

You won't believe it, everything is free!

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[0 : 00] So Isaiah 55, the whole chapter, this is God's word. Come, give ear and come to me. Listen that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. My faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not and nations you do not know will come running to you. Because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on them and to our God for he will freely pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

[1 : 26] As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth.

It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

The mountains and hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the juniper and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign that will endure forever. This is God's word. Let me pray.

Almighty God, we come to you this morning and we ask that you'd speak to us. We ask that you'd encourage us, that you'd build us up. We'd ask that you'd challenge us, that you'd correct us, rebuke us where needed.

[2 : 28] And we pray that you'd train us in righteousness, that we, your children, might be equipped, your servants might be equipped for every good work. We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.

Now it's quite a few years ago now that we used to live in London. It was quite a few years back. And if you ever get, maybe lots of you might have been to London, but I'd recommend on your next trip, or maybe you went there last time, if you ever go, that you put in your diary a trip to Borough Market.

If you don't know, or you don't know what it's like, it's a food market that sells pretty much everything. You know, you get the normal kind of food that you might need to take home and cook, but that's not the best place.

The best place is where it's already cooked for you. And there's every type of meal, or kind of, I don't know what the word is, every type of food that you could think of.

You know, you've got paella, amazing sourdough, goat curry. There's every type of food that you could think of. It smells amazing, every corner.

[3 : 37] It's a bit of a sensory overload, and there's the constant clamour of people looking up around to just find what they want to eat that day. It's that kind of classic market scene when you're there, and every person kind of wants you at their stall.

And so there's those constant voices enticing, shouting for your attention, to try to grab your attention so that you can see if that of what they have to offer is what that you might consider. It actually can be, if you don't like crowds, it can be a little overwhelming. And when you're looking, there's so much to choose, you don't actually know what to go for. You know, maybe you sample first and try a little bit, or go full steam ahead with a bold choice.

Now, I want you to imagine, I want you to imagine yourself being in that setting, okay? The loud, busy market, everything's on offer. The food market, everything's being offered to you. Not knowing where to look with voices vying for your attention. But then as you're stood there, in the middle of it all, there's a voice that shouts, come, get the best food in London.

[4 : 48] The best. But everything you can see, it's for free. Now, you can see where I'm going with this, because it's the verse we've started with, the first verse of our passage this morning.

But if you were there, if you were there and you heard that, I reckon there's kind of three classic responses to that. And I wonder, if you were there and you heard that, how would you respond? If you would take a poll, I reckon there's three mixed responses. The first would be the sceptic. It's too good to be true. Nothing comes for free. There's always a catch.

I'll stick with paying. At least I know I'll get good quality, because I'm paying for it. I'm not taking any of this rubbish that they're giving away for nothing. You get the sceptic.

Then you get the proud. I'm no cheapskate. I don't need a handout. I work hard to pay. I've got a good job. I work hard to pay for my own food. Thank you very much.

[5 : 46] I'll leave it for those who are a bit hard up, who need a bit of a charity. I'm no charity case. They're proud. And then you get the last person. The person who hears it and goes, amazing, free food.

That's exactly it. I would just come in for all the samples anyway. And down at the other end, run, jostle, to get to the front of the queue. It's made their day. Why would you not go for that?

There might be other responses. I reckon those would be the main three. The truth is, those three, I think, is exactly how people respond to the free offer of the gospel.

A few weeks ago, we looked at the exchange that comes in Isaiah 53, the servant paying the price who's wounded so that we can be healed, who takes on all our transgressions so that we can be set free and receive forgiveness.

You know, and when that offer to the skeptic, it looks too good to be true. That offer to the proud thinks, no, no, no, no, no, no.

[6 : 54] I want to pay my own way. But God's offer to the gospel, it's the, and the offer of the gospel to the skeptic and the proud, this is God's higher way.

It's God's way that is higher than ours. His thoughts that are higher, better than our thoughts, of calling people to himself. It's God's higher way of giving everything away for free.

I'm going to, so that's kind of where we're going to go as we look through this passage, thinking about God's higher ways. And the first point we're going to is the higher way of pardon, the higher way of pardon.

It's the exact imagery, you know, we talked about Burrow Market, but it's kind of the exact imagery lifted straight from the passage. It is imagery of being in a marketplace. And what we see is that the living God addresses, in his call, he addresses two groups.

The first one is the needy, those who have nothing. Look what he says. He says, Come, come all you who are thirsty.

[8 : 03] Come to the waters and you who have no money. Come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. If you are needy, there is what he's saying.

You can have lavish extravagance for free. If there was a belief that their lack was a barrier, here the lack is actually the only qualification necessary.

You have to come with nothing. You have to be thirsty. You have to be hungry. You have to have nothing to come to this market trader.

Then he turns his attention to a second group. What does he say? Verse 2, he says, Why spend money on what's not bread? And your labour on what doesn't satisfy?

You see, he turns into those who, it's those who have, think they have a better deal. That they've got what, they've got something, and you know, they've earned some money, and they're going to spend it on something better.

[9 : 14] Those who spend something on, but what they spend it on is a poor substitute. Would rather pay for something, rather pay for what is not bread, a poor substitute, rather than accept it as a gift.

It's the person who wants a receipt in their hand to prove they aren't a charity case. Only to find that what they have in their hand is something worthless.

This invitation from the market trader, it is a scandalous invitation. It's a total scandal. The invitation is scandal because spiritual emptiness, being parched, thirsty, and starving, as I've said, that is the requirement to receive.

That is the qualification. You must come with nothing. You must be empty. You can't actually have it both ways. You can't come with money. You can't spend your money at one stall, and then come to God and take what's free as well.

You know, this is the question, really, that comes from this passage here, is that the living God is saying to us, as he says, come, he's, can you come to me with nothing?

[10:31] Can you do that? It's actually harder than it sounds. Can you come to me with nothing? Can you put it all away and just come to me empty-handed?

You know, Jesus didn't go to the cross because you asked him to. He didn't go so that you'd owe him an eternal debt that you could never pay.

No, he went and paid for your forgiveness with his life so that you could receive as a gift free of charge. And he's desperate for you to hear the offer.

He's desperate to hear the offer of come. You see, verse 3, give ear, like, turn your ear towards where, give me your ear and come to me, listen, that you may live.

And then I'll make an everlasting covenant with you. I don't know if you, maybe you say this to your children or your kids, you know, you say, I've said this, are you listening to me or not?

[11:46] Perhaps you've said that. When I say that, I mean more than, like, are you hearing me? Because I know they can hear me. I mean, when you say you're listening to me, it's not, it's not, are the sound waves going into your ears?

It's, are you doing what you've been told when it says, are you listening? It's more than hearing the sound, it's responding to what's being said, the command. It's a, it's a posture, isn't it, that sets apart that you're hearing and responding to the words.

It's not just hearing, it's listening. And, that's the posture. That is the posture that God wants, that God's asking, listen to me, give me your ear.

Give me your ear. Hear me. Listen to me. Why? So that you may live. It's the, it's different from the natural posture that reaches for the wallet, that looks for the price tag, that looks for the catch of the gospel.

There is no catch. Life is found by hearing the words of the giver and taking it to heart. In the market, everything is a temporary transaction.

[13:03] But the words of the giver bring a permanent, everlasting promise binding you to him with something that won't just satisfy temporarily, but it will feed you the eternal spiritual meal of salvation.

forgiveness. It will be a temporary of salvation. This is the higher way of pardon. God's higher way of, the spiritual meal of pardon is forgiveness, of having a relationship with Jesus and it lasts forever.

God's higher way of pardon. The second higher way is the higher way of calling. The higher way of calling. You just think, you know, I've told you, I'm sort of telling you all about Burrow Market and that's kind of what you do when you leave a place like that.

You remember it. I'm telling you now how great it was and let me tell you, you're not the first person that's heard me sort of go on about it. Even that day, that weekend, I'd told people where I'd been, what I ate and that they must check it out.

Told them about all the free tasters I'd had and what I needed to go. You need to get there. It's such a great way to spend a Saturday afternoon. When I talk about my day, afternoon there or the many times we were there, it's not a sales pitch.

[14:34] I don't work there. It's a genuine love for the experience and the place and how much of a good thing it was. Whoever's listening receives kind of the overflow, isn't it, of my enjoyment.

And this is what happens to those who receive the invitation and dine with the king. This is what, this is what, there's an expectation that when you receive and come and experience the thirsty are satisfied when the hungry are fed, when those who have sinned receive forgiveness, when those who are dead receive life and those who are in darkness can see, it is an overflow.

It is not a sales pitch. there is a comparison with what David did.

The end of verse three, you see it says, I make an everlasting covenant with you and then he says, my faithful love promised to David and then it tells you about David.

See what it says, it says, see, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and a commander of the peoples. He ruled with the sword. He was, you know, historically David led through military command.

[16:03] But here, what he's saying is that the nation, the exiles, the people of God will become like a new David. Not leaning on the sword, but leaning on the testimony of what he's done in them.

You know, you'll do the same. You will summon nations you know not. Nations who do not know will come running to you. Why? Because of the Lord your God. Because you've been nanned out with splendor.

Because of what I've done to you. The nations will run to you, not because you're powerful, but because you demonstrate that you're satisfied in him. That is why they will come.

You will be, you will be, you will still be a bold witness like David, but with totally different means. And the means is the message that they will speak.

The message is in verse 6. New Davids, the new witnesses have a message to announce. Verse 6, seek the Lord while he may be found.

[17:12] Call on him while he is near. there. There's a famous Sri Lankan minister called Daniel Niles and he famously said that being a Christian, and many of you had heard this, but being a Christian is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

That's all there is to it, witnessing. It is meeting people who at one point in time you were just like them.

They're spiritually parched, they're hungry, they're thirsty, they're not satisfied, and you can see that that is how you once were. There was a time when you were hungry, when you were parched, when you were spiritually needing something else, and you can see that they're looking to be fed, and what you're doing is you're pointing them.

You see that stall down there? The one people are either turning their nose apart or they're running to? The giver? You see that place where everything's and you hear the voices saying that everything's for free?

It sounds like it's not good to be too good to be true, but it's not. It's a genuine offer. If you look, if you seek down there, that's where you'll find the living God.

[18:46] He's nearer than you imagine. You seek the Lord and he'll fill you. He'll fill you with the bread of life.

He'll feed you with forgiveness and salvation and you'll have a relationship with him. Just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. The trap, the difficulty is this.

We assume that it's more than that. We assume that, you know, oh man, I need to know the A or Z of the Bible, that pointing people to Jesus needs some kind of a professional training, a performance, that it's, you know, maybe you need to be stood at the front of a church and this is what it's all about.

But, you know, we're not selling anything. We're testifying that we've tasted from the Lord what is good and that what he offers other people can have too. We might ask, what does that look like in practice?

Because it sounds a bit abstract, doesn't it? Go seek the Lord. In practice, well, you know, the living God doesn't leave us here. Look with verse 7. This is what it looks like in practice.

[20:01] Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on them and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

This is what seeking the Lord means. It means turning to him from sin to faith. We have a word for that. We call it repentance. It's doing a full 180.

Walking your own way, you do a full 180 and walk towards the living God. Turning away from sin, away from the mess, the sin, the mistakes we've made in life, all those times we've got angry, all those times we've said things we've regret, all the times we've lusted, all the times we've hankered, after more stuff, all the times we've looked after number one and been selfish, all the times we've hurt people, it's turning from that way of life where it's just the norm and we don't care, turning from that to the living God and walking towards him because we know that when we get there he will pardon us from all the mess.

That is repentance, it is forgiveness and the wicked and the unrighteous we return to him when we take that full 180. That's the message.

You can return to the Lord from whatever you've done and he will satisfy you spiritually forever and there's nothing, nothing at all, no sin that's too bad that means that you can't do that yourself.

[21 : 24] That is the message, that is how somebody seeks the Lord and finds it. witnessing this passage, we see it fulfilled in the life of the church.

This is what he's called us to do as his people. There is, isn't there just a beautiful simplicity that what it means is just calling other people to feast, calling other people and showing what he's done in our lives, out of the overflow of what we've received, the grace that we've received.

And when we think about it like that, it's not beyond any of us, whether you've been a Christian for five minutes or 30, 40 years. It's letting people know what the Lord has done and where he can be found.

However, what happens if you do just that? You tell somebody, seek the Lord, he's near, all you have to do is call on him to save you.

What happens when you do that and nothing happens? What if that person stays a proud, cynical sceptic?

[22 : 52] The temptation at that moment is to think, well, it's probably my fault. Maybe I didn't explain it well enough. Maybe it's my personality that's the problem.

I just don't have that kind of engaging, charismatic way of drawing people. And we've all probably thought like that. If you've thought like that, it's here that we need to move to the higher way of power.

Know God's higher way of power. God's power is not something added to him, but it is part of him. It's who he is. He is his power. I would say maybe this is kind of the hinge, perhaps you might say the principle of playing the whole passage.

We've talked about the higher way and here we're going to see it. Look with me. We get kind of an interruption. We're getting told all about this message that we need to proclaim, seek the Lord, let the wicked forsake the ways, let them turn.

And then we get this interruption from the living God. You see what he says? He says it in verse 8. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

[24 : 08] God's logic operates on a different plane.

These verses here are the engine that drives the pardon to the wicked. It's the engine that drives that we can be empowered to call people to him, ourselves.

it's the engine that means grace, forgiveness and a seat at the table are free. Because this is not the way that we would do things, it is a higher plane on which he operates than the world.

It is higher and it is better. And his higher way of power is not something we have to reach up and grab, but something that comes down to us.

Verse 10. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without water in the earth and making it bud and flourish and so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater.

[25 : 11] And here we have it, verse 11. So is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

It is a beautiful picture. Rain does not ask for anyone's permission to make a seed in the earth germinate and grow. When it rains, if seeds are in soil, they germinate, flowers bud and open. Rain always makes things that are in soil grow. It doesn't need any help. It does the work of growing on its own. And so what the living God is saying is in the same way as that, like natural biology kind of ecosystem, the way the world works, in the same way when the word of God goes out from his mouth, meaning when it's heard, when it's read, when it's preached, it will be like the rain.

It will produce, what does he say, the purpose for which I sent it. If it lands on hearts that are made of good soil, it will produce salvation.

it will accomplish the purpose for which it lands in people's ears. Now, sometimes when that word hits, it might reach hearts that have not good soil, they might reject it and harden their hearts.

[26 : 40] But we don't understand the mind of God and that might very well be the purpose for which it was sent. Sometimes that is what it produces. But that is not on us.

the fruit of the word has nothing to do with us. You see what that means for us, what it means for the church, that we are not responsible for the growth or what the word does.

God is responsible for what he will do with his word. We are simply the ones pointing to where the rain is falling. We need to hear this.

Because what it means is someone could give the most brilliant, most persuasive articulation of the good news of Jesus, hold out the invite, explain what it means that the Lord is near, that he's come in the person of Jesus and yet that word still be rejected.

And you think, how? That was the best description I've ever heard in my life. Equally. You could explain the good news, your voice might be shaking, you leave feeling embarrassed, broken, like you didn't do it justice, you feel like you missed the opportunity, you feel like no one would have convinced anyone, it was terrible, you might feel.

[28 : 07] That could be the one time where the word lands and produces fruit that leads to salvation. Skill, ability, enthusiasm is never the reason.

The word like rain lands where it lands and God empowers that word to do the work by his spirit, it is never you or I. We're to let it work by speaking and showing but then leaving it in his hands. And so you should never feel like you're incapable of witnessing with your words of what God has done. You should never feel like you don't have the ability to do that. If you ever drift into that which we all do, you're believing again it's down to you and that maybe God's not powerful enough to work.

They need to know something else, some rhetorical trick. It never does. God's ways are higher and better. By speaking his word through his spirit, the word always does the work and so the pressure's off.

What grows is something spectacular and the result of what grows, the fruit that grows is what we're going to move to our final point, the higher way of transformation.

[29 : 21] The higher way of transformation. Look with me, verse 12, you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

It is the higher way of transformation of celebration. When the word lands, creation itself breaks into song. There is joy and peace.

Because of transformation, there is a sign of what God has done. This is the sign. Verse 13, instead of the thorn bush, we'll grow the juniper and instead of briars the myrtle.

It is for the Lord's renown, for his name. What occurs is a sign of what God is doing. Thorns and briars, weeds, just a picture of what we used to be like, naturally.

They're a picture of everything that used to be true in our lives, the thorny relationships that always prick us, the briar of a habit that feels we can't escape, those thorns and briars in our life we cannot prune.

[30 : 25] But when the word hits, when it lands, look what grows, look what happens. Thorns and briars replaced with the juniper and the myrtle, evergreen plants whose leaves never wither.

This is the everlasting sign. You know, the flourishing church is the pointer, it's the permanent signpost, it's the monument to God's grace.

His higher and better way. It's what makes a name for the Lord. Why? Because the higher way was Jesus took your thorn, he took them on his brow when he wore a crown made of them.

The only reason that you are growing and blossoming like a spiritual juniper is because Jesus took the deep sharp prick of your thorn. This is what the words, the word of God does.

And the trees, it says the trees clap because creation itself is impacted by the reversal of the curse. It's the overflow, the rain that waters these hearts of soil.

[31 : 35] As in Pionos, it is the irrigation of the new creation. And as we read this, these images, there's too many.

They start to overlap in our minds because the budding new flowers of God's grace, the person who responds to God invite, becomes the one who invites themselves, you get changed from a hungry, thirsty, empty soul to a satisfied, vibrant, radiant display of God's glory, overflowing with him in other people's lives, with our story of what God has done.

We are transformed now by the Spirit of God to work through his work, to do what could never have been possible before. And so as we draw in, for closing, here's the questions that I want to leave you with.

Will you leave the marketplace still clutching your wallet and your hunger, or will you join the trees in clapping for a meal you didn't earn? Will you join the giver of grace in pointing others towards the meal of forgiveness that satisfies eternally?

Because he's still calling. You know, his call never dies down. He's always calling you to come to him afresh. And the gift is always free to come to him every day.

[33 : 03] Why not join in with the song, or go find another beggar and tell them where the bread is, to come and receive forgiveness, receive spiritual life, an eternal future, a promised future, hope, peace, joy, and love.

Listen to the marketplace giver. Come. Come all you who are thirsty.

Come to the waters and you will have no money. Come, buy, and eat. Let me pray. Almighty God, we praise you that you have invited us and that we have responded by coming to you.

And we want to hear that word of come every day and come to you afresh every day and to know your grace and mercy and peace. We pray that you would empower us to speak and point other people to this amazing invite.

give us courage, give us confidence, help us to trust not in ourselves or our ability or skill, but to trust that you're the one who makes all this happen, that you work through your word, by your spirit.

[34 : 28] And even when we feel like we've made a mess of things, you are the one who can bring life where we didn't see it happening. And so almighty God, we thank you for this gift of grace and we pray that you'd bless us.

And today we'd say that again, that we want to come. We want to, like the kids, we want to respond to this beautiful invite to have a seat at your table. We ask for this in the name of Christ.

Amen. Amen.