

The Gospel according to Isaiah

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[0 : 00] So we're in Isaiah chapter 55, and if you turn to the middle of your Bibles, you should be somewhere around Isaiah. It's on page 615, Isaiah chapter 55, page 615.

Isaiah chapter 55, come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me, hear that your soul may live, and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

[1 : 24] Seek the Lord, while he may be found, call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

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

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, 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 shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace.

The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush shall come up the cypress, instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

[2 : 38] We'll need, you'll need the Bibles open, don't close your Bibles, keep them handy on your lap, because we'll be keeping quite close to the text.

Friends, I wonder if you ever get discouraged in your Christian life. Do you? I certainly do. I was out on Buchanan Street just a few moments ago, giving tracts away, and some of the responses that you get are quite discouraging, I can tell you that.

Or it might be the church, you know, the church can be discouraging at times, can't it? I was just looking at the evangelicals now here for November. Anglicanism in twilight.

And I suppose the same could be said actually for many churches. The Church of Scotland. So, you know, we can have these things going through in our thinking, can't we?

Mulling them over, these discouraging thoughts. Might be you've been in conversation with somebody, and the wrong words have come out. You've been trying to explain about the Lord Jesus Christ, but you wished you'd not said something.

[3 : 42] And you can go to, if you're like me, you can. You can go to bed, and it's all running through your mind. Tossing and turning. Can't sleep. Can't resolve it. You end up sort of half a night, just mulling these things over.

And then in the morning, you know, you crawl out of bed, shuffle along to the bathroom, look in the mirror, few more wrinkles, tired eyes, more white hair, you turn the taps on.

And in between the taps is an old curled up tube of toothpaste. It looks lonely and tired. There's not much left in it.

And you look up to the mirror, and yes, that's exactly how you feel. Friends, when we have these sorts of discouraging feelings, we need to turn back to God's word, don't we?

God's word doesn't change. And we'll be doing that through Isaiah chapter 55. We'll be trying to reorientate our thinking. And as Isaiah writes, his words stretch through the centuries.

[4 : 57] Isaiah had begun writing before the first exile in 722 BC. And his whole calling had been trying to keep God's people on track.

You know, they kept going adrift, making political alliances with people. With Assyria, in Egypt. Think of that, Egypt.

Moses would turn in his grave, wouldn't he? And then, exile. Babylon. Think of all that slipped through the fingers.

You know, Jerusalem, the temple. They're saying, that promise to David, what's happened? Babylon. It seems like a dead end, doesn't it? Are you with me?

It puts our discouraging feelings in perspective, doesn't it? by the rivers of Babylon. There we sat down. There we wept. Psalm 137.

[5 : 53] You see? But then, someone remembers that prophet Isaiah. They scurry around and find some old scroll. They start unrolling the scroll. And then, suddenly, there's a crowd listening.

Yes, it's Babylon. Babylon, you know, the harps are there, hanging from the trees. But once again, they're hearing God's word. Friends, once again, God is speaking to them.

You know, he speaks, doesn't he? Think about the logic of this. He speaks from outside of our situations. Am I right? Do you see? Suddenly, suddenly we realise, don't we, that there's something much bigger unfolding.

You know, our senses can take in one sort of data, but then, through his word, God stands before us, doesn't he? Do you see? With his cosmic and eternal realities.

Even in Babylon, you know, which somehow they'd managed to forget. Our first point is about a messianic banquet.

[7 : 02] You know, Isaiah had scratched his words onto a scroll, and as we read today, we hear God speaking. He's inviting a fallen and confused world into a heavenly banquet.

Just look with me there, verses 1 to 3. Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price.

Why spend your money for that which is not bread? It's a bit like Jesus, isn't it? Jesus says, what good is it if you gain the whole world and lose your soul? And your labour for that which does not satisfy.

Listen diligently to me and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear and come to me here that your soul may live, and I will make with you, look at that word, isn't that nice, an everlasting covenant.

My steadfast, sure love for David. You see? The Davidic everlasting covenant. So it's a banquet, isn't it? And it incorporates the Davidic promises, end of verse 3.

[8 : 10] Everlasting. You know, think of what God's saying here in those verses. He's saying, here you go, this is access into my eternal kingdom. It's before you.

You know, that kingdom that you seem to have forgotten about. We can so easily sort of end up thinking that our circumstances have eclipsed God's plans and purposes, can't we, friends?

It's easily done. You know, somehow it's sort of thrown God off balance, and perhaps that in itself is a word for someone this lunchtime.

You know, your own situation just now, problems at work. They'd almost smothered your faith in God. And verse 1, there's something strange in verse 1.

Did you notice, friends? Just look there. Verse 1. Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who is wealthy, no, he who has no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money, without price.

[9 : 16] We ask, come on Isaiah, how is that possible? How can a fallen and rebellious humanity come into the environment of God Almighty without somehow paying the price?

You know, how does that work? And we find the answer, don't we? Just turn left on the page there. Chapter 53, verse 5. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Listen, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his stripes we are healed. Yes, the suffering servant, friend, paid the price, didn't he?

For your salvation and for mine. Isaiah saying, there's no trading here. The transaction's done. And on the cross, Jesus said, didn't he?

He uttered, it is finished. It is finished. And suddenly we know that this free invitation was infinitely costly. I was speaking to some Muslims outside of our church earlier this year, three of them.

[10:23] And I was saying, how do you know that your sins are dealt with, that you're saved? And they said, well, it's a matter of living a life pleasing to God. You know, he'll weigh things up on Judgment Day.

I said, my God is a lot more holy than that, the God I live for. My God couldn't tolerate sin on Judgment Day. You know, he couldn't sort of wink an eye to it, sweep it under the carpet, that sort of thing.

No bargaining with my God on Judgment Day. But through Jesus, I said to them, I'm actually as holy as God himself. It's incredible, isn't it?

They turned around and walked off, preferred to follow their own made-up God. But we ask, Isaiah, is this just for the Jews? You know, it is 2007, it is Scotland after all.

You know, we get sceptical, don't we, about free offers. I had some free vouchers for a restaurant, nice Indian restaurant. Went, took the wife, went to this restaurant, got my vouchers out after the meal and then the waitress started to show me the small print.

[11:31] You have to be there at a certain time, a certain day, all that sort of thing. I was quite crestfallen about it, you know, when she showed me the small print.

And we expect some small print, don't we? You know, we're not naturally God's people, you and me. And Isaiah says, well, read verse 5. So we look down there, it is, behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, do you see?

And a nation that did not know you shall run to you. And non-Jews come running to God. Us, we, can run to God.

All around the world, people are still running to God. I opened the front door here yesterday, 25 Bath Street, to let my friend out with his push bike.

There was a Chinese girl sat on the steps. A short time after, Ewan Dodds, our international worker, he's got her email address, she's coming along to a church service on Sunday.

[12:35] People all around the world are running to God, says Isaiah. But just imagine the reaction to these words after Isaiah had written them.

You know, they're all sat down, listening, lapping it all up, smiling at each other, but then this crunch here, you know, God summoning people that don't know him.

You know, nations that don't know him. Gentiles, they get up, walk around, shake their heads. As Isaiah got his wires crossed, they ask each other.

This isn't something humans make up, is it, friends? It's God's love, isn't it? Reaching down from another realm. And if that's not enough, there's more to come.

Like the floodgates, opening of God's love and cascading down on his people, only God would speak the following words in verse 7. Verse 7, he's inviting those who are opposite of himself.

[13:36] You remember chapter 6, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. And yet here, his invitation goes out unreservedly to those who reject him.

People like you and me. Yes, verse 7, verse 7, we see the utter otherness of God. It's worth just dwelling there on verse 7.

Verse 7 is how the prodigal son turned home. Do you remember Luke chapter 15? Just imagine him. He's there in a foreign country, isn't he? Next to the pig trough, his tummy rumbling.

And he looks down and Isaiah says, let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. And Jesus says, Luke 15, verse 17, I think, he says he came to his senses and he gets up, doesn't he, the prodigal son, goes back to his father.

Let him return, says Isaiah, to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. Open arms.

[14:48] Here it is, isn't it? Verse 7, it's the centre of the passage, repent and you shall be saved. It's an invitation for the wicked, those with nothing to offer.

It's international. And so it's for you, friend. You fit the bill. It's got your name on it. God's inviting you. God's inviting us home.

Isaiah says, come to the waters. Jesus stands up. If anyone is thirsty, come on to me. So is this invitation to this heavenly banquet, does it make sense, friends?

It's a great banquet, isn't it? It'll satisfy our deepest longings. It's free. Gentiles are invited. And to cap it all, the wicked are on the invitation list.

People like you and me. The religious say, Isaiah, come on, what are you talking about here? What are you talking about? And perhaps we ourselves, you know, we can have that sort of thinking.

[15:52] Maybe you've got friends, colleagues at work, you give them a wide berth. Maybe you've got neighbours, but you never speak to them about the Lord Jesus Christ. They've never come round for tea at your house.

You know, we can do that sort of thing, can't we? We can think that people don't fit our criteria of being a Christian. But what does God say to us this Wednesday?

Have a look down at verse 8. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

And Saul meets with Jesus, doesn't he, on the road to Damascus. John Newton pens amazing grace. Our next point is about inviting folk to this banquet, and I don't expect you'll be surprised. How will it be done? Through God's word. Have a look at verse 10. For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

[17:09] It shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing which I sent it. Did you notice the analogy with rain in verse 10?

We know that, don't we, in Glasgow? The effects of rain. You know, rain can't not help nature flourish, can it?

It's like an inherent effect. And as I say, it's like that with God's word. Just like that with God's word. You know, we might sit in the front room of our house chatting with somebody about the Lord Jesus Christ.

We might feel inadequate and incidentally that's an accurate assessment of the situation. We're discouraged. I was down south, I worked with Edward Lobb at a church down south and I was once welcoming people at the front door, but I was also leading the service and doing the kiddies talk. And Edward and Catherine walked in, Edward said, good morning Alex, how are you? I said, I'm nervous. And Edward said, I've been reading Isaiah 55 this morning. He says, just turn it up, will you?

[18:21] So I turned Isaiah 55 up. He said, have a look at verse 11. I'd look at verse 11. He said, do you see that word beginning with A? Can you see it, friends? Edward said, it's a nice word, isn't it?

And then he walked off up the stairs with Catherine to the hall. It's a nice word, isn't it, that, friends? He's accomplished. You know, takes us out of the results department, doesn't it, if that's where we strayed.

Just the same in the New Testament, says Jesus, scatter the seed, scatter the seed. And now Isaiah is not miserly with his ink, you know.

He could have just put a full stop there and clocked out. It's been a good day's work for the prophet, hasn't it? But he takes us to another realm entirely. Our final point is nothing less than the restoration of the created order.

Have a look with me at verses 12 and 13. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and hills before you shall break forth into singing, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

[19:25] Instead of the thorns shall come up the cypress, instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

What is that everlasting sign that won't be cut off? What are you talking about, Isaiah? You know, is it the temple? Was that everlasting? AD 70? No, it wasn't. So what's the everlasting sign?

Isaiah's sort of on tiptoes now, looking into the future, like a child peering through a window at something, and we look together with him, and we see our future, friends.

He's looking at nothing less than the new creation. You know, it's a picture, isn't it, of the whole of creation, celebrating, rejoicing, the mountains and hills singing, the trees clapping their hands.

Sounds a bit silly at first, doesn't it? A bit daft, don't you think? Until we remember, friends, the extent of the curse. Paul says that we know the whole of creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth.

[20 : 35] You know, creation, think about this, outside of Adam, it didn't do anything wrong, did it? Poor creation. Adam got the totality of it cursed.

And here, Isaiah's painting a bit of a picture of some celebrations going on. You know, is the creation happy? I'd say it was happy. You see, the curse is lifted.

Do you see? I like the word, break forth in the middle of verse 12. Do you see? Break forth. It's like a cork coming out of a champagne bottle, isn't it?

Just look there at verse 12. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace the mountains and hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

So here it is, friends. This is the future, isn't it? That Isaiah knows. And so by those rivers of Babylon, God's people listen to God's word.

[21 : 38] They look at the scroll, and suddenly there's hope in the midst of despair. And friend, I don't know what's going on in your life just now, but God does, doesn't he?

And he wants you to trust him. We finish with verse six. Seek the Lord while he may be found. call upon him while he is near.

Isaiah is a prophet, isn't he? And he's asking us for a response. Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we ask that you would help us to orientate our lives, to put things into perspective, perspective.

So as all we do is framed by your glorious purposes, we hear the emergency services outside, Father, and we look forward to this place that Isaiah knew, where there would be no sin, there would be no curse, there would be no death.

Forgive us, Father, for the times when we've evaluated our lot in life by worldly criteria. And we ask that you fill us afresh with your indwelling and eternal covenant in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 03] And use us as your ambassadors amidst this mixed up world, bringing life and hope as we talk about him. And to that end, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this day and forevermore.

Amen.