

COME TO ME

by Danny Hall

We are approaching election time in our country, and of course this year, with all that's been going on in Washington and around the country, this is a rather unique opportunity to get into the middle of a political mess. One of the great advantages our family had living in Europe for over thirteen years was that we didn't have to watch American political campaigns up close. Now that we're back in the country for our first major campaign, having to sort through it all and hear all the garbage that goes back and forth, I must say I'm not very impressed.

Because of the nature of the debate and the scandal in Washington this year, candidates are posturing and framing their campaigns in the language of values, trying to maximize that language for their own political benefit. In the midst of all this, we're asking ourselves how we cut a straight path through it. There's so much ambivalence, so much relativism. We learn over and over again that things that you think you can count on, you just can't count on. In the process of developing our views, we wonder how in the world we can ever find a firm foundation we can rely on.

In the last message ([Discovery Paper 8159](#)) and in this one I'm returning to some truths that have helped me get my life on a firm foundation. In the last message we looked at a wonderful passage in Isaiah 6 and saw the greatness of God and the response that we have to God as we are humbled before him, then lifted up in forgiveness and grace. Now I want to turn to a beautiful picture of God and what he has to give us in Isaiah 55. Upon the sure foundation of the promises of God, we can establish ourselves as we look to the future.

Isaiah 55 is a crucial point in the book. It's the end of a section, starting with chapter 40, that some have entitled "Song of the Servant." The first half of the book, chapters 1-37, contains prophetic warnings to the nation and to its surrounding enemies of God's impending judgment if they do not get right with him. Chapters 38 and 39 are a historical interlude that sets up the final chapters of the book.

In chapters 40-66 there is a forward-looking prophetic word to the nation promising that God will re-establish it after its time of captivity and judgment. There are a number of pictures laid out through this half of Isaiah, one of which is this section that describes the Servant of the Lord and his activities. Perhaps the zenith of this section is found in chapter 53, where the sacrificial suffering of the Servant for our iniquities is played out for us in beautiful yet graphic and startling language. Flowing out of that beautiful picture are chapters 54 and 55, which are responses of joy to that glorious act by the suffering Servant. Chapter 54 begins, "Shout for joy...Break forth into joyful shouting...." Chapter 55 begins, "'Ho! Every one who thirsts, come.'" There is a rising call to joyful response to the great gift that the suffering Servant procures for us. It is an invitation to enjoy a feast someone else has paid for, a song of the benefits and the glory of what the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 has done for us.

Let's read Isaiah 55, and then we'll go back and look at some of the highlights, because we can't do it all justice in a single message.

**"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost.**

**"Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance.**

**"Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that you may live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
According to the faithful mercies shown to David.
"Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
A leader and commander for the peoples.**

**"Behold, you will call a nation you do not know,
And a nation which knows you not will run to you,
Because of the LORD your God, even 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;
And let him return to the LORD,
And He will 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 without watering the earth,
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

"For you will go out with joy,
And be led forth with peace;
The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you,
And all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

"Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up;
And instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up;
And it will be a memorial to the LORD,
For an everlasting sign which will not be cut off."

GOD'S MAGNIFICENT OFFER

In the first part of this chapter God makes us an offer, an invitation, if you will. In it we see something of the wonder and glory of what Christ has done for us. The offer begins with a call, "Come," which is repeated twice.

The motif of this section is the marketplace in Jerusalem. Perhaps you have visited that marketplace or one like it. It is an open marketplace of bargaining and buying and selling. If you have never been there, let me describe some of the experiences Ginger, Christopher, and I had when we went to Jerusalem. Walking down through the old city, we saw merchants everywhere. The streets were narrow and crowded, and goods were stacked up all around the entranceways to little shops. People were begging us, at times almost physically dragging us in, to look at their goods, and then offering all kinds of bargains, trying to persuade us to buy what they had to sell. One day we went into a particular shop, and something caught Ginger's eye. That was a real mistake. The bargaining was on. A man came up to us, and we were there for the longest time. We kept trying to leave, and he wouldn't let us. He started out by saying, "You're the first customer of the day, and if I make a sale to the first customer, my whole day will be blessed. So I'm going to make a great deal for you." He went on and on. And just to prove how great we were at this, you can come and see that article hanging on the wall in our house.

That's the setting for the offer we read about in this passage. In the cacophony of the merchants crying, "Come," offering their wares, the voice of God himself says,

**"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come....
And you who have no money come...."**

Notice the character of this offer. First, throughout the Scriptures the metaphor of thirst depicts the very deepest needs of our heart and soul. Calling people thirsty pictures them as needy and desperate in the same way that physical thirst drives people to desperate measures to survive. So the offer is to satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts and lives.

Second, the offer goes beyond the basic meeting of our deepest needs. He uses the figure of coming to buy milk and wine, and farther down he speaks of abundance. The picture here is of great, overflowing beauty and abundance of life. Our soul is more than satisfied, overwhelmed with the greatness and goodness of God himself.

Third, it is the impoverished of soul who are invited to come. The most valuable thing we could ever want is offered for us to buy even if we don't have any money. It's freely given to us. So once we become bankrupt and we have nothing and nowhere to go, God says, "Please come and enjoy the richness of my abundance!" But while it's ours for free, the offer is to "buy." That is we need to take some initiative, to reach out and make it our own.

In order for us to understand the wonder of this offer, God gives us a contrast in verse 2:

**"Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?"**

Like a thirsty person in a parched desert who, seeing a mirage of an oasis, runs and stuffs sand into his mouth thinking it's water, we can squander everything we have thinking we're buying what we need, when it's not nourishing food for our soul, and it cannot satisfy. I could give you examples of this from my life, and I'm sure you can think of your own. We have chased after so many things thinking if we just had this experience or owned that, if we just accomplished this thing or went to that place, somehow our soul would be nourished. There are moments when we indulge in all kinds of destructive things hoping that they'll satisfy us. But they don't.

One of the more interesting events during the years we lived in Europe was when the Iron Curtain came down in 1989. We were in Vienna in those early days of euphoria in late 1989 and early 1990 when the walls were coming down. These people suddenly had newfound freedoms after all the years of repression. Thousands upon thousands of Eastern Europeans flooded into the city of Vienna for the first time (until the Austrian government realized they had better put up some more border controls, require visas and so on). Driving through the city of Vienna, you would find groups of Eastern Europeans crowded in two kinds of places: electronic stores and pornography stores. There were lots of both. After all those years of repression, they rushed to try to fill the void, and almost in a caricature of what we in the west have always done, they thought by indulging their sexual appetites or getting the next new gadget or electronic gizmo, somehow they could make their life better. God is saying to us through the prophet Isaiah, "You're buying what is not bread, squandering everything you have on things that cannot satisfy. Come to my feast."

OUR RESPONSE: SEEKING, FORSAKING, RETURNING

In verse 3, after this warning about how we're chasing after all the wrong things, it says, "Incline your ear and come to Me." Suddenly we find that God himself *is* the feast. He invites us to know him, to commune with him, to be partakers of his nature, to walk in fellowship with him. His wonderful offer of more than satisfaction, of abundance and wonder and total freedom beyond anything that we could possibly come close to supplying, is himself.

Back in the late eighties, there was a young man from Hollywood who came over to Vienna to take a trip with some of our staff people who were working in Eastern Europe at the time. He was a television producer, the first Christian I had ever met in that industry. He came to see if he could support the ministry in some way or be involved in it. He took some trips into Eastern Europe, and then on the weekend, before he went back to the States, we were having a retreat for all the men on staff. We were in a beautiful setting up in the hills in the eastern end of the Alps, not too far from Vienna, in a nice little house. He and I got to be pretty good friends.

We were talking one day, and he looked at me and said, "You know, here is the creator of the universe, the maker of all things, the sustainer and giver of life itself, he who is above all and everything is in him and from him, and this God has asked me to fellowship with him. Now, I have decided that if I don't get up every morning of my life and spend a significant hunk of time just enjoying being with God, one of two things is true about me: Either I don't really believe this stuff, or I'm the stupidest person on the face of the earth."

That's the question for us, too: Do we really believe this stuff, or are we just stupid? The God of the universe offers us himself, and here we are chasing all kinds of nothing.

Isaiah goes on in the next few verses to say that this offer is secured through an everlasting covenant that God makes for our benefit. It's secured by the heir to David's throne, the ruler through whom all the nations will be attracted to this wonderful message. We don't have time to unpack all the glory of this reference to David's kingdom and the nations that are called to him, but suffice it to say that this offer is secured by a covenant between God and us, secured by the King himself, Christ Jesus, who will sit forever on David's throne, who himself is so attractive that all the nations of the world will be drawn to him.

The last half of this chapter deals with how we respond to this absolutely incredible offer. There are three kinds of ideas that describe our response.

First, seek, or call upon the name of the Lord.

**"Seek the LORD while He may be found,
Call upon Him while He is near."**

In other words, take advantage of it. We must take the initiative to receive the gift that God has given us.

Second, forsake, or turn from our wicked ways, our wicked thoughts, our unrighteousness. In other words, this prize is worth so much, it is so satisfying, so deep, so wonderful, we must not hang onto anything that can impair our ability to obtain it.

Third, return. This is a prophetic word spoken to the nation of Israel. Because of their sinfulness and hardness of heart, God

was going to judge them and send them into a time of captivity. But this prophecy speaks of a time of restoration after that, when he calls them to return to that for which they were originally created.

The idea of return means there was purpose that was prior to this moment. I would suggest that the nation of Israel here is a picture of our relationship with God. The call to us to return to him means that we are to return to that for which we were originally created, which is simply fellowship with God himself. All this chasing after other ways to satisfy, this life of emptiness, has been a rebellion against that for which we were created. God calls us to return, to know him and to fellowship with him, to make him the center of our life.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S THOUGHTS AND WAYS

Then on the basis of that response, to sum all this up and to drive home the wonder of this offer and the call to accept it, the end of the chapter builds an interesting case. God says through his prophet,

**"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.'"**

In the preceding verses we were to forsake our wicked ways and thoughts. Now God's ways and thoughts are brought into the picture, because they are as different and high above ours as the heavens are above the earth.

Now what does that mean in this context? There are several things that I would draw your attention to. First, God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours in his understanding of what is real and valuable. This whole context is about understanding what is real and what is only illusory. God understands it, and that is why he calls us to forsake the illusory, and to grab hold of that which is eternal and real, which is himself.

Second, God is greater in his thoughts and ways in that he understands the gulf that is between us and him, and we don't. We are uncomfortable with the facts that God is so wonderful and great, and the concept of God is so ethereal and hard to wrap our minds around. So we spend a lot of our lives trying to reduce God down to something manageable for us, to redefine God in ways that are comfortable for us. But God understands the gulf, and the truth that he wants us to see is that the gulf is too great for us to bring him down to our level, and so he has reached across the gulf to us.

The third way that God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours is in the wonder of his grace. Even when we acknowledge the difference between us and God, our response is often incorrect. We talked about this in the last message. When we try to reduce or manage God, our response is often, "Okay, God, let's strike a deal here. I'll clean my act up a little bit, I'll be a little nicer. What do you want me to do, God?" Or if we've done something really heinous we say, "Oh, I could never be forgiven. I'm too evil, I've done too much." Then we transfer what we think about God to our earthly relationships, and we're self-justifying and unforgiving. But in the wonder of God's grace he reaches across the abyss of our sin and offers us himself. He procures for us the freedom from our sin through what he has done through the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, that glorious picture of Christ. His ways are above our ways because he forgives. His thoughts are above ours because his grace transcends all that stands between us and him. This gift of salvation is too wonderful for us to conceive.

Verses 10-11 speak of the gift of God's word. The snow and rain coming down and nourishing the earth, the seed bearing fruit and being made into bread for the eater, are pictures of God's word, which goes forth from him and accomplishes what he desires. The word of God, as he says, effectively accomplishes what it's sent out to do, and in particular, what he desires. And what is it that God desires? He has just laid it out for us. He desires us to know him. So his word is guaranteed to reveal who he is and bring us to him. The wonder and power of the word of God is that it opens up for us this great offer of salvation, life in him. When we place our trust in the promises of God as he is revealed to us here, we need not doubt that the gulf has been bridged by God himself. We need not doubt that we can experience the sustenance and satisfaction of the abundance of God. For God's word has spoken it, and it is effective and powerful to transform us by his grace.

SHOUTS OF JOY

Then, as if all of this weren't enough, he ends with this beautiful picture:

**"For you will go out with joy,
And be led forth with peace;
The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you,
And all the trees of the field will clap their hands."**

Creation rejoices and worships God as it looks forward to that time of final restoration and deliverance, that day when all will be made right and our redemption will be complete. This is a word of promise of the joy that will transcend all joys, when the complete restoration of the nation and all of its grandeur will come, and for you and for me when that final consummation of our salvation in the very presence of God will come. It's a day of great joy and thanksgiving.

In these verses, Isaiah describes what I call one of two great moods of worship or emotional responses in worship. One is

awe and reverence. We saw that in the last message in Isaiah 6. There are times when you and I are before God, and we need to be humble, to acknowledge his awesome might and holiness. But on the other hand, Scripture is full of the emotions of celebration. We rise from that moment, while still in awe and reverence of the greatness of God, and God says, "Clap your hands, be excited, be joyful! You've been set free!" And here at the end of this great promise we have that celebration in which we are set free by the grace and wonder of God to just enjoy him. If you can't find joy in this gift, check your pulse!

I look back at my own experience of coming to Christ at eighteen, about two months before entering university. I had spent most of my high school years chasing after everything I could think of to be satisfied. I thought if I held this office, had this relationship, indulged in this or that, had this experience or accomplished that goal--you name it, I ran the gamut, always searching for a new cause, a new experience. You may have gone through that, or you may be there right now. I always went to church, because that was the culture of my family, but I used to derisively tease any and all teenagers around me who were serious about church or faith in Christ.

Then one summer Sunday evening, after a series of events in which, looking back, I see the hand of God, I went to a prayer meeting with the people I had derided for so long, who humbly loved me and prayed for me, and God showed me the arrogance and futility of all that chasing around. He broke through with his wonder and grace. That night when I went home, I pulled an old King James Bible that I hadn't read in years off the shelf. In my bedroom down in the basement of my parents' home, which I used to consider my little kingdom, I sat up most of that night reading the Bible. After all those years of hearing all the Bible stories and being bored to tears week after week in church, that Bible came alive to me. I have never experienced so much wonder and joy in one evening in my whole life. I couldn't have articulated theologically what was going on, and it didn't matter. What mattered was that the grace of God had touched my soul, and there was joy and freedom and peace. I knew I had come home.

I wish I could say that I learned that lesson so well that it has characterized every moment of my life since then. But like you, I somehow keep listening to the voices of the marketplace yelling, "Come here, buy this," and I'm distracted and tempted to go taste and see, while the voice of God is saying, "Come to me, come to me." Let's not keep listening to those voices when God himself invites us to be set free to joy immeasurable!

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