



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 24, 2007
Released on Wednesday, June 20, 2007**

"Isaiah Invited Everyone to God's Feast" (Committed to Seeking God)

Lesson: Isaiah 55:1-3a; 6-11.

Read: Isaiah 55:1-11.

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:10-15.

Background Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-11.

Time: about 700-695 B.C.

Place: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6).

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT:

Isaiah 55: 1-3a; 6-11.

1Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

2Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

3Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live.

...

6Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

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

9For 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 cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Examine the facts about the invitation that our God extends to us to seek Him while He can still be found.
2. See that God has provided for our salvation and that we simply have to come to the feast and partake of it.
3. Understand that all who come to the feast will drink of the cup of salvation and know victory and the freedom from sin.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. LOVING INVITATION (Isa. 55:1-3a)
- II. THOUGHTFUL EXPLANATION (Isa. 55:6-11)

INTRODUCTION

The film *The Dream Team* is a 1989 comedy about mental patients who meet for group therapy. When their psychiatrist takes them on an outing, he witnesses a slaying and is nearly killed by the perpetrators. The group, not knowing what happened to their doctor, is left in New York City alone. They soon learn they are wanted both for the slaying and for the attempted murder of their doctor, who has ended up in a hospital.

The humor results from the need of this “dream team” to grapple with reality. How will they find their way out of the trouble they are in? In our days of psychiatrists and psychologists, support groups, and abundance of self-help books, it sometimes makes us wonder where previous generations got mental and emotional help. What did Christians do in all those centuries before professional Christian counselors came along?

Once I came across an ancient work entitled *Conferences*. It was written by John Cassian, a monk who lived about A.D. 365–433. In this book, monastery leaders are portrayed as meeting with Cassian in groups to discuss issues of how to live the Christian life. In other words, they would counsel together for the spiritual benefit of themselves and for those to whom they ministered. Those with greater spiritual maturity could help guide others.

Today’s lesson also offers us a picture of members of a group coming together for counseling. Chief among the group members are the future Jewish exiles (that is, the “everyone” in Isaiah 55:1; God’s *covenant nation*). The prophet Isaiah writes 100 years before the Babylonian exile, but Isaiah knows that the Judeans will find themselves in deep trouble. They will not know where to turn.

The counselor, however, is the Lord himself. His wisdom and knowledge are infallible. We often wonder, as though in a dream, where to turn in times of trouble. God often uses our Christian friends who are wise enough to help us deal with reality. At other times He provides those with professional training to help. But behind any of these counselors must be the wisdom of the Lord, who alone can bring hope from despair.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In last week's text, the Lord sought to shock Judah into repentance. Their acts of worship were in vain unless their lives demonstrated inward purity and outward righteousness (thus the "true worship" God desires from His followers). Isaiah's ministry was a call to repentance; failure to repent meant destruction. Isaiah was told two things about Judah. First, since his preaching would fall on deaf ears, destruction would occur. (In fact, it did in 586 B.C.!) Second, in order to keep His covenant, the Lord would preserve a remnant (a scrap or remainder) of faithful people in spite of this destruction (Isaiah 6:8-13). This remnant was the exiles surviving the Babylonian captivity-which ended in 539 B.C. This week's lesson stresses that message again.

The first section of Isaiah, chapters 1-39, is mostly judgment. The second section, chapters 40-66, is mostly blessing; almost all of it is poetry (except for 66:17-24), which means there is much use of figures of speech. Commentators have proposed many different outlines of these last 27 chapters, but most see 3 units of 9 chapters each. Isaiah 55 falls within the second unit, namely Isaiah 49-57. One way to look at these chapters is as a group discussion involving five parties: the Lord, the Messiah, Isaiah, Zion, and the Gentile nations.

The fourth party requires a little discussion. *Zion* can refer specifically to the city of Jerusalem, but also may be used to refer to the nation as a whole. In this part of Isaiah, *Zion* probably refers to the faithful remnant in the (to them, future) Babylonian exile. This remnant is idealized in those who accept the Messiah.

During the course of the discussion, the Lord reveals the fact, method, and scope of His salvation. In Isaiah 55, the reader must identify speakers and those being addressed by carefully noting the pronouns and then identifying the main point.

QUESTIONS

I. LOVING INVITATION (Isaiah 55:1-3a)

1. How does Isaiah 55 fit contextually into the flow of the book?

As previously mentioned in today's Lesson Background, the book of Isaiah divides into two sections. Chapters 1 through 39 are largely prophecies of condemnation, while chapters 40 through 66 are largely prophecies of comfort. In this last part the chapters can be considered as three sections of nine chapters each, divided by the subject matter. The middle section (that is, chapters 49-57) emphasizes the Lord's suffering Servant-who is, of course, Jesus Christ. The center chapter is 53, where the crucifixion of Christ is graphically described.

It is only after his examination of the Messiah's suffering that Isaiah described God's promise of Israel's restoration (chap. 54) and His invitation of salvation to the world (chap. 55).

2. What did God mean by speaking of a person being thirsty and having no money? (Isa. 55:1)

Jesus referred to those in need as "one that thirsteth" and "he that hath no money" (vs. 1). Thirst is a real need on the part of anyone whose body is becoming dehydrated from lack of water. This is a good figure to define someone who is lacking the inner peace and satisfaction that comes from being in a right relationship with God.

Once Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles, He stood on the last day and called out, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). Obviously His concern was not physical water, which cannot provide the "living water" He was referring to at that time. He was speaking of the longing for meaning and fulfillment that is within every person and cannot be met *apart from God*.

3. What did "wine and milk" (vs. 1) have to do with it?

"Wine and milk" (Isa. 55:1) are said to provide satisfaction [to those who symbolically thirst spiritually]. These are symbolic of the peace that comes when a person is right with God. Perhaps the best part of the message is that there is no cost for finding this peace! We know from the New Testament that the price was paid by Jesus Christ on the cross. All we have to do to receive it is acknowledge our sinfulness and accept Jesus as our personal Saviour. Salvation is readily available to all, regardless of one's status in life or the amount of wealth one has.

4. What logical question is posed in verse 2 that should cause everyone to reflect on salvation?

The logical question that follows in Isaiah 55:2 should cause everyone to think seriously about its answer. Why would people spend money, their hard-earned wages, for those things that will never satisfy when the peace they so desperately want is *free*?

We know all too well that people are guilty of accumulating "treasures of wickedness" (Proverbs 10:2). But even people who accumulate money honestly can trap themselves into thinking that possessions will bring happiness.

We understand that the context in which this message was given was an appeal to Israel to follow and obey God. The universal nature of the invitation, however, allows us to perceive what is said in the understanding we have of the gospel.

5. What was God's specific invitation, and what did He promise for the right response?

God's specific invitation was to "incline your ear," "come," and "hear" (v. 3a). As a result, "your soul shall live," is what He promised. This promise is a spiritual one as opposed to physical, but we might also emphasize that it speaks of a meaningful spiritual life. To live in this way means to experience a positive, satisfying, and enjoyable life. When we are right with God, we have every reason to enjoy life.

When the hard times come, we experience grief, but Christ's underlying joy and peace still remain.

II. THOUGHTFUL EXPLANATION (Isa. 55:6-11)

6. What commands do we find in verses 6-7?

The commands: "seek ye the Lord," "call ye upon him," "forsake his way (the way of the wicked, that is), and... his thoughts (those thoughts of the unrighteous)," and "return unto the Lord" are commands that describe a search by faith accompanied with repentance-which is evidenced in the forsaking of wicked ways and thoughts. The important thing to keep in mind, however, is that this seeking must be done while it is still possible to find God and benefit from it.

7. How are the commands found in verses 6-7 a warning for us today?

Adam Clarke noted, "Rabbi David Kimchi gives the true sense of this passage: 'Seek ye the Lord, *because* he may be found: call upon him, because he is near. Repent before ye die, for after death there is no conversion of the soul" (Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, World Publishing). It is also possible that for some, the day might come when God cannot be found. Hearts can become so hard and spiritual ears so insensitive that it is no longer possible to hear the voice of God when He calls.

8. How do these commands relate to God's willingness to pardon?

For those who do come and call upon Him (that is, hearken to the commands found in verses 6-7), they are given the assurance that God will have mercy and pardon them abundantly. What an amazing statement of His mercy and grace! It is far beyond our ability to comprehend.

9. How did God describe His ways and thoughts as compared to ours? (Isa. 55:8-9)

In reading verses 8 and 9, we now realize why the magnitude of God's mercy and grace is beyond our ability to comprehend. It is because we cannot possibly think or act as God does! Isaiah 64:4 makes a statement that further describes the greatness of our God: "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." Our minds are not capable of comprehending God!

10. How did God describe the effectiveness of His Word in accomplishing the purposes behind it? (Isa. 55:10-11)

God's Word is the necessary ingredient of life for His children. Reference to His Word in these verses would not be limited to what was written, for at the time God ministered through Isaiah, not everything was written. Any word coming from the mouth of God is certain to be fulfilled. Its purpose will be accomplished just as surely as the purpose of rain and snow. The immediate context was assurance to Israel of the future establishment of the kingdom of God and their covenant relationship with Him (see Isa. 55:1-5).

God's Word has an effect on the hard hearts of people just as rain and snow have an effect on the hard ground on which it falls. The most effective way to reach into the hearts of people is to use the Word of God. We can apply this to the use of the Bible

even though it was not completely written when Isaiah said this. What God says always accomplishes what He purposes—including the entirety of the Scriptures we now possess.

Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

CONCLUSION

A. A Response is Required

Israel was lovingly invited to seek the Lord and experience His willing response. We are invited to find Him through His written Word and benefit daily from what He has to say to us. Israel was then left with a choice to respond..., so are we.

B. "You Can't Miss It"

I do not have a reputation in my family for always being able instinctively to find my way around while traveling. Since I know this, I (unlike many men) do not have any qualms about stopping to ask directions.

However, some people are better at giving directions than others. Upon finishing the description, he or she may utter those often-heard words, "You can't miss it." Since on occasion I have indeed "missed it," those words do not offer me much comfort!

However, the Lord is saying to the exiles who will experience His punishment, "If you listen to what I say, if you give up trusting in your own ways, and if you seek me, then restoration will occur. Its scope will be beyond anything you can imagine. And this restoration is as certain as my Word: you can't miss it."

His directions are clear: seek Him. This always leads home. This was comfort to the faithful remnant. It is comfort to all who seek the Lord today. No one is too far away to come to the Lord. One does not have to be free from sin to do this (otherwise no one would come). One has to be willing only to stop demanding to be the boss of one's life and let the Lord be the boss. (Is this asking too much—considering the wonderful exchange that we have been given?) —*Kenny Boles*

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Neither salvation nor the blessings of the Christian life can be earned (Isa. 55:1-2).
2. The key to living a fulfilling life is giving constant attention to God's Word (vs. 3).
3. When a person truly calls upon the Lord, she is willing to abandon her wicked ways (vss. 6-7).
4. If we want God's best, we must learn and submit to what He has revealed to us (vs. 8).
5. We cannot stand in judgment of God's ways; we can only stand in awe of them (vs. 9).
6. If our service is centered in God's Word, we are guaranteed success (vss. 10-11). —*Jarl K. Waggoner*

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us [that we should be called children of God]" (1 John 3:1).

PRAYER

Dear Father, We thank You for being absolutely trustworthy and effective. For all the times we still struggle with wanting to run our own lives apart from You, we ask Your forgiveness. We, the most defiled, thank You for the relationship You have built with us through Christ, the Messiah, in whose name we pray, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our lesson next week (July 1, 2007), we will listen to Micah as he *clearly summarizes* what God requires from us. Read Micah 2:1-4; 3:1-5, 8-12; and 6:6-8 in preparation. *Good studying!*

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