Good News for Thirsty Souls

Second in the series, “God’s Good News for Today”

# Scripture: Isaiah 55

# Key Thought: God invites us to quench our spiritual thirst with His life-giving Spirit.

# Intro:

What is the thirstiest you have ever been? I remember days when we were putting in hay as teenagers. After loading the hay onto the wagons in the fields, we would help then go to the barn and put it in the hay mow. Sometimes it would be a hot day, and we would be working near the top of the hay mow. I would be dripping with sweat, a little stuffed up from the chaff and dust in the air. When I crawled out of that hay mow, I really needed something to drink. Sometimes Mom would bring out lemonade. That was great. Most of the time we drank water. On our other farm, we would go down to where the well was turn on the pump and drink out of the big hose that filled the cattle’s watering trough. The water quenched our thirst.

The Scripture that we read both in Isaiah 55 and in Jesus conversation with the woman at the well uses our physical thirst as a picture or analogy for our desire and quest for God.

# Our human condition

A good question to ask is when do we thirst for God? Allow me to make some suggestions. We are Thirsty for God when:

## When life doesn’t satisfy

Think about the analogy of physical water. When we don’t have any for period of time, then we thirst. In the same way, we thirst for God when we run out of spiritual resources. We realize that his life-giving word of truth is absent from our lives. We realize that our energy is dried up. The prophet Isaiah expressed it as spending our labor on things that don’t satisfy (Isa. 55:2). We are going through life’s motions, maybe even having some outward success, but the inner strength, the inner joy, is missing. We find ourselves understanding a little bit of what the prophet Amos spoke about.

“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land— not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. Amos 8:11-12 NIV

Maybe we remember previous spiritual high points fondly; but they seem far away from our present experience. Maybe we find devotions or worship services dry and uninteresting. Maybe our prayer times have become perfunctory or even been crowded out altogether.

We also begin to relate to the situation of the woman who came to the well as described in John 4. She was getting physical water. But she had no trouble realizing that she needed an inner source of refreshment to which she did not have access. So, when Jesus offered her an inner source of spiritual refreshment that would not go away, she wanted it immediately. It is this inner spiritual refreshment to which Isaiah invites us and of which Jesus spoke.

## When it feels like God is absent

Sometimes people express spiritual thirst as feeling that God is absent. From Scripture we know that such a feeling is not true as God has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5,6). But sometimes it feels like it’s true and we need to reach out for new strength from God. In such times we understand the words of the psalmist;

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?   
Ps 42:1-2 NIV

A.W. Tozer, in speaking about our need to desire the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives commented;

"Probably no one was ever filled {with the Holy Spirit] without first having gone through a period of deep soul disturbance and inward turmoil" (Leaning into the Wind p. 58)

## When we need God’s forgiveness

Sometimes this disturbance of our soul may be because we recognize that we need God’s pardon. Consider the words of David in Psalm 143

Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy;  
in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.  
my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed.  
I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works  
and consider what your hands have done.   
I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land.   
Ps 143:1, 4-6 NIV

## When we go through difficult passages of life

A third way that we become thirsty is when we go through challenging times in our lives, particularly the difficult passages of life– marriage, birth of children, empty nest, midlife crisis, leaving home, loss of a spouse, bankruptcy or other financial crisis, serious illness for ourselves or a loved one. Things like these tend to make us aware that we are inadequate in ourselves and we need to be able to draw on the strength that God offers to us through his Holy Spirit. Such times increase our sense of spiritual thirst. Though in themselves, many of these are difficult things, God uses them to help us understand our need for the Holy Spirit’s help. They make us thirsty for God.

## When we face ministry challenges

Sometimes we become thirsty for God because of the challenges that God has given to us in our ministries or relationships.

I was reading this week the experience of the apostles in the very early days of the church from Acts chapter 4. They had been called before the leaders of the Jewish nation to give an account of their preaching and works of healing in Jesus name. After being beaten and threatened, they returned to the brethren and reported what had happened and prayed together for added strength from God. Their prayer in Acts 4:24-30 was so powerful and is still so inspiring today. God heard their prayer and immediately the place where they were praying was shaken and they were all filled again with the Holy Spirit’s presence, just as they had been at Pentecost. In the following chapter, you can note the specific answers to prayer as God poured out his spirit and did wonders through the apostles, gave them courage to continue to speak, and brought more people to Christ. God quenched their thirst

# God's invitation

## The Bible’s message of invitation

Think for a moment about how we often experience the Bible. Many people, unfortunately, when they think about the Bible, think about things they are commanded not to do. Some think about verses having to do with condemnations. Some think about curiosities of history. Others search for things they don’t think agree with their own perspectives.

But I believe that judging from the words of Jesus and many other places in Scripture, that one of the primary ways that God wants us to experience his word is as a book of invitation! God is always trying to get our attention in order to invite us back to him. We humans are like busy little children, immersed in our own conversations and games, and nearly deaf to the beckoning voice of our heavenly Father.

So, Jesus frequently called out to those to whom you spoke;

“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” Mark 4:9 NIV

In Isaiah 55, the prophet also pled for the people to listen.

Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. Isa 55:3

And what does the prophet want them to hear? It is a repeated invitation!

“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. Isa 55:1 NIV

The prophet rephrases God’s invitation in verses 6, 7

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.  
Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.   
Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. Isa 55:6-7 NIV

Jesus invited the woman at the well to receive living water. Once in Jerusalem at a special feast, Jesus cried out,

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. John 7:37-39 NIV

The Bible ends with an invitation. Just five verses before the very last verse we find this invitation to us all.

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. Rev 22:17 NIV

The message is consistent from Old Testament prophets to Jesus to the book of Revelation. The Bible is a book of invitation. God is inviting us to open our hearts and minds and spirits to receive of his Spirit and find his Spirit in us to be a spiritual water of life, springing up on the inside like an ever-flowing spring, an artesian well, a continuous fountain of God’s grace.

## How we respond to God’s invitation

Our positive response to this invitation from God can be expressed in many ways. It could be expressed in some physical way such as coming to an altar, going apart to pray, coming to church, etc. But I don’t think of these kind of responses as the primary idea in responding to God’s invitation to receive living water.

The kind of “coming to God” that Isaiah the prophet is calling for is the same as Jesus was thinking of when he said,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matt 11:28-30 NIV

It is a coming to God with our soul–a drawing close to Jesus–a seeking sustenance, grace, and answers from him.

Jesus said, “Come to me.”

–not just to church though that is often helpful

–not just turning over a new leaf, though that may be needed

–not to a creed, though doctrine is important

"It is not intellectual knowledge about God that quenches man's ancient heart-thirst, but the very Person and Presence of God himself. These come to us through Christian doctrine, but they are more than doctrine. Christian truth was designed to lead us to God, not to serve as a substitute for God. (A.W. Tozer, Leaning Into The Wind. p. 34)

We are not coming to a religion, but to a person. We are responding to God, to Jesus.

God’s invitation to living water is above all a personal invitation to get to know God personally. In his great prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus said;

This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. John 17:3

# God' s Good News - Living Water

When we do accept God’s invitation to come to him for living water, what do we receive? Let’s go back to our text in Isaiah 55 and see what great promises the prophet brings to us with his invitation.

## Life

The most important result is in verse 3.

“Listen that you may live.” Isa. 55:3

Our very spiritual life hangs on our respnse to God’s invitations.

Jesus told the woman at the well,

The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:14 NIV

When we open our hearts to God and accept God’s invitation to come to Jesus, we receive eternal life in the process.

## Rich fare

But is this life that God promises a bare existence where we eke out a joyless living? No, not at all. The opposite is true. Isaiah says,

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Isa 55:2

Did not Jesus tell us that he had come that we might have life to the full–abundant life (John 10:10)?

## God’s love

God also promises that as we come to him we will be wrapped in his warm and faithful covenant love.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. Isa 55:3 NIV

Jesus made a new covenant between God and people through his death and resurrection. When we respond to God’s invitation, that covenant of love includes us. Jesus said,

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.  
 John 15:9 NRSV

## Streams in the Desert

For generations, one of the most popular books for personal devotions has been a volume with the title “Streams in the Desert” by Mrs. Charles Cowman. Its title comes from another prophecy of Isaiah that refers to water. It is a prophecy about the kind of refreshment that the Messiah will bring to God’s people.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.   
Isa 35:6 NIV

Isaiah touches on the same theme in Isaiah 44

I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground;   
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. Isa 44:3 NIV

The point is that when we respond to God’s invitation, he will bring spiritual refreshment into the driest times of our lives. It will be as if we had found streams in the desert. And the refreshment will come through God’s Holy Spirit.

## Testimonies

Jim Ryun (SA-TE)

James Baker III (SA-TE)

# Conclusion

Are you going through spiritually dry times? The Bible’s invitations are for you this morning.

“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 you will delight in the richest of fare.  
 Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. Isa 55:1-3 NIV