

Pardon
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
Isaiah 55
Prayer Sermon Series
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INTRODUCTION: Isaiah 55 is a surpassing text. God's generous feast transcends our physical needs—He also speaks to our soul. What was dead can be restored and redeemed. *"Come, everyone who thirsts"* (Isaiah 55:1). When we recognize our need, we can come to the party. That God could be so gracious and inviting may not make sense because we don't think as God thinks. His ways are powerful and great. Our ways are limited, minor, and trivial in comparison. God's word is potent and effective. I love this line too, *"He will abundantly pardon"* (Isaiah 55:7). Forgiveness is an important part of prayer. We are abundantly pardoned IF we make confession. However, God does not have a "pardon and parole board." We aren't on probation with the Lord. *"If the son sets you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36). Then we can bear witness to God's goodness. As is said, *"Grace is one beggar telling another where to find bread."* We find the bread of life in Jesus Christ, who is of the line of David.

The first of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses that launched the Protestant Reformation stated, *"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt. 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."* Each Sunday we say in our Communion liturgy: *"We confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Then we rejoice with these majestic words; *"Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!"*

APPLICATION: How is your Lenten prayer group going? You can still start one. What touches your heart in Isaiah 55? We all carry something. We do not need to carry the burden of sin. We can give it to Jesus. What do you need to leave at the altar? Google the "Prayer of Examen" (I like Richard Foster's entry).

Isaiah 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 labor 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. "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon 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 shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Synonyms for "**Come**" include: "approach, draw closer, and move toward."

It is invitational – "Welcome." To welcome people becomes our aim, calling, duty, goal, objective, purpose, and vocation. It is our mission. "Helping Others Follow Jesus."

It is intense, heartfelt deep, strong, sincere) appeal. It is active, not passive.

It is inclusive, not exclusive. It wants all people to know they are welcome and desired.

It is thoroughly good news.

Isaiah 55 points to Jesus.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew

11:28-30

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away. Matthew 19:14-15

His message was inclusive and often given to people who felt they were spiritually broke. Those invited to come may feel they are unworthy. They do not have the ability to come or the resources to purchase what their thirsty souls' desire. They are hungry but cannot buy bread.

"A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" Luke 14:16-24 Jesus was on a mission to invite people to a great banquet – but people didn't want to come.

And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:31-32

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." Luke 19:5

Jesus used the experience of thirst in his conversation with a spiritual and social outcast – the woman at the well. He told her: John 4:13-15 *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."*

The result? She became invitational herself. *So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to him. John 4:28-30*

In chapter 6 Jesus said: *"I am the bread of life."* Water and bread were images of invitation from Isaiah 55.

The word of invitation is seen in the Book of Revelation:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. Rev 3:20

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Rev 22:17

What is our message? What are we trying to say?

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon 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. 55:6-9

We do not think like God thinks. We tend to think we are too good – we don't need God. We feel self-sufficient. Or we think we're too bad and not worthy of being forgiven. We haven't "earned" God's love. That's why we hear of deathbed conversions. The problem of deathbed conversions = we live our whole life with anxiety of the hereafter; but we also miss out on the wonderfully good news of pardon and of presence. God forgives us – abundantly. God comes to live in our hearts.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. John 10:10

Since sin entered the world, humans have been playing hide and seek from the Lord. The Lord wants to be found. He is not hiding from us – He wants a relationship with us.

Steve had 8 felonies on drug/weapons charges. He was released from his 2nd time in McAlester in January of 2007. He found us at Asbury and has turned his life around. Many people have helped him here with that turn around. Though others have helped, it's been Steve's decision to make a life change. He didn't want to live like he had any more. But it is very hard for an ex-con. The odds are GREATLY stacked against them. But he's gotten stronger and grown each year. He shared with our Seniors Bible Study Class for a # of years now. The first year he

didn't know what to say. Each year he's grown. His experience in Disciple Bible Study was transforming. A wide # of people at Asbury helped him, including employment and Mentorship. He's been a true witness. He married and now has a 6-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter. In 2015, he appeared before the State Pardon and Parole Board and presented his case and got a standing ovation. A few weeks later he got a letter from Governor of Oklahoma - Steve's been pardoned.

I've never been convicted of a crime and sent to prison, but that's a legal conversation. Spiritually, we're all convicted felons who are thirsty and hungry. We need pardon – we need forgiveness. God wants to pardon us and release us for new life. *"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.* Isaiah 1:18

What am I asking you to do? Give your life to Jesus Christ – receive His pardon and grace.

Join us in helping others find the greatest gift ever given. This is why Asbury exists – to Help Others Follow Jesus. We don't have to have everything all together before we begin to share. Zacchaeus didn't. The woman at the well didn't. None of the disciples did. Steve didn't. I didn't. Just begin where you are now.