

The Universal Invitation

Isaiah 55:1-9

INTRODUCTION

- A. A young lady, who felt that her parents were too restrictive, entered a life of prostitution.
 - 1. Learning of her daughter's plight, the girl's mother desperately sought to rescue her.
 - 2. Not having her daughter's address, the mother left a photograph of herself in each house of ill fame she visited.
 - 3. One day, the prodigal daughter saw on a mantle in a reception room, a familiar picture.
 - a. It was the likeness of her first love—her mother.
 - b. Beneath were the words: "Come home."
- B. Could there have been any more meaningful message for that girl to hear than one that simply said, "Come home"?
- C. We understand that God desperately wants those made in his own image to come home to him.
 - 1. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).
 - 2. In the Parable of the Marriage Feast, the king told his servants, "Go . . . to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find" (Mt 22:9).
 - 3. "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink'" (Jn 7:37).
 - 4. "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev 22:17).
- D. In this morning's text, God is urging the Jews to return to him.
 - 1. Earlier in the Book of Isaiah, God had promised to send his people into Babylonian Captivity.
 - a. "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD" (Is 39:5-6).
 - b. Immediately after the promise of captivity, God begins to comfort his people—From chapters 40 to 55, God promises to comfort those who go into captivity.
 - 1) Think about the implications of that for a moment: God promises great judgment, but he also offers great hope & love.
 - 2) Well did Paul write: "Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness" (Rom 11:22).
 - c. God's severity is great.
 - 1) One day the Lord Jesus shall come to destroy this world & punish those who are not his: "The Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess 1:7-8).
 - 2) As John sees God's judgment poured out upon the Roman Empire, everyone hides himself among the caves & calls to the mountains: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev 6:16-17). If John depicts God's wrath against the Roman Empire in such severe terms, can you even imagine what God's wrath at the end of the age must be like?
 - d. God's severity is great, but so is his kindness.
 - 1) "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rev 5:8).
 - 2) Even though we deserved the full cup of God's wrath, God sent his Son to take that wrath & to redeem us from sin.
 - 2. God has promised his people that they shall see his severity—he shall send them into Babylonian Captivity.
 - 1) However, God—in this morning's text—offers his people kindness to escape that severity.
 - 2) This morning, we want to think about "THE UNIVERSAL INVITATION" that we, too, might escape God's severity.

THE INVITATION'S PARTICIPANTS, v 1a

- A. "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters."

The Universal Invitation

- B. In Hebrew, the word “Ho!” is used here to serve as an attention-getting device.
 - 1. God wants to have our undivided attention—God wants people to come to the water & drink.
 - 2. There are five imperatives (commands) in verse 1.
 - a. These imperatives, along with “Ho!” serve to illustrate the urgency of the invitation.
 - b. There is no time to delay in responding to the invitation, but one needs to do so quickly.
 - 1) “You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (Js 4:14).
 - 2) “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (Heb 3:15).
- C. The invitation’s participants are those who thirst—this invitation is only for the thirsty.
- D. God says that everyone who thirsts should come to the waters.
 - 1. Israel is a dry land, and during the summers those who would travel in Israel would endure parching thirst.
 - a. The people to whom Isaiah wrote understood thirst—Not just wanting a drink after being outside on a warm day, but needing a drink to sustain life.
 - b. The idea behind this verse seems to be an ancient water vendor who would sell water to passers-by during a drought.
 - 2. Yet, the thirsting here is for God; the desire for God is often compared to thirst.
 - a. “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:2).
 - b. “I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land” (Ps 143:6).
 - 3. Everyone who really has a desire for God can come to him.
 - 4. They shall find their needs satisfied.
 - a. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Mt 5:6).
 - b. “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’” (Jn 6:35).
- E. Are you thirsting for God? Has God satisfied your thirst?

THE INVITATION’S PRODUCT, v 1b

- A. “He who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”
- B. Wine & milk often stand for spiritual blessings.
 - 1. When God appeared to Moses, he promised to deliver the Israelites “out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8).
 - 2. Wisdom personified offers wine: “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (Prov 9:5-6).
- C. God, therefore, is offering these Israelites spiritual blessings if they will turn to him.
- D. Jesus, likewise, uses the imagery of food & drink to offer us spiritual blessings.
 - 1. “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:13-14).
 - 2. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (Jn 7:37-38).
- E. Do you know the spiritual blessings God offers?

THE INVITATION’S PRICE, vv 1c-2

- A. “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” (vv 1c-2).
- B. The spiritual blessings God offers are absolutely free.
- C. God encourages the Israelites to come & buy wine and milk without money & without price.
 - 1. This verse is obviously full of irony, for one cannot buy anything for free; everything has a cost.
 - 2. Yet, God offers spiritual life to the Israelites for absolutely nothing.
- D. God asks the Israelites why they spend money for what is not bread and spend their wages on what does not satisfy.
 - 1. This verse probably deals with the Israelites’ preoccupation with settling down in Babylon; they had lost all hope of returning to their homeland & they were putting down roots in Babylon.
 - 2. When the people could have free water, wine, & milk, why would they spend their money on what could never satisfy?
 - a. Many people spend their lives today in what will not satisfy.

The Universal Invitation

- 1) They spend their lives accumulating wealth only to see their children resentful of the time they spent away from the family.
- 2) They spend their time chasing after new & exciting sexual encounters when their husband/wife could satisfy those needs.
- 3) They fulfill their need for God in some false religion only to end up in hell when the world is no more.
- b. Are you spending time in what will not satisfy?
3. True satisfaction can only be found in God.
 - a. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Ps 23:5).
 - b. “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need” (Mal 3:10).
- E. God offered **free** spiritual blessings to the Israelites.
 1. Spiritual fulfillment comes to us freely, as well.
 - a. We “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).
 - b. “Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev 22:17).
 2. Author James Herriot tells of an unforgettable wedding anniversary he & his wife celebrated early in their marriage.
 - a. His boss had encouraged him to take his wife to a fancy restaurant, but Herriot balked.
 - 1) He was a young veterinarian & couldn’t really afford it.
 - 2) “Oh, do it!” the boss insisted. “It’s a special day!” Herriot reluctantly agreed & surprised his wife with the news.
 - b. En route to the restaurant, Herriot & his wife stopped at a farm to examine a farmer’s horse.
 - 1) Having finished the routine exam, he returned to his car & drove to the restaurant, unaware that his checkbook had fallen in the mud.
 - 2) After a wonderful meal, Herriot reached for his checkbook & discovered it was gone. Quite embarrassed, he tried to offer a way of making it up.
 - c. “Not to worry,” the waiter replied. “Your dinner has been taken care of!”
 - 1) As it was, Herriot’s employer had paid for the dinner in advance.
 - 2) Likewise, God has paid for our spiritual blessings in advance.
 3. However, simply because salvation is free does not mean that we need to do nothing to get it.
 - a. There is no way that we can earn our salvation; no amount of good works is going to save me.
 - 1) “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:4-5).
 - 2) It doesn’t matter how good I think I am, how many acts of mercy I perform, how much money I give to the Lord’s cause—I cannot save myself.
 - b. But, that free gift of God can only be accepted through my obedience to Jesus.
 - 1) “Being made perfect, [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb 5:9).
 - 2) If I refuse obedience to Jesus, I refuse that free gift.
 - c. Back in 1830, George Wilson was convicted of robbing the US Mail & was sentenced to be hanged.
 - 1) President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Wilson, but he refused to accept it.
 - 2) The matter went to the Supreme Court & Chief Justice John Marshall concluded that Wilson would have to be executed.
 - a) Marshall wrote for the Court, “A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged.”
 - b) Are you, like George Wilson, refusing the pardon?

THE INVITATION’S PROMISE, v 3

- A. “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.”
- B. God promises that those who hear shall live.
 1. The Lord is promising a full life to the one who will hear.
 2. God gives us a full life, too.

The Universal Invitation

- a. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).
- b. In other words, Jesus gives a full & meaningful life.
- C. Do you have the full & meaningful life that Jesus offers?

THE INVITATION'S PLEA, vv 6-7

- A. "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."
- B. The Lord pleads with the people to seek him now—to seek him before it is too late.
- C. The people are to seek the Lord while he may be found & to call upon him while he is near, v 6.
 - 1. It is obvious here that the Lord wants to be found.
 - a. Isaiah says, in fact, that the Lord can be found.
 - b. In the day of these Israelites, he had come near through the work & words of Isaiah; he is near us today through the words of Scripture.
 - 2. There is an urgency in this plea, for the time is not unlimited.
 - a. Although God is being patient, the time for judgment is going to come.
 - b. There is an acceptable time for seeking God.
 - 1) "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2).
 - 2) "He appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts'" (Heb 4:7).
 - 3. There is great danger in delay.
 - a. In Saint Louis in 1984, an unemployed cleaning woman noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home.
 - 1) Since there were only a few, she made no effort to deal with them.
 - a) Over the summer the bees continued to fly in & out of the attic vent while the woman remained unconcerned, unaware of the growing city of bees.
 - b) The whole attic became a hive, and the ceiling of the second-floor bedroom finally caved in under the weight of hundreds of pounds of honey & thousands of angry bees.
 - 2) While the woman escaped serious injury, she was unable to repair the damage to her home, simply because she kept putting it off.
 - b. Will it be the case that you will continue to put off your obedience to the Gospel until it is too late? Will you wait until death finds you or your eyes behold Jesus coming in the clouds of glory?
- D. The wicked is urged to forsake his way & his thoughts, v 7.
 - 1. The Israelites needed to forsake their sins, and we need to forsake our sins.
 - a. "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Prov 28:13).
 - b. "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1).
 - 2. Have you forsaken your sins?
- E. After the Israelites forsook their sins, they were to turn to God.
 - 1. We, likewise, need to turn to God.
 - a. "Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts" (Mal 3:7).
 - b. "You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pt 2:25).
 - 2. Have you turned to God?
- F. If the Israelites would turn back to God, he would have mercy on them, for he will abundantly pardon.
 - 1. God will pardon our sins.
 - a. "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Is 43:25).
 - b. "I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Heb 8:12).
 - 2. Do you need to obtain God's free gift of salvation this morning by turning from your sins & obeying Jesus in baptism?