

11th February 2024 – Isaiah 40-55 (5) – Isaiah 55:1-13 ‘A new invitation’

You'll be pleased to hear that I've got a 1-word sermon today – or at least, a 1-word summary – and it's simply this: COME. Come. Come to me, says God. **Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters of life.** Come, you who have nothing to offer, who are at the end of your resources, or perhaps who have no idea why God would love you or even notice you: come. Come to me.

But, you know, coming to Jesus is one of those things that easy to say and hard to do. If it was that easy, I could stop my sermon now: the invitation would be enough. But the truth is that we all have reasons not to come – doubts, fears, scars. Most of these are real, some of these are cleverly constructed avoidance strategies, all of them get in the way of us finding what God *wants us* to find and what we *need* to find, a pure relationship of joy and commitment with God: the child with the Father, the lover with the beloved.

As we bring our series in Isaiah chapters 40-55 to a close, we've enjoyed week after week of amazing promises. To a people in despair, the Lord offers extraordinary hope, and, through the prophet Isaiah **he draws this glorious vision to a close with a simple and joyful invitation: COME.** But at this point, this is where Israel's worries and doubts kick in: can we trust this word? Look at what's happened, we're exiled, God was angry with us, it feels like he's forgotten us: can we really do this, can we really come back to God?

I believe the rest of chapter 55 is God's answer, God's way of addressing those fears. I see five objections and God takes each of them in turn and says: it's OK. That doesn't have to stop you. And what God said to Israel is what I believe God is saying to us today. Come. He knows the doubts, he knows the fears, he knows the objections. The call to faith is not a call to blind faith, God understands the human condition, he knows the reasons we have for not coming, and his word to us today is still come.

So what's the first objection? Well, you might have noticed that the offer is made in verse 1 to those who have no money. But in verse 2, he addresses people who do have money: 'Why spend money on what is not bread?' The Lord knows that **many of us invest in our own security, we try and create our meaning.** But he also knows it doesn't work, it won't satisfy us ultimately. His advice is to feast on him: 'Eat what is good and you will delight in the richest of fare.'

So, to those who are self-reliant, to those who rely on wealth to create their own meaning, God says, come to me because you won't find it there. What I give you can't be bought. **PAUSE.**

If that first group was over-confident, the second group are more suspicious. **Objection no2: can we really trust God? God is God, but is he good?** For most people that's rarely an abstract question: what makes us doubt God's goodness is our own experience of suffering, or of someone close to us. Israel likewise had been severely punished, and now God was telling them that their time of suffering was over: could they really trust him? God's answer comes loud and clear in verse 3: 'I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.' It's OK, says God, I can be trusted. What I am doing here is for all-time.

You know, God's not safe but he is good. And when he calls us to come, he calls us to experience his consistent goodness. It doesn't mean a pain-free life, but it does mean a faithful friend, a loving Father who will never let you go. Come, because my promise to you is eternal.

That's all very well, you may say: I know I need God and I know He's good, but why do I have to come now? I'll make my peace with God a bit later – after all, there's always time, isn't there? Well, yes – and no: (v6) 'Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.' There are seasons in life, moments, opportunities. We've looked before at the word *kairos* – it's the word for time as a significant season or moment. The spiritual life has these seasons, and one of the keys to a fruitful life is to recognise these seasons and respond. 'Now is the time,' God says to his people. I'm near to you *now* – why delay?

The thing is, what we say to God becomes a habit. If you keep saying no to God, it gets easier every time. But it's also true if we say yes to God. One of the best bits of advice I was ever given is this: keep saying yes to God. Isaiah 40-55 is God's big yes to us; the invitation here is to say yes in return. Come.

The fourth objection is implied in verses 8-11. Put bluntly, does God cut it? **Is there enough wisdom or power in following him?** Some of it doesn't seem to make sense, and some of what does make sense looks weak or foolish to the outside observer. Can we really put our trust in a God like that? Well, God's reassurance to Israel then, and to all of us now, is right here in these verses. To those who think coming to God lacks wisdom, God says: (vv8-9) 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

Don't place me within human limits, God says, don't make me in your image. I'm so much bigger than that. This is the God who turns conventional wisdom upside down, who brings life out of death, victory out of defeat, glory out of suffering. This is the God we see in Jesus, isn't it? No, God is not limited by logic and our limited understanding of cause and effect in the world. He is still on his throne and his Word still has power: (v11) 'my word... will not return to me empty, but which accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.'

Come, the Lord says, because my way is greater, and my word still has the power to change the world and to change a human heart.

And finally, God answers one last negative thought: **what if this spiritual life is all a bit, well, dull?** Isn't the life of faith about long faces, more don'ts than dos, rules and regulations? To which my first response is: however did we reduce the life changing message of God to *that*? No, God says, of course there will be trials and difficulties, but what I am calling you to will ultimately be a life of joy: (v12) 'You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you.' The abundant life that God calls us to is so overwhelming that it bursts the banks of humanity so that *all* of creation cries out in joy and spontaneous praise! A reminder, if one was needed, that the word 'gospel' means good news – news that makes you sing for joy.

So, the message today is very simple, and comes straight from God himself. It's the very first word of our passage: **COME.** Come because only I can satisfy you. Come, because my loving promises to you are eternal. Come because now is the time – now is always the time. Come, because my plans are better and my wisdom is greater. Come, because my calling to you is a calling to joy, to abundant life. 'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.' Come. Come as you are. Please, just... come. Amen.