

## Isaiah 55 Sermon Church on the Corner

Lo, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.  
3 Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.  
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.  
4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander for the peoples.  
5 See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you.  
6 Seek the Lord while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near;  
7 let the wicked forsake their way,  
and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.  
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.  
10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered 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 succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
12 For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
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 be to the Lord for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

**Introduction** – Have you ever watched a friend making terrible life choices? Perhaps a cycle of overwork, self-medication and destructive behaviour? Or making really bad choices about relationships - they say its just fun, but it has become a pattern. And little by little these bad choices become who you are.

Now the truth is that we can see it clearly with some people, but Isaiah looks intensely at us and says what are you doing? What are the choices you are making? Why are you working so hard for that which does not satisfy?

### **Context.**

We are approaching the climax of Isaiah, and it is written towards the end of Babylonian exile. Remember the young and the educated had been taken away into captivity, and Jeremiah had said to them “Seek the good of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for if it prospers, you too will prosper.” It was clearly the case that many of them had prospered. In fact a significant number of the exiles never returned to Jerusalem. And amazingly until recently modern day Iraq had the largest jewish community outside Israel as a result of this. So after spending 70 years in a materialistic, hedonistic culture Isaiah speaks to a community torn between leaving behind all their comfort in order to rebuild Jerusalem. Some passages of the Bible need little contextualising.

### **So Isaiah poses a question.**

*v2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in the richest of food.*

What are you working for? We have bought into a system of consumption and accumulation without ever really asking whether it delivers on what it promises.

What are we working so hard for? What is it that we think we are going to achieve. Philip Roth – I recently reread American Pastoral by Philip Roth. One of the great American writers, a towering intellect who achieved great wealth, success, and recognition. Yet his writing betrays an angry and painful emptiness. *“He had learned the worst lesson that life can teach - that it makes no sense.”*

This experience of dissatisfaction is really important to recognise *“If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for something else.”* C.S. Lewis

**Isaiah says there is a better way?** *“your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”*

**But this is not the broad road.** Not the obvious way.

Very unlikely that the lifestyle pages of the Sunday paper are going to point you in this direction. Or even the achievements of science, for all its brilliance.

*v9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts*

It is going to require a degree of humility. If you are like me you find it hard not to know, you won't be told. Do you know about the door to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem? It is only 4 feet high. You don't get to go in without bowing down.

### **1. It begins with an invitation.**

You are invited into a life-giving relationship

*v3 Incline your ear, and come to me;*

*listen, so that you may live.*

*I will make with you an everlasting covenant,*

Not a negotiated relationship. Not a deal. Quid pro quo.

*“Listen to me”* It is God who is calling us.

*“I will make with you an everlasting covenant,”*

A covenant. A promise of Love. All you have to do is say yes.

### **2. It is founded on mercy.**

What we bring is failure & brokenness to this relationship. We come exactly as we are. Not as we pretend to be.

*6 Seek the Lord while he may be found,*

*call upon him while he is near;*

*7 let the wicked forsake their way,*

*and the unrighteous their thoughts;*

*let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,*

*and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

You don't get to say I'm good enough. And you certainly don't earn this.

But that is not a negative thing. Instead of the lie that your worth is based on what you have achieved. The truth is that you are child of God, made in his image and are of inherent and eternal worth, no matter what your external circumstances. But of course the challenge of that is if it is true of us it is true of others too. We don't get to differentiate between them and us, those who matter and those who don't.

### **3. And there we will discover that life is a gift.**

The irony is that Christianity is painted as a life of grim duty, rules, ritual and obligation.

By contrast worldly freedom, wealth and success are like food which quickly loses its savour.

They might taste good at first, like spiritual fast food. But don't try and live on them. They will not sustain you.

By contrast the life that God gives us is simpler and less showy, but ultimately is richer and more joyful. We chose to live behind the allure of our acquisitive culture and find in God's creation a life of simple goodness and quiet joy.

*v12 For you shall go out in joy,*

*and be led back in peace;*

*the mountains and the hills before you*

*shall burst into song,*

*and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

The key word in that verse is 'back'. They are being called back to Jerusalem - to the holy city. That they had left behind. And it would be a hard journey, and a sacrificial choice. Like them we are being called - but to the new Jerusalem - the kingdom of God. Hebrews 13 *“For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”*

And that will require the same hard choices, sacrifice and pilgrimage.

But as Romans says *‘The Kingdom of God is justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.’*

That is the life that God intends for you.

### **Conclusion**

This Advent we begin again. Remembering that life is a gift from God to be received with joy.

It is an invitation to be accepted - as v1 says.

*v1 Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!*

So we are called on a journey of discovery, of finding in God the life that was always intended for us. It is not the obvious way, not the broad path. But it is the way that leads to eternal life. And advent reminds us that starts now.

*“God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.*

*There is no such thing.” ~ C.S.Lewis*