

Isaiah 55: Getting Real about GRACE

**Baptism and the Lord’s Supper
as
Manifestations of God’s Grace**

The GRACE of Invitation--Isaiah 55:1-3

Organ Prelude

Call to Worship.....Travis Crocker

Leader: “Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!

**People: Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?**

Leader: Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

**People: Give ear and come to me;
hear me, that your soul may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.**

Hymn No. 314.....Whosoever Will

Invocation.....Jim Thomason

**The Baptism of Those who Have Responded to Christ’s Invitation
(Names of baptismal candidates)**

Anthem: Draw Me Near.....Adult Choir

Welcome and Greetings.....Glenn Bolt

Praise and Worship.....Praise Team

Offering/Doxology/Prayer

The GRACE of Justification—Isaiah 55:4-9

Hymn No. 575.....I Will Sing of My Redeemer

Meditation.....Jim Thomason

Invitation and Justification (Is. 55:4-9)

- ⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander of the peoples.
- ⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations that do not know you will hasten to you,
because of the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor.”
- ⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.
- ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way
and the evil man his thoughts.
Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.
- ⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.
- ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

“Whosoever Will May Come”—I don’t know about you, but it’s been many years since I last sang that old Gospel song that we opened our service with today. I trust enough of you knew it to “do it justice.” As I read the opening verses of Isaiah 55 and thought about our topic of grace for this week, that hymn came to mind—and it wouldn’t leave!

**“Whosoever heareth,” shout, shout the sound!
Spread the blessed tidings all the world around;
Tell the joyful news wherever man is found:
“Whosoever will may come.”**

That’s grace, friends—the grace of God’s extraordinary invitation extended to us all. And long before the full dimensions of God’s invitation were made known in Christ Jesus, the prophet Isaiah got it.

This is one of the reasons we talk of there being Gospel in the writings of Isaiah. God told him to announce to the world:

“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.” (v. 1)

No money—no problem. That’s not something we hear every day! What God offers us, we could never afford anyway—no matter how much money we have. His invitation to us is priceless.

Soon there is to be a big wedding over “across the pond”—a royal wedding. You’ve probably heard about it—if not, you may want to check your pulse to make sure you’re still in the land of the living!

Now, there’s a lot of talk about who’s on the guest list. I may be wrong, but most of the folks invited probably have plenty of money—what do you think?—at the very least, enough to meet the dress code that’s stated clearly on the invitation.

Good news, though: there’re no such requirements on God’s invitation—something that Jesus made even clearer for us when he told the story about another member of royalty hosting a marriage banquet for his son.

When the guests didn’t show, you remember what he did. He sent his servants out to invite everyone to come to the party. Make your way down every highway and byway, he told them, and let them know they’re all invited.

That’s the grace of this invitation—God’s unearned, undeserved, unexpected, unthinkable invitation to you and me and everyone else—including some folks that we’d personally choose not to invite—if it was left up to us!

What makes this “grace”...is that we would not even know about this invitation had not God chosen to make it known. We would not be able to respond to it either but for the fact that God enables us to do that too. It’s all pure gift!

In Isaiah 55, the water is offered. We simply reach out in humble faith and gratitude, realizing that we are thirsty people with no means of meeting our own need...and we accept God’s gift. We drink the water and quench our thirst.

In the Bible, water is a symbol of God's presence. Our thirst is a reminder of our need for God. There is a thirst in each of our lives that only He can satisfy; and that thirst for God is a work of His grace as surely as is the water He supplies to quench it.

In the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus encounters a very thirsty woman. Apparently she thought the right husband would meet her need—she had had five of them so far.

Jesus offered her "living water," promising that if she drank the water He had to give her, she'd never be thirsty again—that indeed, it would become in her 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' (Jn. 4:13-14)

When we admit our need, when we realize that it's our sin and rebellion against God that has made us thirst for something more satisfying in life, when as a result we confess our sin and turn to Jesus Christ, receiving Him as our Savior, we are then "justified."

We often say we're "saved" at that point—and we are; but we're also being saved, because salvation is a process that continues as sanctification and glorification, which we'll consider a bit later. The Bible, though, says that in that moment when we embrace this Good News of Jesus Christ, when we personally choose to receive Him by faith, we are "justified."

Now, to get at what this means, think "just as if I had never sinned." In that miracle of repentance and faith, God removes our sin from us as far as the east is from the west. We're forgiven. The slate is wiped clean.

We stand before God justified--in a new and right relationship with Him--and the purpose of this saving grace is to continue to change us for the better all through our lives and right on into eternity.

Baptism is part of this. Those who profess their faith in Christ are then baptized, as we witnessed earlier. The water that symbolizes God's presence with us and His ability to quench our deepest thirst becomes the baptismal waters that remind us of how we've been washed clean and our lives have been made brand new—by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper is also part of this. Just as the Lord invites us to come to Him and find forgiveness and life in Him, He now

invites us to remember the price He paid to make this possible. His body was broken. His blood was shed.

And once again, we are invited to receive the bread and the cup—another experience of grace that no amount of money could ever buy and no amount of goodness could ever achieve. They're gifts from a gracious God who loves us far too much to not give them.

If you know Christ Jesus as your Savior and Lord, if you have faith to believe that it's only by His grace, and not by any merit of your own, that you are privileged to be in this saving, life-changing relationship with God, then I invite you to receive now this bread, the symbol of Christ's body which was broken for you.

The Serving of the Bread

Choir Anthem: *Draw Me Near*

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.
This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,
and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is
real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh
and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."

(John 6:51, 54-56)

The GRACE of Sanctification—Isaiah 55:10-11

Meditation.....Jim Thomason

Sanctification and Glorification (Isaiah 55:10-13)

One day in the funny papers, Charlie Brown was reflecting on his life. "Sometimes I lie awake at night," he says, "and I ask, 'Where have I gone wrong?' Then a voice says to me, 'Charlie Brown, this is going to take more than one night.'"

The thing is...we're all "more than one night" people. By the grace of God, we recognize the problem of sin in our lives, and by His grace we sense that God is extending His invitation to us to

come and drink. We begin to understand that it really is God for whom we thirst.

So we respond to His invitation, confessing our sin and receiving the Savior, Jesus Christ. In Christ, we are justified before God—again, just as if we had never sinned. We are God’s children now, and nothing can ever take this most important of all relationships away from us.

But, friends, that doesn’t mean that we can then put God’s grace up on a shelf. Grace is still a vital part of God’s recipe for our lives.

Saying “yes” to God’s invitation to be justified in Christ Jesus is a wonderful and absolutely essential beginning; but we’re not done yet. The work of grace continues.

That on-going influence of God’s saving grace upon our lives is called “sanctification.” It’s all about growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s becoming more of what God knows our lives can be. Listen to the next couple of verses from Isaiah 55 (vv. 10-11):

**¹⁰ 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,**

**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.**

We’ve seen the rains fall and, this year, some snow as well. Rain and snow have a purpose. They water the earth, causing it to bud and flourish, producing seed for the sower and bread for the eater, as God says poetically through Isaiah.

Then God makes His point--that His word also has a purpose: to cause new growth and to give us something to “chew on” spiritually. God’s grace edifies our souls and enables our lives to reflect more and more the presence of Christ in us. This growing in grace, you see, is growing in likeness to Christ.

The Lord uses a variety of resources to help us along the way, including what we do here. I heard about a disgruntled church member who wrote a letter to the editor complaining that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday.

"I've gone for 30 years now," he said, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time...and the preachers are wasting theirs."

Well, this started a bit of a controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of everyone at the newspaper. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals."

"But I do know this. They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. Without these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment each Lord's Day, I would now be spiritually dead!" Thank God for our physical and our spiritual nourishment!

Grace extends the invitation. Grace declares us justified before God. Grace continues to grow us up, to sanctify us, in Christ Jesus. And one day, God's grace will carry us home "to glory" and there we will finally be perfected. That's "glorification."

**"Whosoever will," the promise is secure,
 "Whosoever will," forever must endure;
 "Whosoever will," 'tis life forevermore: and...
 "Whosoever will may come."**

The Serving of the Cup

Organ: *Amazing Grace*

...Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."

Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.
Indeed, the water I give him will become in him
a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
streams of living water will flow from within him.”

(John 7:37; 4:14; 7:38)

The GRACE of Glorification—Isaiah 55:12-13

Invitation to Discipleship

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.

¹³ Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree,
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the LORD’s renown,
for an everlasting sign,
which will not be destroyed.”

That’s grace, friends—transforming the ugly and useless into something beautiful and useful. Along the way, you see, God’s grace changes us and makes us more like Jesus.

But God won’t force His grace on us. Instead, He invites us, He urges us to receive it. Listen again:

“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.
Why spend money on what is not bread,

and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.
Give ear and come to me;
hear me, that your soul may live.

Hymn No. 323.....Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy

As we have made our way through Isaiah 55 this morning, I hope this service of worship has been an experience of God's grace in your life.

By grace, we come to Christ; by grace, we grow in Him. As God's grace continues to work in us, life becomes more about Jesus Christ...and less about us.

The Prayer of St. Patrick captures this so well. Please pray it with me, in unison, as we conclude the service:

Unison Benediction.....from the Prayer of St. Patrick

**Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen.**

Organ Postlude