

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”

For some of you, that may sound odd at first.

Isn't God always near?

When was God ever hard to find?

But for others, you have experienced this first hand!

Because there are times when God is distant.

As Americans we are prone to an overly-individualistic reading of this.

We read this as being about *me* in *my relationship to God*.

And certainly this can – and does – happen to individuals!

But Isaiah is talking about the restoration of the people of God!

Isaiah 38-55 began with the sickness of Hezekiah.

The House of David is mortally wounded.

Babylon is coming, and the Babylonians will carry away the sons of David into Exile.

Chapters 41-48 speak of the restoration from Exile.

God promises that he will redeem Israel, his Servant.

God will raise up a great king to deliver his people.

No—not the son of David—but Cyrus, a godless pagan.

Because, as Isaiah 48 concludes, Israel, the Servant, is no better than the nations.

When Israel is restored from exile, they will be no better than before.

The Restoration will fail, because the sin of Israel has never been dealt with.

Therefore chapters 49-55 speak of the singular Servant who will redeem Servant Israel.

One man will arise to bear the sins of the many.

The LORD will lay on him the iniquity of us all.

Chapters 54-55 provide a fitting conclusion to this message.

When God reveals his promise of a suffering Servant who will deal finally with sin,
it is fitting that there should be great rejoicing!

The singular suffering Servant has accomplished salvation.

Now the servants respond to what the Servant has done.

This response takes two parts:

We saw in chapter 54 the enlarging of the tent of Zion

Now in chapter 55 we hear who will dwell in that tent

Isaiah 40 had spoken of the comfort that was to come to Zion.

Isaiah 54-55 declares that comfort.

And last time we concluded with the “heritage of the servants of the LORD” –
which we noted is the *only* plural reference to the *servants*
in Isaiah 38-55.

All through Isaiah 41-52 the focus was on Servant Israel.

But as we saw in chapter 53, the singular Servant has accomplished his task,
he has received his inheritance, which he now shares with the servants –
with us!

If chapter 54 speaks to Zion and promises comfort for the restored city of God,
chapter 55 speaks to “everyone” and calls them to come live there!

I’ve given you the chiasmic structure of the passage in your bulletin.

The opening and closing themes of renewal and *coming* –
form a bracket around the theme of the Word of the LORD –
with the certainty and the centrality of the Ways and Promises of God –
and at the very center – a call to repent and seek the LORD.

A. Individual Renewal – Let the Poor Come! (v1)

B. What Will Truly Satisfy? Hearing the Word of the LORD (v2-3b)

C. The Certainty of God’s Promises to David and the Nations (v3c-5)

D. Seek the LORD and Repent (v6-7)

C’. Because God’s Ways and Thoughts Are Better (c8-9)

B’. The Word of the LORD Will Accomplish His Purposes (v10-11)

A’. Cosmic Renewal – the Coming Joy (v12-13)

A. Individual Renewal – Let the Poor Come! (v1)

55:1-5 opens with four calls to come, three calls to listen, and two calls to look.

55 “*Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;*

Are you thirsty?

Are you parched?

Are you wandering in a dry and weary land?

Come to the waters.

The Land of Canaan was a land that *could* be fertile –
if it had enough rain!

But in the hill country of Judah, water was precious.

*and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!*

It may sound odd to say to one who has no money –
“come, buy and eat!”

But Isaiah says:

*Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.*

There is a purchase required!

The wine and milk are not free.
But someone else has paid the price.
We are still responding to chapters 52-53.
The Servant has paid the price.

In family worship last night, we read from 2 Chronicles 35
how Josiah provided 30,000 lambs for the Passover –
so that ordinary Israelites could partake.

It's not that the Passover lambs had no cost!
Rather, the Son of David bore the cost for his people!

That's the same point that Isaiah makes here.

Come to the feast and buy wine and milk without money and without price!

But then he asks:

B. What Will Truly Satisfy? Hearing the Word of the LORD (v2-3b)

² *Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*

Isaiah understands the basics of human economy.

“Money” is simply a number that we place on a certain amount of labor.

If you make \$15 an hour –
and a loaf of bread costs \$5 –
then that loaf of bread costs 20 minutes of your labor.

If you make \$25 an hour –
that loaf costs 12 minutes of your labor.

But Isaiah is curious about a common feature of human economy:

people often spend their money on things that do not satisfy!

Many people have been puzzled at those who have a hard time putting food on the table –
but insist on paying for cable TV!

But if we observe our own behavior – it makes more sense!

We spend an excessive amount of time – and therefore devote our *labor* –
to things that do not satisfy –
things that cannot possibly bring *happiness*.

We know that these behaviors are destructive.
And yet we do them – again and again!
It didn't work last time – but maybe this time?!

Our problem is that we are listening to folly.
Our problem is that we are feeding on lies.

*Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.*

God is not saying to you – “set aside the sumptuous feast,
I will teach you how to live on nothing!”

NO!!!

God says
Listen diligently – eat what is good – delight yourselves in rich food.
God has prepared a sumptuous banquet in Jesus Christ!
Therefore listen to what he has said, and eat what he has offered.

³ *Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;*

If you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts
as your fathers did in the wilderness.

Moses had told Israel in Deuteronomy –
“Man shall not live by bread alone –
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD!”

Isaiah has often used imagery from Moses of the wilderness.
Now he calls Israel to come to Yahweh.
Jesus will use this language when he says
“come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

How does Jesus give you rest?
Through the proclamation of good news!
Your sin is forgiven!
Your shame is removed!

Hear, that your soul may live (55:3)

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”

It is only through hearing God’s word that we come to partake

of this great covenant meal that God has prepared in Jesus Christ.

Why do I call it a covenant meal?

Well – because that’s where Isaiah goes next in this sentence (v3)

C. The Certainty of God’s Promises to David and the Nations (v3c-5)

and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

David?

We haven’t heard about David since Isaiah 38!

The focus of chapters 1-37 was on the house of David,

but 38-55 doesn’t have much to say about it.

The first chapter of this section spoke of Yahweh as the God of David,

but David has been conspicuously absent.

Now, here at the end of the Book of the Servant,

we are told that the Servant’s ministry will do something to renew

God’s steadfast sure love for David.

Indeed, the two “beholds” of verses 4-5 focus on this role of David.

⁴ *Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,*

a leader and commander for the peoples.

This is what God did for David.

David was a witness to the peoples.

Think of what happened when the Philistine champion,

Goliath of Gath, challenged the armies of Israel to a fight!

He said that if he killed the Israelite champion,

Israel would serve the Philistines –

but if the Israelite champion killed him,

then the Philistines would serve Israel!

David was a witness to the peoples.

He stood up in the name of the LORD and defied Goliath.

Sometimes, I think, we undervalue David!

I grew up thinking that the rest of the Israelites

just didn’t trust God enough!

But what would have happened if an ordinary Israelite said

“I trust God – Goliath is blaspheming God –

so I’m going to go fight Goliath!!”

He would have ended up dead.
That's not faith – that's folly!
David did not defeat Goliath simply because he had faith!
David defeated Goliath because he was the LORD's Anointed!
He had been anointed by the Holy Spirit
in order to go before Israel in battle!

Or, to use the language of Isaiah,
“I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.”

Have you ever noticed how many *Gittites* were in David's army?
A Gittite is someone from Gath.
There were apparently some honorable Gittites who honored the word of their champion!
And when Goliath fell, they served David from that day!

David was a witness to the peoples –
a leader and commander for the peoples!

And of course, that was especially true when he became king!
Hiram of Tyre made a covenant of friendship with David.
Many kings and many peoples bowed the knee to David!

But Isaiah envisions a day when God's steadfast love for David will be renewed!

⁵ *Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.*

Who is being addressed?
The you of verse 5 switches to masculine singular.
The you of verses 2-3 was masculine plural.

You – people of God – need to listen and hear the word of the LORD!
Because *you*, O Singular Servant of the LORD, will call a nation...

Jesus is the Singular Servant of the LORD to whom the nations run!
Because the Holy One of Israel has glorified his Holy Servant, Jesus!

Here we see that the Servant of chapters 38-55
is connected with the Davidic King of chapters 1-37.
And through this Servant/King, God will bring to fruition the promise to Abraham
that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him.

Dearly beloved people of God,
why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?
And your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Come to Jesus!

D. Seek the LORD and Repent (v6-7)

⁶ *“Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
⁷ 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.*

If the Servant has paid for the transgressions of his people,
then the people of God must turn away from their sin and seek the LORD.
Jesus Christ has died for your sins.
Therefore repent!
He has promised to forgive the sins of all those who ask for pardon.

Do you regularly ask forgiveness for your sins?
I hope that our weekly habit of confessing our sins publicly is having a good effect.
I hope that you are learning to make it a daily habit to confess your sins to God,
and to one another.
But remember that repentance is more than just asking forgiveness.
It is a forsaking of sin.
“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.”
Flee to Christ and walk in newness of life!

Repentance unto life is a saving grace,
whereby a sinner –
out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ –
does, with grief and hatred of his sin,
turn from it, unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

If you think about it, the Shorter Catechism’s description of repentance unto life
is fully expressed in verses 6-7!

We see our sin for what it is!
We see our God – we see Jesus – for who he is!
We come because we see the mercy of God in Christ!
And we come hating our sin – and turning away from it – forsaking it! –
because we know that we need his compassion and pardon!

There follow a series of four “kis” – four statements that explain *why* we should repent.

C'. Because God's Ways and Thoughts Are Better (v8-9)

These “kis” drive us relentlessly to the reason for repentance.

First, comes the bald statement of the reason:

⁸ *For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*

Okay, that should be pretty apparent.

God's ways are different from our ways.

If my wife treated me the way Jerusalem treated God,
it's not likely that I'd respond quite so graciously!

So second, verse 9 expands on the first “for”

⁹ *For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

In verse 7, we were called to forsake our wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts.

Now God says *my ways* are higher than your ways –
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

This is important!

Do you believe this?

Of course I believe this – don't be silly!

He's God. I'm not.

I didn't ask if you *acknowledge this to be true*.

I asked you if you *believe this!*

Do you put your faith in this God whose ways and thoughts are higher?

Do you trust him?

Even when his ways don't seem to be working?

Even when his thoughts seem to rather bizarre?

B'. The Word of the LORD Will Accomplish His Purposes (v10-11)

The third “for” then gives a comparison:

¹⁰ *For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,*

*¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

Why should you repent?

Why should you forsake your wicked ways and flee to Christ?
Because as the rain from heaven waters the earth and makes it fruitful,
so also the Word from heaven bears fruit in the lives of God's people.

But listen carefully!

The illustration that God gives you is one that takes time!

You want bread?

God says that he will give you bread!

He will send rain and snow –
so that in four months you can have bread.
Even so is the Word of the LORD!

It shall not return empty!

It *shall* accomplish the purpose for which I send it!
The Word of the LORD will bear fruit in its own time.

Do not rush.

Do not be hasty!

Learn from the ants to wait patiently for the proper time!

And that proper time is the theme of the final “for” in verses 12-13:

A'. Cosmic Renewal – the Coming Joy (v12-13)

*¹² “For you shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

*¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall make a name for the LORD,
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”*

Drawing on the image of the watered and fruitful earth,

Isaiah promises that the Word of God will bring bounty and plenty
to the restored people of God.

But while it uses the imagery of restoration from Exile,
Isaiah is not talking chiefly about the Restoration from Babylon.
His eyes are fixed firmly upon the Great Restoration in Jesus Christ.

The reason why you should repent of your sin and flee to Christ
is because God has not merely revealed his power,
he has revealed his *name*.

The everlasting sign that shall not be cut off is not something external to who God is.
He has revealed himself, his character, and his love.
Because the Word that went forth from his mouth
was none other than the Incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.