got an Xbox for Saturday and I've got a church for Sunday and then I've got to grind through five weeks until I can get back to my Xbox and then back to church.

[12 : 56] That's not what the invitation is. Ultimately, God's inviting you to be restored to the ancient glory that he intended humanity to have all along in creation.

To be participants of his kingdom. To be the image bearers we were meant to be. To be a human person fully alive. That's what verse three means.

Incline your ear and come to me here that your soul may live. You know, in the Old Testament, you know, your soul isn't just sort of like the immaterial part of you. It's the true you.

Your very self, your very being. The invitation of the gospel God summons to come is the summons to enter his kingdom under the lordship of King Jesus and no life and no glory.

But what exactly does it look like to respond to this invitation? How do we do it? Well, in verses one through five as we just saw, God calls you and I to come. But in verses six and seven, God shows us how to come.

[14 : 10] If verses one through five are the invitation to come, then verses six and seven are the explanation of how to come. So let me read verses six and seven again. 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. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

Now notice the two sides of responding to God's invitation. On the one side, we're told to seek the Lord, to call upon him. And this action of turning to God, seeking him, calling upon him, placing our trust in him, coming under his lordship, this is what the Bible calls faith.

But there's another side here. There's not just turning to God, but there's also turning away from our old life. Verse seven says, let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

This is what the Bible often calls repentance, turning away from our old life without God and admitting that our path apart from God leads to dissolution and foolishness and destruction.

[15 : 23] Repentance is turning away from that path, leaving that path, to place our whole life in God's hands. So here's the beauty of the invitation of the gospel.

We come to the Lord as we are, but not to stay as we are. The Lord accepts everyone who comes to him, but coming to him entails leaving our old life behind for a new one.

And if we do that, if we turn and seek the Lord, what do we find?

If we forsake our old ways and call upon the Lord Jesus, how will God respond? Does he kind of put us on a probationary period to see if it might work out, you know? Is it like you're a new hire, you know, given 30 days to see if you're a good fit with the corporation?

Does he put you in the middle of tryouts to see if you're spiritually fit enough to make the team? Is that how God's invitation works? No.

[16 : 26] For every sinner who repents and calls upon the Lord, who receives this invitation of life, there's no probationary period. There's no trial run. There's no tryouts. Everyone who returns to the Lord receives what?

Abundant pardon, verse 7 says. He will abundantly pardon. Pardon. Not begrudgingly pardon. Not basically pardon. Not probably pardon. But abundantly pardon.

Pardon upon pardon. Do you hear those words, Christian? Brothers, sisters?

Perhaps this week you've fallen short. Perhaps this week you've seen that there's still much remaining sin in your life. If that's you, then treasure this word abundantly.

You know, this is the natural progression of the Christian life. The deeper we grow in Christ, the more we begin to see of God's holiness. How beautiful, how awesome, how good and great God is.

[17 : 32] How loving and wonderful God is. And the more we also see of our own sinfulness. How deep the idols of our heart are lodged. How besetting our habitual sins really are.

But for the Christian, this doesn't lead to despair seeing these two things in increasing measure. Because as our understanding of God's holiness gets bigger and bigger, and as our understanding of our own sin gets deeper and deeper, you see, our knowledge of the cross gets greater and greater.

for this is a God who abundantly pardons. And as the wonder of the cross grows, as the wonder of His abundant pardon captures our hearts, that's the engine for real change in our lives.

The love of God forgiving all my sins, restoring me to glory, giving me a place in His eternal kingdom, inviting me, a sinner, to join His mission in the world, to proclaim the gospel of peace to the whole creation, and to do the good works He prepared in advance for me to do.

To let a life of mercy and justice be like a mustard seed, seemingly small, seemingly insignificant, but with that, to grow into a tree with the birds of the air resting in its branches.

[18 : 54] all of this, fueled by the wonder of the cross, and God's abundant pardon to sinners, to you and me.

But can we be sure about it? Will God really pardon? Will God really give us a place in His ancient promise of glory? Will God really make good on His invitation?

Well, if in verses 1-5 God calls us to come, and in verses 6-7 God shows us how to come, in verses 8-13 and the rest of our passage, God gives us assurance to come.

Isaiah 55 moves from invitation to explanation, finally to assurance. And there are actually three assurances here, three pairs of verses, each starting with the word for.

How do we know God will abundantly pardon and make good on His invitation? Well, first, because God's ways are not your ways. Look again at verses 8-9. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

[20 : 04] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Here's the good news, friend. God isn't like us.

We humans rarely pardon, let alone abundantly pardon. But God isn't like us.

Do you remember what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5? He says, scarcely will someone die for a righteous person. Maybe for a good person someone would dare to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts and God's ways are not our ways. We want to turn away when others wrong us, but God turns towards us.

We want other people to pay when they offend us, but God pays what we owe when we've offended Him. And God isn't just a little different or slightly different.

[21 : 04] God is massively, majestically different. Like the sky and clouds and stars are higher than the earth, billions of miles away, that's how much higher God's ways are than our ways.

And that means God will abundantly pardon all who come trusting in His Son. But it's not just that God's ways are higher than ours.

In verses 10-11 we see that God's word is more productive and more effective than ours. Look again at verse 10-11. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. God's word always accomplishes what God desires.

It never comes back empty. Like rain that comes down and produces grain and grain that becomes bread and bread that feeds the hungry. God's word is productive and effective always without fail.

[22 : 14] If God says it, He'll do it. In Genesis 1, God's word brought forth the heavens and the earth in creation. And Hebrews 1 says that God's word upholds the universe and keeps it in existence.

And that powerful, effective word in creation and preservation is the same powerful, effective word that God speaks in redemption. How do you know God will do what He says?

Because this very word became flesh for us and for our salvation. God spoke and things came into being. And when God spoke a word of redemption, what did He do?

He became flesh for us. The Son, the word of God became incarnate in the person of Jesus and we beheld His glory. And on the cross, the incarnate crucified word cried out, it's finished.

Sins are paid. Death has died. The enemy's been defeated. And that same word is now heralded in the preaching of the gospel.

[23 : 22] The invitation goes forth from the empty tomb of the risen Lord down through the preaching of the apostles and now being proclaimed by the church in every age, the invitation goes forth.

And this word, because it's God's word, God's gospel, it cannot fail. If God says He will pardon, then surely He will abundantly pardon. But it's not just God's ways or God's word that assures us that God will make good on His invitation.

There's also God's name. Look again at verses 12-13. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle and it shall make a name for the Lord. An everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

These verses show us the kind of radical transformation that God's word brings. This invitation of abundant pardon, of God's glory and kingdom through the crucified and risen Jesus, it brings about what?

[24 : 26] It brings about a new creation. Once there were tangled thorns and briars, now there's a forest of cypress trees and myrtle trees. This beautiful forest where once there were thorns and briars.

And is this not a picture of the redeemed people of God brought from death to life through the glorious gospel of God's Son? But the assurance that God will do it is found at the very end.

How do we know God will make good on His invitation? How do we know that God will abundantly pardon and transform us like this? Because this is going to be the sign. The transformation of the effective word is going to be the sign, the everlasting sign of God's great name.

When the new creation erupts, when God's people are forgiven and transformed, and ultimately, in the new heavens and new earth, when all of creation is released from its bondage to decay, and the mountains and the hills break forth into singing, and the trees of the field clap their hands, all of that is going to be a testimony proclaiming the greatness of God.

It shall make a name for the Lord. You see, friends, this is how God has chosen and ordained to display His glory, to display His name, His nature, who He is.

[25 : 50] This is how God has chosen to display that for all eternity through the redemption of His people, redeeming them from sorrow and the enmity of sin into joy and peace of abundant pardon.

And through their redemption, God will sweep up creation in freedom from sin's decay. You see, God didn't just want to reveal His glory as a God who creates.

God chose to reveal His glory also as a God who redeems. And if this is how God has chosen to reveal His great name for all eternity, then surely it must be so.

If God is choosing to raise us to new life so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace, as Paul says in Ephesians 2, then we can have all the assurance in the world that He will do so.

Why? Because God has staked His own name and His own reputation on it. The masterpiece that God will hold up showing how awesome and how much of a God He is so that His glory and wisdom and beauty might shine forth for all eternity are His redeemed people united to the Redeemer, our Lord Jesus.

[27 : 07] He signed His name on the canvas and He will surely complete every stroke of that masterpiece to perfection. And that means everyone who responds to this invitation, everyone who comes, leaving their old life, calling upon the Lord Jesus, will be saved.

So you've gone through your mail. You've opened the invitation. Here it is. While there's still time, God says through Isaiah, respond.

Come. Come to the waters. Come buy and eat without money and without price. Don't wait. Come. Call upon the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

And brothers and sisters, those who have already called upon the name of the Lord, remember what we've been invited into, a feast, a joy. So celebrate today. Rejoice and be glad.

Yours is a glory that will not fail. Let your neighbors and your coworkers and your family see your joy. You've been invited to the feast.

[28 : 22] The new creation's begun. Let them see your joy and let them know that they're invited too. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we pray that as we've heard and considered this invitation this morning, that your spirit would work in our hearts to bring them from death to life to respond to this call to turn and trust in you.

God, for those who are wrestling with this call, I pray that you would come to them, liberate them from their fears and their doubts, and grant them the faith to trust in you.

And God, for those who by your mercy have responded to this invitation, for those whom you've brought into your church through this wonderful invitation to come, I pray, Lord, that we would have the joy that is spoken of here.

and the peace and the glory. God, we know it's imperfect now, but we see it. We see the signs of your kingdom breaking out in our midst.

[29 : 42] We see thorns that have been turned into beautiful trees, so we pray for more of it, God, and we pray for a great confidence in you and a joy in you that is befitting of our Lord Jesus, the great King of joy who has purchased for us such a great and unshakable salvation.

In his name we pray. Amen.