

Sermon Given by

Tony Heywood

At the Evening Service on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010

### Isaiah 55 - "The real thirst quencher"

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I wonder which of these invitations grabs you the most...

- Come for a beauty treatment day – a complete makeover and as many treatments as you like at a luxury spa.
- Come for a day at Brands Hatch driving the latest state-of-the-art sports cars.
- Come to Buckingham Palace for tea with the Queen.
- You're invited to a 5-course dinner for two at the restaurant of your choice in Cambridge – Midsummer House Restaurant, Hotel du Vin, Helen and I would probably settle for Pizza Express.

There are some great invitations there and in life it's lovely to have some invitations – perhaps to a wedding, or an 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday party or a special wedding anniversary. The last 6 weeks or so we've all had lots of invitations from political parties: Vote for us and we'll do this or that for that for you. Now of course they're having to make those invitations to one another. Whatever you think of those invitations I've just mentioned, we're going to look tonight at the biggest and greatest invitation of all.

But first let me ask this - if God was going to say one word to you, what do you think it would be? I think that for lots of non-church goers – people who were very much just looking into Christian things, that one word would be, "No" or "Don't" or "Go away!" That's 2 words I know but the one word God says and the invitation is to everyone is this: "Come!" 5 times in the first 3 verses God says to us "Come!" V1 ***"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk...v3 Give ear and come to me..."*** So in Isaiah 55 God, the Maker and Sustainer of the universe, is giving this amazing invitation to all people. That's our first heading...

#### **Come to me, says God – the best invitation in the world!**

V1 ***"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters..."*** The invitation is not to the physically thirsty but to the spiritually thirsty. God's invitation is for those who have a longing in their soul. Can you see that at the end of v2 – if we come to God and listen to Him the result will be, end of v2 ***"your soul will delight in the richest of fare."*** V3 confirms this, ***"Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live."*** So for those with a spiritual hunger or thirst, you have a longing in your heart for satisfaction then God says to you ***"Come to me. Come to me and I will quench your thirst; I will satisfy your hunger."***

To press home the wonder of the invitation God asks us V2 ***"Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?"*** Why look for meaning and satisfaction, says God, in things that will leave you ultimately dissatisfied. This is very apt for today's world where so many people look to money and possessions for meaning and happiness. According to an Economic and Social Research Council, 750,000 Brits are addicted to shopping. One man they interviewed said: "The only way to stop being depressed is to go shopping – but then it only comes back later." Mike Starkey has written a book called "Born to Shop". He comments: "In an earlier age life's adversity was met by a robust faith, even if it was only in human nature. Today we have our own solution. When the going gets tough the tough go shopping." We live in a society where so often people say to themselves, "If only I was paid a little bit more then I'd be ok" or "if only I won the lottery and could afford a bigger house, a nicer car, more exotic holidays, then all would be well." But

would it? Eric Morecambe was, in the 70s and 80s, the nation's favourite comedian. He earned a fortune from his work, which would have ensured that he had plenty to live on for a long and prosperous retirement, but he kept working right to the end of his life. After he had a serious heart attack, a friend asked him, "Why don't you slow down?" He replied, "I can't – I haven't got enough." Most of us know the truth of that. We have seen enough miserable millionaires to know that money and possessions are not the key to a fulfilling life and yet still we pursue them. Others look to pleasure to satisfy their inner yearning for satisfaction. Sex drugs and rock and roll or whatever the Little Shelford equivalent of that is – I'm not sure what that would be – what do you think: gardening, antiques and fine wines – golf, bridge and the opera. Of course there's nothing wrong with those things, they're good things and they can provide great pleasure but if we look to them for ultimate satisfaction they'll leave us hungry. There are others who look to ambition and success – that's what they live for. They have their sights set on some goal they long to achieve; a first class degree, a place in the team, marriage to Mr Right, promotion at work. But so often when the goal is achieved and the initial euphoria passes it leaves us just the same as we were before. As Peter Sellers put it: "The expectation is greater than the realisation." And so God says to the spiritually thirsty person, V2 **"Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."** Come to me, says God, it's the best invitation in the world. And if we continue on through the chapter, Isaiah fleshes out why it is such a great and generous invitation. V3b God says that if we come to Him, **"I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David."** We will know Him and He will know us, we will love Him and know his amazing unconditional love for us and this isn't just a passing thing, no this is forever. It's an everlasting covenant.

V7b, if a person comes to the Lord or as it puts it there, if he or she turns to Him, then God v7b **"will have mercy on him...God will freely pardon."** We can know the joy and delight of the slate wiped clean, all our sins forgiven.

V12 **"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace."** True deep down peace and joy will be ours. That's the offer that God extends in this invitation.

And did you notice in v1 that it's free. We don't have to pay – in fact the invitation is for those line 3 of v1 who know that they have no money, that is they have no spiritual wealth or credit to buy God's favour. And yet it still says next line, **"Come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk"** and yet 6<sup>th</sup> line of v1 it's **"without money and without cost."** What's going on there? What's the answer to this apparent paradox? The answer is given 2 chapters earlier in the book of Isaiah so please do turn back a page and this brings us to our second heading...

### **Come to me through my Son Jesus Christ, says God – a free but costly invitation**

Please turn back to Isaiah 53:4-6 - they're verses made even more famous by Handel and his Messiah. I won't sing them – that wouldn't be edifying but I will read them and we see in these verses which are fulfilled through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, the reason why God can make this amazing invitation to us. Isaiah 53 and I'll read from v4 **"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."** So we can come freely to God, to this rich feast but only because someone else has paid the price. That is how God can make this fantastic offer. That is how he can say "come" to those who have no spiritual wealth because the price has been paid in full by Jesus Christ. Isaiah 53:6 sums up the gospel beautifully, can you see that, v6 **"We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..."** That is to say that we all naturally reject and turn away from God, ignoring Him and living for ourselves – it's what the Bible calls sin. The symptoms of our sin will differ from person to

person but we all have the same underlying problem. Because God is a holy God he can't just ignore our sin, he must deal with it and that is why God sent his Son the Lord Jesus into the world – to die in our place, to take the punishment we deserve so that we through trusting in Him may be forgiven. Look again at v6 ***“We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him (the Lord Jesus) the iniquity of us all.”*** So this invitation is free for us and for all people because it cost Jesus, the Son of God, his very life. He has done it all so that we through trusting in Him can know and love God and more significantly we can be known and loved by Him. At great cost Jesus has paid the price and it's only through Him and in Him that anyone will find and know true peace and joy, true meaning and satisfaction. A guy called Augustine said many hundreds of years ago: “You Oh God have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” So if you are spiritually hungry and thirsty, God says to you, “Come to me, come to me through my Son Jesus Christ because he has done it, he has paid the great price. Now come and receive.” As Jesus himself says in Matthew 11: ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*** Or in John 6: ***“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”*** Come to Jesus that your soul will live, so that you will have life and have it to the full. Life at its best, life as we were designed for. Often though, people will object to God's generosity in the gospel precisely because it is free. They want to earn their salvation, they want to contribute in some way; they find it very offensive to hear that they have no spiritual credit with God and the natural religion of mankind is works. You may have heard it said before that the way to remember the difference between all the world's religions is to divide them up into 2 letter and 4 letter religions. All the world's religions bar one are 2 letter – spelt DO; do this and do that to somehow, maybe earn God's favour. Only Christianity is spelt with 4 letters – DONE. Christ has done it all, the price has been fully paid, we just need to have the humility to come and receive.

That brings us to our third heading...

### **Come while you can, this is an invitation with an urgent RSVP**

Back to chapter 55 and we see the urgency for response in v6 – please look down at that v6: ***“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.”*** Come while you can, come while you have the opportunity and inclination to. Carpe diem, don't let it slide by. Come before the busyness of life crowds out this most important decision. Come before you put up more and more barriers to belief. V7 spells out for us what coming to God will involve, v7: ***“Let the wicked forsake his own way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”*** In other words we need to repent – that's what forsaking our own way means and we need to believe – that's what turning to the Lord means. To repent means more than shedding crocodile tears of remorse. It literally means to turn around; it involves changing direction. It's like when you're on a car journey to a new place and it suddenly dawns on you - that terrible moment that we've probably all experienced that at the last junction you went the wrong way and have been travelling in the opposite direction for about 20 minutes. You have to swallow your pride and turn around. Naturally we are the bosses of our lives; doing what we want when we want. To repent will mean that we need to turn around and start living with Jesus as our boss, doing what pleases Him and believing that he died and rose again to save us. There is, as I say, an urgency to this RSVP. V6 again ***“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.”*** So please check this out, make an informed decision, ask your questions – the Christianity Explored course starting a week on Wednesday would be a brilliant way to do that. Do your research but don't dilly-dally forever and keep delaying your response. There is a real danger to that.

There was an American preacher in the C19th called Dan Baker and he used to tell a story about a man crossing an ocean on a liner. The man was leaning over the side of the boat. It was a bright sunny day and there was barely a ripple on the water. And the man, as he

leaned over, was throwing something up in the air and catching it. It was something that gleamed and sparkled as it caught the light.

A fellow passenger came up to him and asked him what it was. The man caught it again and showed him: "It's a diamond." "Oh, is it worth much?" "Of course it is. Look at its size and colour. In fact all I have in the world is in that diamond. I'm emigrating and needed to get my wealth into a portable shape, so I sold everything and bought this diamond." "Then, aren't you taking a big risk throwing it up in the air so carelessly?" "Oh no, I've been doing this for the past half hour and I've never dropped it." "But there might come a time when you do." But the man just laughed and carried on tossing the diamond in the air. He throws it up... he catches it. He throws it up... he catches it. He throws it up... he reaches for it... But this time it's too far and the diamond falls with a splash into the ocean. For a moment, he stands aghast, and then he cries, "Lost! lost! lost! All I have in the world lost!"

At which point in the story, the Rev. Dan Baker would turn to his audience: "You say, 'No one would be so great a fool; that story isn't true.' But I say to you that story is true and the man is here tonight. You are the man. That ocean is eternity. That ship is your life. That diamond is your soul of priceless value. And you are playing with that soul. 'Oh!' but you say, 'there's no risk. I've been living my own way for the past 30, 50, 70 years, and life is good.' But there will come a time when you throw it up one too many times, and it will fall too far out, and there will be a splash and you will be lost for all eternity. Come tonight," the preacher would say, "before it is too late and put your soul where it will be safe for ever, in the keeping of the Son of God." Well it's an old-fashioned story, but it illustrates perfectly the danger of delay and of toying with our souls, knowing that at any time we could lose our lives and step out into an eternity without Christ?

So v6 **"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near."** But maybe there's someone here and you want to take this step of repenting and believing but it just all sounds too good to be true, this offer of pardon and peace, of satisfaction for our souls and joy for our hearts. You wonder whether God will do what he says. You fear that he's like a used car salesman who talks up the product knowing full well that he's put a bit of gloss on it. But God reassures us in v8. He says, Look, **"my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways."** God's saying to us, "You may not think it'll definitely happen but I tell you I do things differently. You may think you have to earn my forgiveness but I say v8 **"my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways."** V11 **God's word, that goes out from his mouth, will not return to him empty, it will accomplish what he desires.** In other words we can take God at his word. So "Come to me", says God, "come to me through my Son Jesus Christ and come while you can." If you have felt God calling you to himself as we've looked at Isaiah 55 and you're ready to accept that invitation, then please remember v6 **"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near."** I've got a booklet that I'd love to give you that explains a bit more about this invitation and how we can accept it. There's a prayer at the back of it which you can pray tonight and come personally to God through Jesus. I've got some on me and there's a pile of them at the table at the back and I'll put some out in the porch as well. Please do take one. Please do come and see me, I'd love to chat to you and help you. And whether you're ready to make a decision now or you still have burning questions please come along to Christianity Explored. It's such a great way to find out more.

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Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)