

Text: Isaiah 55:1-3 (Pew Bible pg.773)

Title: “Come to the Waters”

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bibles to Isaiah 55. As you're turning let me just encourage you that Easter is just a little over a month away. As you know that time of the year our friends and neighbors are more likely to accept an invitation to attend church than at any other time of the year. So we have made available to you today and in the future some invitation cards that can be used at Easter, but also at other times of the year. It has our schedule and directions. One of the most important things we can do as a church is to be an inviting church. You can take that two ways.

- One definition of “inviting” has to do with activity ... we are always inviting people to know Christ and to come with us to church.
- Another definition of “inviting” has to do with one's appeal or attractiveness if you will. You walk by a bakery and you see a cinnamon roll in the window that is “inviting.” It's appealing to you. And as a church that also needs to be true of us ... that there is something about the love of Christ in us that is appealing to others.

We need to be both because God is. Jesus Christ reveals a God who is an inviting Person in that He is altogether lovely. When people see Him as He really is in all of His grace and glory, there is something attractive about Him to a sinner. But God is an inviting God in the other sense of the word. He invites and calls people to Himself. All through the Bible we see the great invitations from God to people to come to Him. And one of those is our text today ... Isaiah 55. Read Isaiah 55:1-3.

I'm preaching a series of messages entitled “Profiting from the Prophets.” There are 17 books in the Bible (about the last one-third of the OT) that contain the messages of the prophets. Five of those books are designated Major Prophets, and the first of those books is Isaiah. Now hold your place in Isaiah 55 and turn back to Isaiah 1:1 where we are introduced to Isaiah. Read 1:1.

Notice that the life and ministry of Isaiah is played out in Judah and Jerusalem. So we're going to take our special Osprey helicopter on the short ride from the Northern Kingdom where the prophet Jonah was from, and where the prophets Amos and Hosea preached, down to the Southern Kingdom where Isaiah and other prophets will be speaking God's message at the same time.

And we see that specifically Isaiah's messages concerned Jerusalem and Judah and events that took place during the reigns of four different kings in Judah, spanning about 40 years. (I think of how the evangelist Billy Graham has preached through the administrations of president after president here in the US.)

Now the Northern Kingdom is more advanced in their apostasy and Isaiah would live through the years when the Assyrians finally overran Samaria and carried away the ten tribes of Israel into captivity. But Assyria would pass off the scene and Babylon would take its place. And what happened to the Northern Kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians would happen to the Southern Kingdom at the hands of the Babylonians. And Isaiah saw all of this long before it ever came to pass.

Now the Book of Isaiah is commonly divided into two sections. The first 39 chapters contain God's messages to Judah during the chaotic times of the four kings listed in Isaiah 1:1. In the last 29 books the vision zooms way out and we are enabled to see 700 years from Isaiah's time to the time of the coming of God's Suffering Servant, the Messiah, the Savior of Jews and Gentiles, Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that there are 66 chapters in Isaiah, and there are 66 books in the Bible. The first 39 chapters are typical OT history and prophecy; and there are 39 books in the OT. The last 27 chapters of Isaiah have a NT tone to them, pointing to what God would do in sending His Son Jesus Christ. And of course there are 27 books in the NT. That's an interesting twist to Isaiah.

So let's go back to Isaiah 55 where we started. This chapter falls in the last portion of Isaiah that peers far off into the future to the first and second comings of the Christ

Isaiah 53 is perhaps the most towering OT prophecy of the Christ who would come not as a conquering warrior/king, but as a Suffering Servant. We stand in awe of the prophecy that looked ahead 700 years to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross in amazing detail:

Isaiah 53:4 - Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:5 - But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:6 - We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And Isaiah 55 comes on the heels of this with the invitation that would come to Israel and to the nations to come to Christ with their thirsty and hungry souls.

Now scholars think that Isaiah 55 takes the form of an ancient invitation to a feast.

ILLUSTRATION – My grandson Cooper turns 3 tomorrow, and next week his parents are going to throw a big party for him. He's excited. The theme is Super Heroes ... Captain America, Thor and the others. He's big into that, you know. And along with presents and games there's going to be good stuff to eat and to drink. And the invitations we sent out a few weeks ago.

And what we have here is an invitation that God sends out 700 years before the time of Jesus Christ. But it's amazing how perfectly it points to the salvation that is offered through Christ to us today.

Now good Bible study is a matter of asking and answering the right questions. So let's just throw some questions at this text to see what comes out of it.

1. WHO IS INVITED?

Isaiah 55:1a - “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.

It says, “Come, all you who are thirsty.” As a pastor I have people come to me all the time to say, “I’m just dry on the inside. I don’t feel like I have any reason for living. I’m not satisfied with the way my life is going.” That’s what it means to be spiritually thirsty.

Now thirsty people *will* seek to quench that thirst, and the thirstier they get the more desperate will be their attempts to satisfy that thirst. People can go weeks without food; they can only go a few days without water.

ILLUSTRATION – I trained most of last summer for a half-marathon in Colorado. You’ll recall that last summer was one of the hottest on record. In the middle of those long runs I would get so thirsty that all I could think about was getting something to drink. Thirsty people will try to quench their thirst. It will not be put off.

Now some who are thirsty have no way of satisfying the need themselves. To them the Lord says, “You who have no money come...” What great news that is! When we know we can meet our own needs when it comes to real meaning and purpose in life ... when we know we are hopelessly lost as sinners and we are completely dependent on God to provide the way through His Son Jesus Christ. “Come, you who have no money.”

EXAMPLE: Remember Jesus’ encounter with the woman in John 4. Jesus stopped at a well in Samaria, and a Samaritan woman came out to the well about that time. She was a woman who was spiritually thirsty and didn’t know it. She had been married several times and was living with the man she was currently with. It was clear that she had been trying to fill her life with meaning by jumping from one man to another.

Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water. The woman was surprised, “You’re a Jew and I’m a Samaritan. You’re asking me for water?” Jesus replied, “Yes, and if you knew who I was you would be asking me for living water. The water that I can give you is eternal life.” Still not completely understanding the woman said, “Give me this water.” She needed something she couldn’t supply for herself.

Now others are thirsty, but they are self-deceived. They think they can meet the need themselves. That’s what the Lord means when he says...

Isaiah 55:2 - Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

As Americans most of us are at a disadvantage here. We have enough money and enough smarts and enough time on our hands to keep pursuing things that we think will satisfy our spiritual thirst. And that keeps us from coming to Christ and completely depending on him.

So that’s the first question: Who is invited? The next question:

2. WHAT IS BEING OFFERED?

As we read we realize that what is being offered to us is actually more than the basic “water.” God does more than just satisfy our basic thirst for life. What He gives goes so much deeper than that. “Come to the waters...” (v.1). Notice the plural. We’re talking here about bountiful, abundant living water. Jesus talked about “rivers of living water.”

Notice in v.1 that the invitation not only offers water, but also milk and wine. And there’s something to eat as well (v.2). Water satisfies the basic thirst. Milk provides nourishment that helps us to grow. And wine is there for enjoyment. The bread adds substance to it all. (Note: I don’t have time to discuss the use of wine in biblical times as opposed to the use of it in our times, but clearly in biblical times wine was often associated with joy.)

And what God offers us in Christ meets the deepest needs and longings in our souls, and it’s more satisfying than you can imagine.

John 6:35 - Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Now the next question we want to ask is...

3. HOW DO WE GET IT?

Now there are a number of imperative verbs (commands) in these verses. Just look at the commands:

- Come (vv.1-3). Over and over in vv.1-3 the Lord says come, come, come. But in v.3 He says, “Come to Me.” That’s where this this life is found. It’s found in Him.

Philippians 4:19 - And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

And it’s not just coming to Christ to get saved. It is coming to Christ every hour of every day and finding in Him the life our souls need.

- Buy (v.1) – Note: Now why are we asked to buy something that costs nothing (v.1)? Because there’s still a transaction involved. God purchased this gift of life through the death of His Son Jesus Christ, and He wants to impart it to us. The only currency accepted is the currency of faith. Jesus talked about this...

John 7:37 - “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

John 7:38 - Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

John 7:39 - By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

- Drink and eat (vv.1-2). In other words, “Take it in; consume it.”

Now there is an explanation of what it means to drink and eat. It is the same as listening to (v.2) and hearing (v.3) the Lord and His Word.

Isaiah 55:2b - Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Isaiah 55:3a - “Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live;

By the way, later in Isaiah 55 we learn something about this Word:

Isaiah 55:10 - 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,

Isaiah 55:11 - so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

In other words, God’s Word is guaranteed to do what God intends and promises it will do. It will satisfy. As Jesus said...

John 6:35 - Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

- Delight (v.2). It’s not just something to be consumed. It is to be enjoyed! So we come to Christ and drink the water of life which quenches the thirsting of our souls, which is also the milk of life that also nourishes our souls, which is also like wine of life that brings abundant joy to our souls.

Now there are a couple more questions we need to ask:

4. WHEN DO WE COME?

There’s an RSVP to this invitation.

Isaiah 55:6 - Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

Do you realize that God is making a gracious invitation to you, but you don’t have the luxury of responding at just any time and in any way you wish?

There’s a time when God may be found? When is that? When He lets you find Him. And there’s a time when He draws near to offer this gracious invitation. It’s His party; He’s the host.

And the next two verses explain what is involved in accepting the invitation and the call.

Isaiah 55:7 - Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

Notice that God refers to our “way” and our “thoughts.” As we come to Him we forsake our way and our thoughts. Why? Because they are not God’s way and God’s thoughts. We’re talking here about repentance. We change our ways, but it goes deeper than that. We change our thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8 – “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.

Isaiah 55:9 – “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

So we are to come now. And the last question is this:

5. WHY COME?

The answer to that question is found back in v.3.

Isaiah 55:3a - “Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live;

Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.”

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION – One of C. S. Lewis' children's novels in the Narnia series is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. And in this book the Narnians are on a long voyage across the ocean. They come across an island that later they call "Dragon Island." There is a boy named Eustace who is with the Narnians, and he goes off to explore the island. He comes across a cave where there is a dead dragon, and in the cave are all of the treasures of this dead dragon. Eustace takes a golden bracelet that belonged to the dragon and puts it on his arm. He falls asleep on the pile of treasure and wakes up to discover that he himself has turned into a dragon. The gold bracelet that he put on his wrist now is a shackle on one of his legs as a dragon. Eustace, now a dragon, is trying to scratch the dragon off of him, so to speak, but he can't do it. He's all alone. He finds his way to a pool of water and as he looks into the pool, suddenly Aslan the Lion appears. He is the Christ-figure in the Narnia tales.

Aslan comes to Eustace and says, "You will have to let me help you." And he says, "No, I can do it myself." And he starts clawing again at the skin and he takes off one or two layers and he thinks he has done it. He looks in the pool again and there is the same old dragon skin under the old layers.

And Aslan says to him, "You really have to let me help." And with his sharp lion's claw Aslan starts to cut through Eustace's dragon skin, ripping the skin open and helping him get out of it. Then Aslan places Eustace in the pool of water and says, "Now you need to get under the water."

Eustace goes under, and he comes back up and he is a new person. He is Eustace again; and his skin is soft like that of a boy.

What a powerful picture of what Christ does for us when we come to Him with trust and repentance. He takes away the dragon skin of the old person, and makes us a new creature in Christ. Come to Him to day ... Come to the waters.