

Let's open our Bible's to Isaiah 55. This morning I will be teaching from the English Standard Version. Now Brian has had a history of assigning me difficult passages and hard subjects to preach on but not today. Chapter 55 is one of the most encouraging and beautiful passages in the book of Isaiah. What a relief. In this chapter we see **God invites all people to come to him and to be satisfied by his love**. Let's jump right in to verse 1.

What an amazing invitation. Think about the feeling that you get when someone wants to spend time with you and they take the time to call and reach out and ask you to come. Come for dinner, meet me for coffee, I want to spend time with you, when can we hang out. An invitation can communicate a sense of value and belonging. In this first verse the Lord says "Come" four times to add emphasis.

Who does the Lord invite? Everyone who thirsts. Raise your hand if you had something to drink this morning! I should see every hand in the room. This is a universal invitation. Everyone gets thirsty. Our bodies require water to live. We have the convenience of modern safe drinking water, but for the people of Judah in the time of Isaiah, water was a scarce commodity and was carefully stored and used for survival. Who does God invite to come to him? Everyone.

All are welcome, please come, come and be nourished, no money is required, no payment, come and be filled with the good things that God has to offer. Isaiah uses the language of thirst, of hunger, of finding water and food and nourishment, freely offered by God. But we know what this is pointing to a deeper spiritual meaning.

This invitation echoes the words of Proverbs 9:1-6. Solomon writes as if Wisdom is a person who has prepared a meal and invites guests to come in. "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, whoever is simple, let him turn in here! To him who lacks sense she says, Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the ways of insight."

We see the same invitation from Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus said: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The invitation is universal. All who labor, all who are weary, heavy laden, weighed down, struggling, all are invited to "Come" and find rest.

God even invites the wicked to find forgiveness and compassion.

Now just in case there is any confusion, Isaiah further clarifies who is invited to come to the Lord in verses 6-7. (Read). God's invitation is not simply for the believer or the righteous person. His invitation extends to the wicked and the unrighteous as well. None are excluded from God's invitation though many will refuse to come when he calls.

Isaiah challenges us to "seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near." This is not suggesting that God is going to withdraw himself and go hide somewhere. But the reality is that God offers his forgiveness and compassion to the living. We, in this life, have the opportunity to come to the Lord. He will not force us to seek him, he will not force us to repent and return, but he freely invites us to come to him. And the urgency is real, because those who refuse God's invitation, will suffer the consequences when they die. And while God is being patient with humanity today, He has declared that a day of judgment will

come. On that day it will be too late. I know that this is very unpopular doctrine today. People don't want to hear that God will judge people and that the consequence of sin is death, eternal separation from God in anguish. It's not fun. But it's what is clearly taught in scripture.

The invitation is for today. The Lord is near, he is close by, he is not hiding, he is not going to close the door on those who aren't good enough, because none of us are good enough. He is patient, and gentle, and kind, and waiting for us to respond to his invitation.

Humans will go to great lengths to satisfy the longing in their soul.

Look at verse 2. (Read). All humans have a longing in our hearts for meaning for significance, for belonging. We were created for relationship and intimacy with the living God but we have been separated from God by sin and that has left us with a hole in our hearts, a void in our soul that constantly desires to be filled. God invites us to come to him and have our hearts filled by his love and grace and forgiveness, and finally be satisfied.

I love this question in verse two. "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" Why do we look to every other source on earth to fill the hunger in our hearts? Why do we labor for that which does not satisfy? Think about all the things that we do, all the sources that we drink from that can never fill us up.

Good things over-done. Some sources of water are good things, but when over done, they become a problem. Things like: Family, Career, Influence, Financial Security, Health, Belongings.

Each of these things on their own are good, even gifts from the Lord. But when we look to them to satisfy our hearts longing, they become a problem. Marriage is a gift from the Lord, kids are a blessing. But if you think that meeting the right guy or girl and getting married will make all

your troubles go away, its going to be pretty rough. A meaningful career is wonderful. A job that pays the bills, provides for your family, what a blessing. But if your identity becomes your job, or you pursue your career as if it will fulfill you it's going to be really hard. We all want a healthy retirement fund and enough resources to enjoy our golden years (whatever that means), but how much is enough? Someone once asked John D. Rockefeller how much money was enough, and he answered "just a little bit more." Now some say that exposed his greed, but others think that he understood human nature and knew that no amount of money could satisfy the longing in our soul. In the same way, how much stuff is enough stuff? Everyone has to shop to live, but some of us live to shop. And about 10 minutes after you buy something, the dopamine wears off and you start looking for the next item that you just have to buy in order to be happy.

Entertainment and distractions: How far will we go to entertain ourselves and distract ourselves from life and reality? Again, many of these are benign, but when we use them to fill the void in our hearts, it's a problem.

Whether its hobbies, sports, video games, the news, social media. We Americans seem to have an endless appetite. The average American spends 10 hours a day on the internet. Roughly half of that is working, and the other half, shopping and entertainment.

How many YouTube videos, how many reels do we need to watch to be satisfied? Just one more. That's what the algorithm wants you to believe doesn't it? Just watch one more, it will be fun, you will feel good. And an hour later we are wondering what we are doing with our lives. I know watching sports is a big deal for a lot of people, but honestly, when was the last time you watched a Superbowl and you thought, wow, that was an amazing game, so satisfying to watch. I can't wait for next year.

Finally, **Poison and self-destruction.** When we are thirsty enough, or hungry enough, we will do anything to satisfy our need or try to escape

our pain. Even if it poisons us. Think of the most destructive habits in our society. Substance abuse, alcohol, sexual addiction, gambling. These things literally rewire our brains, making us crave more and more, and yet as we use them they satisfy less and less. In the end they leave us broken and destitute. Proverbs 27:7 One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet. Maybe we turn to these things to numb the pain, maybe it's to escape reality for a little while. Maybe it's the illusion that if we just try one more time, we'll win big, and all our problems will go away.

We humans will do just about anything, go to any length, to satisfy our thirst, even if it costs us our very lives.

When we accept God's invitation, He promises to satisfy our souls.

So what's the solution? What is the nourishment that God offers in Isaiah 55? The second part of verse 2. 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. What is this rich food that God offers to us? Who are we to listen to? His name is Jesus. The best Sunday school answer ever.

Take a look at this story in John Chapter 4. One of my favorites. Jesus is hanging out at a well in Samaria, his pals have all walked into town to get some food. And a woman comes out to draw water from the well. This Samaritan woman had been looking to relationships to satisfy the longing in her soul and had been through 5 divorces, now let's read what happens (4:7-15). Jesus is the living water. When we drink from him, when we surrender our lives to him, when we receive the forgiveness of our sins through his blood, he promises to fill our hearts with living water, so that we will never be thirsty again.

He says it a little differently a few chapters later in John 6:35. This is the day after Jesus fed the 5000 with the two five loaves and two fish. Some of the people followed him across the Sea of Galilee and started asking

him questions. Verse 35 Jesus said "I am the bread of life...(Read through verse 40)"

I wonder if Jesus had Isaiah 55 on his mind when he said these words. Jesus is the living water, the water of life, he is the bread of life. When we come to him we discover a bottomless well, an endless supply of God's grace and love and goodness for us.

There are many ways that the Lord satisfies the longing in us, I've highlighted just a few this morning.

When we come to Jesus we discover:

God's abounding love Lamentations 3:22-23
the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." His loving-kindness will never run out.

Complete forgiveness is available through the blood of Jesus.
"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12).

A new identity When we look to Jesus for our value and our identity we are made new in him. 2 Cor 5:17 if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. We are also called God's children, co-heirs with Christ. Roman's (8:16-17).

A sense of purpose We were created on purpose and with purpose and we want to know what our purpose is. Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

And when we are overwhelmed by the hard things of life, and there are many hard things in this life, we turn to Jesus for strength and direction and we find in him the **Peace that surpasses understanding** (Philippians

4:7). Those are just a few of the many good things that God offers us in Christ when we come to him, and drink from the living water that he has for us.

As Isaiah closes the chapter God explains to us how all of this is possible. How is it that a holy God can offer forgiveness and redemption to an unholy people who do not deserve it? How can this mystery be and how do we know that it is true.

God is transcendent and totally other than us.

Look at verses 8-9.

My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are my ways your ways. I love this so much. We can only see God as he has revealed himself through creation, through scripture, in Jesus, and by his Spirit. But try as hard as we can to understand that God is not like us, we still often view God in our image because we are human and limited in our capacity. God can forgive because God is not like us. God can send his son to die on our behalf because God does not think like we think. God can redeem fallen, broken people like you and me because he is not like you and me. And we forget that not only is God infinitely more powerful, and capable, and superior to us, he is also different from us. We are created in his image but we are not like God. He is different from us.

He expands this concept in verse 9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Have you ever been around someone who is really a lot smarter than you are, and you try to talk to them but they have to slow down their brain in order to have a conversation with you? Like you can see them slowing down. God is like that but even greater. WE can't comprehend the mind of God or the ways of God apart from what he slows down and shows us. His ways are so different from ours we cannot comprehend apart from his patient, slow, deliberate explanation.

God always keeps his word. He is trustworthy. Vs. 10.

Just as the rain falls from the clouds and nourishes the land, So God's word sent out, will always do what he intends. He is trustworthy and good. After all the chapters of Isaiah that are filled with warning and the assurance of judgment, I think that God is going out of his way to explain that his invitation is sincere, his forgiveness is real, and his word is trustworthy. If God said he will forgive, we can trust that he will forgive. If God said he will redeem, and renew, we can trust that he will redeem and renew. We don't need to hide from him or ignore his invitation out of fear.

I don't know where you are in your faith journey this morning. Maybe you have been drinking from every water tap that the world has to offer and you are still thirsty and desperate. I want to invite you to come to the water of life that is Jesus Christ. Maybe it's time to pray a prayer like this. "Lord Jesus, I confess that I have been searching for life and meaning and purpose in all the wrong places and they have all left me empty. Please forgive me. Wash me clean by the work that you did on the cross and make me new. Fill me with your Spirit and fill me with your living water so that I can follow after you."

Maybe you are here today, and you know Jesus, you follow Jesus, you know he is the living water, but you have been wandering away from him and drinking from other sources. You know they won't satisfy, but you have been trying them out anyway. Sometimes we fall into old habits or new habits, and we forget the source of life that is calling us to come. Sometimes we look elsewhere for ways to satisfy the longing in our hearts.

Maybe you have wandered from the well of Christ and you need to pray a prayer like this one today. "Lord I have wandered away from your spring of living water and I have looked to other sources to fill me and satisfy my heart. Please forgive me. Help me to return my heart and my focus to you. Fill me afresh with your love and your grace and draw me close to you again." Perhaps that needs to be your prayer this morning.

If you prayed either of these prayers this morning, I want to encourage you. God is always inviting us to come to him. To approach the throne of grace with confidence. When he invites us to come, he will not shut the door in our faces. He won't kick us out because of our mistakes or sins, He simply invites us over and over again, to come and drink from his well of grace, and be forgiven.

I've asked Mark to come and close us in worship this morning. As he comes back on the stage I have a few questions for you to wrestle with this week.

1. Where have you been looking to satisfy the thirst in your life? Please be honest with this question. Think about how you spend your time, your money, your energy. Are you looking to Jesus to fill you, or everything else?
2. What do you need to change in your life to make sure that Jesus is your one true source of living water?