

Isaiah 55:1-5 "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 without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. ⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. ⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor."

Dear fellow recipients of God's grace and salvation:

One of the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith is this: Why does God even care about sinful creatures like us? Think about it. God originally made us sinless. But we threw it all away and look what we've done to God's good earth! We lie to each other, feud with each other, hurt and kill each other. Societies and communities are on the brink of chaos because of selfishness, hatred, and fanaticism. And here's the real kicker: We have audacity to say, "*Where are you God? Why aren't you doing something about this mess?*"

Yet, in the face of such arrogance, God reaches out to save miserable creatures like us -- so that when we die, we might live, and live in a place so perfect that we will rejoice with him forever.

This gives us a little sense of what Isaiah is talking about today: **Our Gracious God Extends His Invitation** (1) *An invitation for free blessings*, and (2) *An invitation for all people*.

1

Picture yourself in a marketplace in ancient Israel. Narrow alleys are lined with colorful merchants' tables and there is hustle and bustle all about. Vendors are hawking their goods: "*Fresh fruit here!*" "*Choice wine at the best price!*" When I lived in Guadalajara, Mexico, there was a huge open-air marketplace called *San Juan de Dios*. Vendors would beckon as you walked by trying to strike a deal with you on food, jewelry, clothing, knick-knacks.

In Is. 55, God is like a vendor: "***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 without money and without cost.***" But there are some clear differences between typical market vendors and the Lord.

First, the Lord's "products" aren't earthly food items or trinkets. He has **spiritual commodities** to dispense. He says, ***Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*** ³ ***Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.***" Isn't it remarkable that God is calling out to us to offer us such blessings? He's not obligated to do so. We snub him every day with our filthy sins, yet he wants to bless us anyway with eternal life! What does that tell us about God? Is he mean and cruel, as some people say? Is he cold and aloof, as some say? Not at all! He is engaging and caring and concerned. One word describes this: **grace**, his undeserved love for us sinners.

Also, notice that what God is vending is free! "***Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.***" Normally haggling takes place at a booth at a bazaar, but no matter what bargain you get, there's always a cost, a price. But not in *God's* market. Oh, the blessings we receive from God did come at a cost. But it cost God. It cost the blood of Jesus. As Paul writes, "***The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus***" (Rom 6:23). You and I come as paupers before the Lord. We have nothing to offer in exchange for his goods. God simply *gives* it. "*Here, all I have is yours without money and without cost.*"

With the invitation there is also a warning: "***Why spend your money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?***" In other words, "*Don't go to all the other vendors out there.*"

You're wasting your time on their junk food." Instead he says, "**Listen, listen to me and eat what is good.**" Only God's food, "**the Bread of life,**" strengthens us and fortifies us. Only this food nourishes us for time and eternity. And it's all free.

2

Everyone likes free stuff. When you go the State Fair or EAA, people gravitate toward the display booths where they are giving out free items or food samples. This gracious invitation of God isn't just for us. It's for everyone. God has plenty of free gifts for everyone! "**Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.**"

Did you know that your Christian life is a standing invitation to other precious souls to have what God freely gives? For example, when you walk out of a restaurant with a smile of your face looking all happy and satisfied, people who see you are apt to give that restaurant a try. Similarly, when Christians express joy in Christ, when we show love to others by our words and actions, when we openly praise Jesus for his goodness, others may very well be led to take an interest in the Savior.

Of course, it can be argued that the opposite is true as well. If we Christians are always moping, grumbling, criticizing, and malcontented about everything -- well, who wants a piece of that bitter or sour pie? We make our Savior look bad and unappealing.

The very reason this congregation exists is to be a sub-contractor for God's vending booth. He cries out, "**Come, eat what is free!**" And we are here to offer the same invitation to a world that is hurting for certain and needs a break -- a break that is found only in Jesus.

Sometimes people, even members of Christian congregations, don't want to participate in or support the work of God's church. According to what Isaiah is saying here, that's being selfish toward all humanity. To freely receive blessings but not freely give blessings, that is selfishness and ingratitude.

This is rather interesting, but did you know that one of the very last verses of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, is a paraphrase of these words from Isaiah 55? In Revelation 22:17 the Lord says, "**'Come!' And let him who hears say 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life!'**"

Friends, what a gracious, giving God we have. We have been invited. We are here to invite. We have eaten. We are here to help others eat "**the richest of fare**" -- true and lasting life in Christ!

Amen.