

"Come, Everyone Who Thirsts"

Through the prophet Isaiah God says, *Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters and he who has no money, come buy and eat!* This is one of many great invitations in the Bible to actually come to God, not only to receive forgiveness but to find fulfillment. This weekend we are going to insert into our series, on *The Story of God and the Struggles of Life*, a four-week focus on a topic that is part of that larger story. We're going to be talking about finding life in God.

This has been very important to me personally and to our Church, but I find people struggle with this. Trust me; I get that. When we talk about finding life in Christ, there are all kinds of questions that come up: *What does that actually mean? Why does it matter? How do you do it?* (Please share your questions on your cards, and we will try to address them). This weekend I want us to reintroduce this idea because it is the heartbeat of Christianity. If you want to understand Christianity or Jesus, whether you are on the outside looking in with curiosity or on the inside trying to figure it out from a position of faith, this is central to everything else. A lot of people get it wrong – I got it wrong – before I got it right. Most of my life up until this present moment is about a continuing quest to understand and apply this in all of life. And the older I get, the more I see how crucial this is and how deep it goes.

What are we talking about? We're talking about the fact that...

I. GOD INVITES US TO FIND OUR LIFE IN HIM.

Look at **verse 1**. *"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."*

A. The Life God Offers Us Is Deeply Satisfying

Water refreshes and restores. Psalm 23:2-3 says *He leads me beside still waters he restores my soul.* In John 7, Jesus said, *if anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink.*

Wine is celebratory, exhilarating, and intoxicating. Psalm 4:7 *You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.* There is a part of every one of us that God made for exhilaration and celebration.

Milk nourishes us so that we grow stronger. When someone is gasping for life, you give them water. But when you want a little baby to grow day after day you give it milk again and again. ¹ God is not just for emergencies. He is for health in the long haul.

So what verse one says is that God wants to quench our thirst for life, fill our hearts with joy. And keep us nourished and growing strong. Notice the quality offered us in God. **Verse 2** ends with; *Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight yourself in rich food.*

This is a compelling invitation for your life and mine. And notice this:

B. The Goodness God Offers Is Relationship With God Himself.

In **verse 1** he said, *"Come to the waters . . . come for wine and milk."* In **verse 3**, he says he says, *Come to me...*" he's the reality behind the imagery. He says, *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.* You see God Himself is the water that restores. The milk that nourishes our heart and makes us strong, and the wine for the spirit that brings exhilarating gladness. When a person takes God up on his invitation, God makes a covenant with that person. *What kind of covenant?* The same kind of covenant he made with King David in **2 Samuel 7** – *"an everlasting covenant of steadfast, sure love."* God binds Himself to you with an unbreakable covenant to follow you with goodness and mercy all your days right into eternity. When you live in relationship with God drawing on his faithful love for you, that relationship is refreshing, nourishing, exhilarating, life-giving.

Illustration: I've often used the image of the father who comes home from holds a few pennies or candies in his hand for his little 3-year-old girl. So she climbs up on his lap and tries to pry open his finger to get the treats. He does this because he loves her and wants to enfold her in his arms and spend some sweet time with her. She just wants a shiny penny or a sweet treat. She doesn't see that the highest good is the Father's himself. He is the source of everything good in her life. *Here's what I want to ask you to really think about:* Are you like the child who wants what God can give more than God himself?

I believe, even in a church like ours that aspires to be God-centered, we are too often like spoiled children who take the Father for granted and use the father more than we love him. Is your desire to connect with God, and find life in God greater than your desire to use God, the way a spoiled child uses a rich father, to get what *you* want? What if the point of being reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus is not only that we would be forgiven but that we would find life in Him?

C.S. Lewis pointed out that in the Psalms God is the *all-satisfying object*. ²**Psalm 73:25**, *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.* An inspiring book for me as a new Christian was A.W. Tozer's, *The Pursuit of God*. He says, "God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that he can, without anything other than himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is." That is what Jesus told the woman at the well. Jesus told her he could give her the water of life.

The teachings of the Bible and Jesus, the findings of psychological research and shared human experience all tell us there are intangible things that influence our life. Peace, hope, and love are intangible but powerful. People without peace can be poisoned by bitterness and eaten alive by anger. People can be crushed by hopelessness, and it can destroy them literally. People can be starved for love, and it can weaken them dramatically. These things that seem intangible are real powers in themselves, and sometimes they are spiritual weapons used by dark powers against us. Love, hope, forgiveness, and peace, on the other hand, may seem intangible, but they are incredibly powerful in positive ways. What God in the Bible is telling you is that through a relationship with him, in His grace, through your faith there is a sure love, a confident hope, a deep peace, these things are real. And you can nourish and satisfy your life through those spiritual realities.

God invites us to find our life in him.

II. TO FIND YOUR LIFE IN HIM YOU MUST CHOOSE TO FIND YOUR LIFE IN HIM.

Listen again: **Isaiah 55:1** does not assume that you have come or will come to God. God is inviting and calling you. *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.*

Verse 2 makes it clear that in order to come to the water...

A. You have to stop chasing what won't satisfy.

Verse 2 begins with a question: "*Why*" - *Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?* He isn't just talking about questionable things or bad things that we spend for and labor to get. He's talking about *really* good things we live for while neglecting God as our source of life itself.

Illustration: In my opening words, I said I got this wrong before I got it right, and to this day, it is the issue at the center of my spiritual growth. Let me tell you about that. When I discovered the reality of Christ as a young man, it was like water, wine, and milk. I had heard the words that Christ died for my sins, but I never sensed the reality of what that meant for me personally. But when I did, the whole world looked different, and I began to change. Because of the grace of God at work in me, I started to accomplish things and achieve things I had never achieved before. I got clean and sober, graduated from college, met and married Connie, finished graduate school with honors, and became a pastor. My mother was relieved. My father was pleased. Things seemed promising, but then they began to unravel. Connie and I struggled in our marriage. There were great times, but our relationship was often complicated and confusing. My work in the church was exhausting and frustrating, thankless.

One vivid memory typifies that season. I had been working into the early morning on some church-related issue. The next day I had a long list of visits to church-members. I was so sleep-deprived; I filled a thermos with coffee to carry me through the day. At one house, no one was home even though I had confirmed the appointment. I thought maybe they would return shortly so instead of driving back to the office, I pulled under a large elm tree and poured a cup of coffee. I hadn't been there more than a few minutes when one of the deacons drove by and gave me the stink eye. At the next deacon meeting, this man-made disparaging remarks and demanded to know what the pastor was doing wasting time under a shade tree in the middle of the day when he should be working. He had no idea how hard I was working, how much I wanted to do well. I wanted to please all of them and accomplish all kinds of good things in the church. I was neglecting my health, my relationship to Connie, and even to God as I claimed to be working for him. Like I said, that is just one memory that typifies an

extended season of frustration and exhaustion. I was so angry and discouraged. I didn't understand why God didn't fix things.

I had to learn a hard lesson -*when our strongest passion is to solve our problems, we often look for a plan to follow instead of a person to trust.* It was during this season that I read or heard somewhere that we should think of negative emotions as sort of like trouble lights on the dashboard of your car. The trouble light is not the problem, but it alerts you to look beneath the hood. If you are angry, anxious, despairing all the time, you can't deal with that by just trying harder not to feel that way. You have to look deeper. *Why* are you feeling like that? If you asked me during that time why I was angry, I would have said, *"Because life and ministry is so hard and people are difficult and demanding. No matter how hard you work, things fall apart, your effort are unsuccessful, and people are critical."* The problem with that is it suggests the only way to find life is to fix things. Fix the problem. Fix the people. *When our strongest passion is to solve our problems, we tend to look for a plan to follow instead of a person to trust.*

We obsess over and labor to fix what can't always be fixed as if God's himself means little. Instead of finding life in God, we try to use God to help us fix life so that we can find life in things that can't give life. God hasn't promised to do that. The irony in my story was that God's grace enabled me to achieve things and impress people, so I began to fall in love with and look for life in what I achieved, and in the affirmation I received instead of in the God who had been the source of it all. The blessings God gave me drew me away from my love for God himself. That never works. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis: *God himself cannot give you a strong and satisfying life that doesn't have God himself as the center and source of that life because such a life does not exist!*

Look at your problems, passions, energies and emotions whatever is the issue you work the hardest to manage in your life today. Is your hunger for a fix to your problems greater than your hunger for a deep connection to God? Do you think that the sure, steadfast and everlasting love God gives you is not as meaningful or satisfying and fixing the problem your stressed by today? Do you want to draw near to God and find life in him more than you want relief from your present suffering or struggle? Are you more interested in trying to use God to solve your problems or moving through your problems with faith so that you more deeply rely on God and know and experience him?

Look at how **verse 2** continues, *Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.*

B. God calls you to delight in him.

Illustration: A famous Christian thinker, Jonathan Edwards famously wrote about this. He talked about a verse that says, *"taste and see that the LORD is good."* He said the difference between believing God is good and tasting that God is good is as different as having a belief that honey is sweet and actually tasting the sweetness. He said, in the same way, there is a difference between believing certain truths about God that tell you he is good and life-giving and actually delighting in those truths so that they give life to you.

The point of my story is to spark reflection on your own life in light of this Scriptural truth. In my story, I had to go to God and say, *"I'm sorry, I've been foolish. I've turned away from you, the true source of life, and I've tried to live off of and out of my accomplishments, and the affection of people and it's left me empty. I've put all my costly labor into a way of making my life work out the way I thought it should. I've acted as if you are not enough to satisfy me unless life goes well, and people are fair. I'm coming back to you, Lord, I want my life to come from you."*

Conclusion

There's a phrase in the book of Psalms that occurs multiple times: It is this: *"To you, oh Lord, I lift up my soul."*³ Saint Augustine has a passage where he talks about this, and he asks this: *"How can I lift up my soul? What ropes or machines are needed? What ladders?"* And then he answers his own question. He says, *"By neglecting God, my soul sinks; it descends. By loving God, I mount the steps that lift my soul. Standing on earth, I'm in heaven if I love God. The body to be lifted up must change its place. The heart to be lifted up must change its will."*

That kind of turning to God is not just for the really hard times in life. It is for everyday of your life. Here's what God is saying to you: *Come to me all who are thirsty. Come to the waters; and he who has no money come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.* You were made for a relationship with God. The gospel tells us that Christ came into our world to bring us back to God – to reconcile us to him. Our sins separate us from him. We deserve his

judgment. But Christ came into the world not to condemn us but to save us and bring us back to God. The reason we can find life in God *without money and without price* is because Jesus paid it all for us. His sacrificial death on the cross was a perfect payment for our sins. He rose again to be our Lord of life. He calls you to come to him and receive from him what you could never earn or purchase. Come to him. Trust him to save you from your sins and give you eternal life. But don't stop at that. Keep trusting him to be your life, to give you life.

Amen.

¹ 1 Peter 2:2

² A few examples include Psalm 37:4, 34:8, 42:1, 63:1, 36:8, 43:4, 16:11, 27:4

³ Psalm 25:1, 86:4, 143:8