



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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An Invitation to Seek the LORD (Isaiah 55:1-13)

- We saw in **Isaiah 53** how the LORD's "*Servant*" prepared the way for the glorious deliverance of God's people.
- In **Isaiah 54** we saw a poetic description of what that deliverance will look like.
- Now in **Isaiah 55** this deliverance is *offered* to those who desire it.

An Invitation to Seek the LORD (Isaiah 55:1-13)

- Despite the *strong exhortation* given in this chapter, the tone is *not* one of disapproval.
- Instead, it is one of encouragement and hope.
- Because of what “*the Servant*” has done, God’s face toward his people is not stormy but sunny.
- The only thing the LORD’s people must do is *accept* the sin offering that the Servant has made and *receive* the mercy of God that comes as a result.
- If they do this, they themselves will be able to be the servants of God in the world, a role which the book of Isaiah has been talking about since chapter 2.

An Invitation to Seek the LORD (Isaiah 55:1-13)

- This chapter can be divided into three sections:
 - An Invitation to Those in Need (55:1-5)
 - The Need for Those Who Hear to Respond (55:6-11)
 - The Joy That Is Promised to Those Who Respond (55:12-13)

Invitation to Those in Need (55:1-5)

55:1 *“Hey, all who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come! Buy and eat! Come! Buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why pay money for something that will not nourish you? Why spend your hard-earned money on something that will not satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is nourishing! Enjoy fine food. ³ Pay attention and come to me. Listen, so you can live. Then I will make an [eternal covenant with] you, just like the reliable covenantal promises I made to David. ⁴ Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.” ⁵ Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

55:1 *“Hey, all who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come! Buy and eat! Come! Buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*

- The LORD seeks the listeners’ attention with the interjection *“Hey”*.
- Then, in a series of imperatives (*“come”*, *“buy”*, *“eat”*), the LORD offers *deliverance* (pictured as *“water”*, *“wine”* and *“milk”*) to anyone who thirsts for it.
- The imagery is reminiscent of lady wisdom in Proverbs 9:1–9, who calls out to the “simple” to come and gain insight: *“Come, eat some of my food, and drink some of the wine I have mixed”* (Prov 9:5).
- It also echoes the cries of Ancient Near Eastern water-sellers, with one crucial difference: the water, wine and milk *here* are offered *without cost*, and so we see that the deliverance being offered here is *free*.
- This offer extends to *“all who are thirsty”* and not just those returning from Babylon.

55:2 *Why pay money for something that will not nourish you? Why spend your hard-earned money on something that will not satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is nourishing! Enjoy fine food.*

- Israel (= “*you*”) had **often** labored for and spent money on things that “*will not satisfy*”.
- The LORD offers that which **truly** satisfies – “*water*” and “*bread*” that represent true spiritual food.
- The LORD urges the people to “*listen carefully*” and to **accept** his offer, for it is **far better** than what they currently have.
- If they accept what the LORD is offering, they will “*eat what is nourishing*” and “*enjoy fine food.*”

55:3 *Pay attention and come to me. Listen, so you can live. Then I will make an [eternal covenant with] you, just like the reliable covenantal promises I made to David.*

- Starting here in verse 3, the metaphors of the marketplace drop away, but there is ***no reduction*** in the degree of ***urgency*** for those who are addressed to ***respond*** to the divine invitation.
- The command to “***come***”, issued three times in 55:1, is now made more ***specific*** – they are to “***come to me [i.e., to the LORD]***”.
- They are to present themselves before the LORD so that they may “***listen***” to what he has to say to them through his appointed spokesman.
- In this way they “***can live***” – that is, fully enjoy the blessings of the “***covenant***” relationship with the LORD that he is now about to discuss.

55:3 *Pay attention and come to me. Listen, so you can live. Then I will make an [eternal covenant with] you, just like the reliable covenantal promises I made to David.*

- God here promises that those who will “*come*” to him and receive what he freely offers will be the beneficiaries of an “*eternal covenant*”.
- The covenant made between Israel and God through Moses on Mount Sinai had been ***broken*** and thus, in a real sense, had already been ***abrogated***.
- So, the question becomes, how was the nation to going to continue in covenant with God?
- About a hundred years after Isaiah has written this, the LORD will announce through the prophet Jeremiah that he is going to make “*new covenant*” with his people (Jer 31:31) – one that differs ***significantly*** from the old covenant made at Sinai.
- Isaiah speaks ***here*** in terms of the covenant with “*David*”.

55:3 *Pay attention and come to me. Listen, so you can live. Then I will make an [eternal covenant with] you, just like the reliable covenantal promises I made to David.*

- As this passage unfolds, we will see that it is through the life and work of the Davidic Messiah, who was the *ultimate* fulfillment of “*the reliable covenantal promises [the LORD] made to David*”, that the covenant pledges are extended to *all* who acknowledge this Davidic Messiah as the one who rules over them and provides for them.
- The Apostle Paul saw these promises as fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:34), *and* in all the benefits that come *from* that resurrection to those who are united with him by faith (1 Cor 15:20).

55:4 *Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.*" 5 *Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

- Verses 4 and 5 **continue** the thought begun in verse 3 by describing and contrasting describe **two** ministries:
 - In **Verse 4** it describes the historical King David.
 - In **Verse 5** I believe we see the LORD addressing "*the Servant*" as the Davidic Messiah.
- This fits with what we saw in **earlier** passages in the book of Isaiah that speak of "*the Servant*" bringing light to the nations and drawing the nations to God. See, for example where the LORD says to "*the Servant*":
 - *It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*" (Isaiah 49:6)

55:4 *Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.”* ⁵ *Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

- No doubt, insofar as the people of God accept the Servant and identify with him, the statements of verse 5 would apply to them as well.
- But I believe that the *primary* person referred to here is the Servant/Messiah (who we now know as Jesus), who makes such a call possible.

55:4 *Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.*"⁵ *Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

- The use of the word attention grabbing word "*Look*" at the beginning of each of these verses invites the reader to *compare* the two ministries being discussed.
- With regard to *David*, the point is a *surprising* one, for the author uses a term that is *never* applied to him anywhere else in the OT. He is called here: "*a witness*".
- By using this term, Isaiah then shapes how we understand the two more *expected* descriptions of David that follow: "*ruler*" and "*commander*".
- It seems likely that the term "*witness*" was chosen to describe David here because it fits in with the ideas being discussed here.

55:4 *Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.”* ⁵ *Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

- The nation of Israel’s function as a “*servant of the Lord*” has been identified several times in the book of Isaiah as being a “*witness*” to the nations of the power and glory of God:
 - “*You are my witnesses,*” says the LORD, “*my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may consider and believe in me, and understand that I am he. No god was formed before me, and none will outlive me... You are my witnesses,*” says the LORD, “*that I am God.*” (Isaiah 43:10,12)
- So as he prepares to speak about the ministry of the Davidic **Messiah** in verse 5, Isaiah emphasizes this **witnessing** aspect of **David’s** life and work.

55:4 *Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.”* ⁵ *Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

- In his role as a “*ruler*” and “*commander*”, David was *ultimately* bearing “*witness*” to the power of God.
- Because, in the eyes of the surrounding nations, as David gained influence over them, it gave them reason to believe that David’s God was indeed *the* God who is over all.
- Furthermore, David also bore “*witness*” to the truths of God’s character and nature in the *psalms* that he wrote.
- Here we see, that in doing those things, David was not so much building a kingdom as he was declaring the character of the one who *alone* can be called King of all the earth.

55:4 *Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.”* **5** *Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

- So in verse 5 we see that as God keeps his promise to David that he would never lack for a descendant on the throne of Israel, the **whole world** experiences the “*covenantal promises [God] made to David*” talked about in verse 3.
- And that promised descendant (the Servant/Messiah, i.e. Jesus) becomes the one through whom **Israel’s** servanthood becomes possible.
- As he calls all nations to himself, the nations come running to Israel to learn the ways of David’s God (see also: Isaiah 2:3; 42:4; 66:18, 21).

55:4 *Look, I made him a witness to nations, a ruler and commander of nations.”* **5** *Look, you will summon nations you did not previously know; nations that did not previously know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he bestows honor on you.*

- As the Servant bears witness to the power of God to deliver all people everywhere from the power of their sin, Israel has something to witness to and is enabled to participate in the Messiah’s power.
- And so, as God glorifies himself through the Servant, Israel *also* will be glorified.
- The one who promises all this is none other than “*the Holy One of Israel*”, the one who ought to be obeyed because he has all power in his hands, and the one who ought to be loved because he has gone to the farthest lengths to redeem his people.

The Need for Those Who Hear to Respond (55:6-11)

^{55:6} *Seek the LORD while he makes himself available; call to him while he is nearby!* ⁷ [Let the wicked one abandon his way] and [and the man of evil his thoughts]. They should return to the LORD, and he will show mercy to them, and to their God, for he will freely forgive them. ⁸ “Indeed, my [thoughts] are not like your [thoughts], and my [ways] are not like your [ways],” says the LORD, ⁹ “for just as the sky is higher than the earth, so my [ways] are superior to your [ways] and my [thoughts] superior to your [thoughts].” ¹⁰ The rain and snow fall from the sky and do not return, but instead water the earth and make it produce and yield crops, and provide seed for the planter and food for those who must eat. ¹¹ In the same way, the promise that I make does not return to me, having accomplished nothing. No, it is realized as I desire and is fulfilled as I intend.”

55:6 *Seek the LORD while he makes himself available; call to him while he is nearby!*

- After the glorious declarations of salvation just uttered, the prophet commands all men to seek the Lord.
- This invitation is universal, addressed to ***all*** who are pursuing a sinful life apart from God.
- Sovereign grace is apparent in these words. God cannot be found at ***any*** time but only when He ***desires*** to be found.
- What is implied is that the ***present time***, the time when these commands are given, ***that*** is the time to seek him.
- The thought is similar to that expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:2: ***“Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation!”***
- In other words, don't ***put off*** seeking the LORD. You don't know what the future holds. Call upon him ***now*** while there is still time!

55:7 [Let the wicked one abandon his way] and [and the man of evil his thoughts]. They should return to the LORD, and he will show mercy to them, and to their God, for he will freely forgive them.

- The command to repentance continues, but where the previous verse was **positive**, **here** the commands are **negative**.
- The command is full – demanding not merely a turning **away** from what was evil but a turning **towards** God and a **wholehearted embrace** of His promises of salvation.
- The “**wicked**” refers to the man who is guilty of sin against God, and his “**way**” is the evil course of life which he follows.
- He must **abandon** this way of life, and instead is to turn unto the Lord.
- The thought here is **not** that one must **first** return in order that God may show mercy, for the **very act** of returning is a **manifestation** of the mercy of the Lord.
- Rather, man is to return, and having returned will discover that God will show mercy.

55:8 “Indeed, my [thoughts] are not like your [thoughts], and my [ways] are not like your [ways],” says the LORD,⁹ “for just as the sky is higher than the earth, so my [ways] are superior to your [ways] and my [thoughts] superior to your [thoughts].”

- The inclusion of “*ways*” and “*thoughts*” here is significant.
- **Together** they make up a whole of who we are.
- A person’s “*ways*” are one’s patterns of behavior, and those must be changed if one is ever to live with the God of the Bible.
- He makes it plain that faith in him without a life like his is not faith at all. (cf. James 2:14ff)
- At the same time a outward change of behavior without an accompanying change in our way of thinking is **not** genuine change.
- Sin is ultimately a matter of attitude. (Prov 23:7)

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- The repetition of “*ways*” and “*thoughts*” from v. 7 suggests that what is wrong with human “*ways*” and “*thoughts*” and requires us to **turn away** from them is that they are not **God’s** “*ways*” and “*thoughts*” .
- **Our** “*ways*” and “*thoughts*” have been perverted by sin from the moment of conception, and it is only as we turn **from** them **to** God and his mercy that we can **ever** have peace with him and live lives that will be truly pleasing to him.

55:10 *The rain and snow fall from the sky and do not return, but instead water the earth and make it produce and yield crops, and provide seed for the planter and food for those who must eat. ¹¹ In the same way, the promise that I make does not return to me, having accomplished nothing. No, it is realized as I desire and is fulfilled as I intend.”*

- These verses provide the an ***additional*** reason why we should seek the Lord and abandon our wickedness: the ***absolute dependability*** of God’s word.
- This point is made here by an extended comparison between the “***rain and snow***” and God’s “***promise***” as found in his word.
- What God has said about the certainty of pardon being available is ***absolutely dependable***.
- But even more than that, ***all*** that God has said or promised in his word is reliable, whether it is about himself and his love, or about the nature of reality and the foolishness of idolatry, or about the human predicament and the necessity of repentance.

55:10 *The rain and snow fall from the sky and do not return, but instead water the earth and make it produce and yield crops, and provide seed for the planter and food for those who must eat. ¹¹ In the same way, the promise that I make does not return to me, having accomplished nothing. No, it is realized as I desire and is fulfilled as I intend.”*

- In the ancient Near East rain spelled the difference between life and death.
- If the rains came at the appropriate times one could hope for good crops, which meant enough food (bread) for the coming year, and, of at least equal importance, seed for the following year's crop.
- If the rains did not come, not only was the crop lost but also the seed, and famine stared one in the face.
- In a powerful comparison, Isaiah says that God's word is just like the rain.
- In particular, he compares the effectiveness of the two.
- Each one achieves the purposes of blessing and life-giving for which it was intended.

55:10 *The rain and snow fall from the sky and do not return, but instead water the earth and make it produce and yield crops, and provide seed for the planter and food for those who must eat. ¹¹ In the same way, the promise that I make does not return to me, having accomplished nothing. No, it is realized as I desire and is fulfilled as I intend.”*

- God’s plans and purposes are for our good.
- God intends to bless the human race, to forgive its sins, to redeem its failures, and to give permanence to its work.
- All this will be accomplished through his word as we now find it in the Bible.
- It is not “*rain*” that is *ultimately* the source of life but the word of God.

Joy Is Promised to Those Who Respond (55:12-13)

55:12 *Indeed you will go out with joy; you will be led along in peace; the mountains and hills will give a joyful shout before you, and all the trees in the field will clap their hands.* ¹³ *Evergreens will grow in place of thornbushes; firs will grow in place of nettles; they will be a monument to the LORD, a permanent reminder that will remain.*

Joy Is Promised to Those Who Respond (55:12-13)

- There will be an exodus from Babylon of those who have turned towards God.
- Their departure will be marked by great joy and peace; even nature (figuratively speaking) will burst into song and “*clap their hands*” because the LORD has delivered the exiles.
- The highly figurative language continues in verse 13 with images of God’s renewal: the “*thornbushes*” and “*nettles*” will be transformed into trees, implying a reversal of the curse to which the ground was subjected in Genesis 3:18.
- The fruitfulness of the land will be a “*monument to the LORD*”, which “*will remain*”.
- As we have seen so often in Isaiah, the deliverance from Babylon spoken of in this original context *prefigures* what God will *ultimately* accomplish in the restoration of the whole earth.

Next Time

- We will see how the LORD Welcomes Outsiders (56:1-8)

Class Discussion Time



Class Discussion Time

- In our text today we see how the LORD stresses the urgency of coming to him ***now*** while he may still be found.
- Have you ever talked to someone who knew they needed to come to the LORD or repent of some sinful practice, but were putting it off, thinking they still had time to repent later? Have you ever found ***yourself*** thinking this way?
- What is the problem with this kind of thinking?

Class Discussion Time

- Our passage today assures us of the absolute reliability and dependability of God's word in **every** area of life.
- Yet it is common in our modern secular age to be critical or skeptical of the Biblical view of things in light of modern "scientific" thinking.
- The modern evolutionary view of the origins of the cosmos comes to mind. Also, modern psychological analysis will often conflict with Biblical teaching.
- People who believe in biblical teaching on sexuality are often told today that they are on "the wrong side of history".
- Have you encountered these kind of thinking in your interactions with other people? How do you address these kinds of ideas when you encounter them?
- Have you **personally** ever found yourself having doubts in some of these areas? If so, what do you do about?