

Isaiah 55:1-5 – Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – St. John’s Burlington, WI – August 16th, 2020

Someone once said that the Gospel is an invitation to a hungry person to sit down and eat.¹ The Israelites were hungry for God’s favor. They had repeatedly sinned against the LORD. They had worshiped other gods. And so the LORD allowed the Babylonians to come in, burn down the city, burn the temple, and carry the people away to the foreign country of Babylon. And now the repentant people were hungry for God’s favor.

Have you ever been hungry for God’s favor? Maybe you can think of a time when your sin really struck your conscience. If you are hungry for God’s favor, listen to what God says here in Isaiah 55.

Imagine that you haven’t had anything to eat or drink for a long time. You’re starving. And you go into the marketplace of a city,² but you’re not sure what good that is going to do because you don’t have any money. And then you hear the voice of one of the shop owners calling out to everyone: **“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” (Isaiah 55:1)**

Have you ever heard a really good salesman? Maybe in a market or maybe on an info-mercial or on a shopping network. The God of all the universe so badly wants people to be saved that he stands in the marketplace and calls out to everyone: “Come, come, come! Buy water and bread and milk and wine without money and without cost.” The Gospel is like a friendly invitation to a hungry person to sit down and eat.

But you might think, “He can’t possibly mean me. My sins are too great.” He means you. **“You who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost” (Isaiah 55:1).** Your sin has left you penniless, but God gives his favor without money and without cost. **“For it is by grace you been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-10).** He means you.

Or maybe you think, “He can’t possibly mean me. I don’t need it.” If you think that way, then you probably have some artificial bread. **“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor one what does not satisfy?”** You see there are other vendors in the marketplace and they are selling counterfeit bread. One of the other vendors is Self-righteousness. Self-righteousness sets up his shop and the bread that he’s selling says, “My sins aren’t as bad a someone else’s. I can buy this bread, but they can’t because their sin is worse than mine.” That’s counterfeit bread. It’s never going to satisfy because it’s dependent on something that you do. And eventually the devil is going to come and remind you: You don’t have any money either.

Another vendor who sets up shop is the World. This is a very popular vendor. And if you find yourself saying, “If I just had a better job, if I just had this accomplishment, if I just had a better

¹ CFW Walther, *Law and Gospel*, Concordia Publishing House, p. 9.

² I owe the imagery of a marketplace and vendors to Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40-55*, Concordia Commentary and to Edward Young, *Isaiah*, NICOT, Volume 3, Eerdmans.

house, if I just had better stuff, then I would be truly happy.” If you say that to yourself then you’ve bought the World’s counterfeit bread. You’re going to work yourself into the ground. You’re going to spend all your money. You’re going to spend your life chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes). And you might catch glimpses of happiness. You might catch glimpses of satisfaction, but it’s never going to last. **“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2)**

The other Vendors leave us penniless and hungry, but God invites us to come and eat good food. **“Listen, listen to me, and you will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:2)**. Not just the bare minimum. The richest of fare. He gives us bread and water to sustain us. He gives us milk and wine for our enjoyment. And these are all spiritual blessings that come from his word. Notice the emphasis on listening. **“Listen, that you may live” (55:3)**. God gives us these blessings when we listen to his word and believe it.

What blessings does God promise us in his word? He says: **“I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David” (Isaiah 55:3)**. What did God promise to David? God promised David that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, he used this phrase “the love promised to David.” He said, **“LORD God, do not reject your anointed one. Remember the great love you promised to David your servant” (2 Chron. 6:42)**. One of the themes of Psalm 89 is this promise that David’s throne would last forever. This promise was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. The vendor Self-righteousness offers us pride. The World offers us short-lived happiness. But God offers us Jesus.

And in Jesus God gives us many blessings. I’ll highlight three of them. They all begin with R. Restoration, Resurrection, and Royalty. First, restoration. The people were in Babylon because of their sin. But God sent the Messiah to **“proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1)**. God sent the Messiah to take all our sins on himself so that **“by his wounds we could be healed” (Isaiah 53:5)**. In Jesus we have **restoration**.

In Jesus we also have **resurrection**. The language here in Isaiah 55, “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost” is similar to what God says in Isaiah 25: **“On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces.” (Isaiah 25:6-8)**. How many tears has death caused us? In the resurrection God is going to replace those tears with a banquet. In Jesus we have restoration, resurrection and finally royalty.

One commentator pointed out that Isaiah 55 really includes us in the promise made to David.³ **“I will make an everlasting covenant with them, my faithful love promised to David” (55:3)**. The promise to David was that his throne would last forever, and if we are included in that promise that means that we too are royalty. The New Testament teaches that we reign with

³ Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40-55*.

Christ. Paul says in Ephesians: **“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (2:6)**. In 2 Timothy Paul says that **“if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Tim 2:12)**. And Peter says that you are a **“chosen people, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9)**. Why buy what the other vendors are selling when we have Restoration, Resurrection, and Royalty free in Christ?

God invites us to come and eat. And he also wants us to extend that invitation to others. Someone once described Christians as a beggars telling other beggars where to find bread. It says, **“See, I have made him a witness to the peoples” (55:3)**. The “him” is Jesus. But Jesus now carries out his witness through us. Jesus said, **“You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8)**. And earlier in Isaiah God said, **“You are my witnesses” (Isaiah 43:10)**.⁴ We talked about being a missionary a few weeks ago in Matthew chapter 10. Being a witness for Christ is hard for a lot of reasons, but one commentator pointed this out: Think about the people of Israel in Babylon and how hard their witness was. The Babylonians had just burned Jerusalem, burned the temple and carried the people into exile.⁵ And God told the people of Israel, “You are my witnesses and your message is that the LORD is the only true God. The gods of Babylon are nothing and Babylon is nothing.” Some Christian leaders have compared the situation of the church today to the Israelites living in Babylon. Young people are leaving the church in droves. Sin is becoming more accepted. Church membership and church attendance is declining. We might feel like the Israelites living in Babylon. But why does God put us in Babylon? God puts us in Babylon because he has people there. People today are hungry, tell them where to find bread and some of them will listen. **“Nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor” (Isaiah 55:5)**.

The Gospel is a friendly invitation to a hungry person to come and eat. Let’s accept that gracious invitation and let’s also extend that invitation to others. Amen.

⁴ The connection between “You will be my witnesses” in Acts 1:8 and “You are my witnesses” in Isaiah was first pointed out to me by Dr. David Pao at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

⁵ John Oswalt, “The Nations in Isaiah: Friend or Foe; Servant or Partner” in *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, page 102.