

THE GREAT INVITATION

Isaiah 55

Crescencio Ibarra made a video, inviting his family, friends, and neighbors to attend his daughter, Ruby's, 15th birthday party. The equivalent of a "Sweet Sixteen" party in our culture, it was to be a grand affair, with food, music, and games – including a horse race with a 10,000 pesos prize. "Everyone is invited," Ibarra said in the 45 second clip with his wife and daughter. A local event photographer post inadvertently set the invite to "public" instead of "private" on Facebook. The invite went viral, with 1.2 million RSVPs, 978,000 shares and #XVdeRuby trending on social media. Mexican airline Interjet even offered a 30-percent discount for flights to the party in a 10,000-person village in Northern Mexico. The party took place on December 26, 2016. Thousands of people showed up. One young man even died in an accident during the horse race. Ruby's mother, Anaeldo, told a local report, "My husband made the invitation, but to people who live in neighboring regions. I don't know who copied it, but they posted it and it blew up, as if it were an invitation to the whole world."

This true story is the great tragedy of fallen humanity. We receive invitations from the world that are not meant for us and respond to invitations from the world that cannot fulfill what they promise. Sin makes us excited about what is not actually true and causes us to ignore what is ultimately true. C.S. LEWIS said it well: "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what it meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."

True satisfaction is only found in the great invitation God extends to guilty sinners. There is arguably no greater statement of this great invitation than **Isaiah 55**. **Isaiah 53** declares the redemptive work of the Servant. In chapter 54, Isaiah describes the benefits of the Servant's work for Israel. **Isaiah 55** extends a wide-ranging, far-reaching, and life-changing invitation: **Our holy God extends a gracious invitation for guilty sinners to get right with him. Isaiah 55** proclaims two fundamental truths about God's gracious invitation to guilty sinners.

I. GOD EXTENDS A GREAT INVITATION THAT IS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

The Israelites were in Babylonian Captivity because of stubborn sin. In **Isaiah 55**, God offers to feed, fulfill, and forgive them. This invitation is not just a good opportunity; it is spiritual obligation. There are twelve commands in the first seven verses of this chapter. God commands sinners to come to him, trust his promises, and repent of their sins.

A. GOD COMMANDS SINNERS TO COME TO HIM.

Verse 1 says, "*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 without price.*" The call to "come" is issued four times in this verse. True satisfaction is only found in God. You must come to him. But there is a condition: "*Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.*" The great

invitation is extended to anyone and everyone who acknowledges their spiritual need. Self-sufficiency automatically disqualifies you from spiritual benefits. Only thirsty people can come to the living waters. In **John 7:37**, Jesus cried out, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.”* As a merchant on the street, God invites the needy to buy and eat. Unlike the merchant in the streets, God sells his wares to the one who has no money. **Matthew 5:3** says, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Spiritually poor people can buy wine and milk without money and without price because the price has already been paid. Lawrence Richards wrote: *“It costs us nothing. It cost Christ everything.”*

Verse 2 asks, *“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?”* Not only does sin rob us of spiritual resources, it also robs us of spiritual discernment. The rich live by their *money*. The poor live by their *labor*. Both are wasted by the life of sin. We spend our money on what sin offers, but it is not bread. We labor for what sin promises, but it does not satisfy. Verse 2 asks, *“Why?”* In **Matthew 19:26**, Jesus asks: *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”* Do not waste your life on that which does not save, cannot satisfy, and will not last. Verse 2 says, *“Listen to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.”* You must hear, trust, and obey the word of God to receive the rich handout of amazing grace. In **John 5:24**, Jesus says, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*

B. GOD COMMANDS SINNERS TO TRUST HIS PROMISES.

Verse 3 commands: *“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.”* The needy sinner is invited to come to God. But sinners cannot come if they do not *hear* the great invitation. The soul that hears and comes to God will experience new, abundant, and eternal life. The great invitation is a lifetime guarantee. God says it is *“an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.”* God’s covenant with his people is based on his divine love, not human accomplishment. It is modeled after God’s loyal love for David. It is the covenant God made with David of a permanent throne and lasting dynasty in **2 Samuel 7:12-16**. Verse 4 says, *“Behold I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.”* In a real sense, this verse is about David and his royal line. Ultimately, it is about the Messiah-King – the Lord Jesus Christ. In **Acts 13:34**, Paul declared, *“And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’”*

The great invitation is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. **John 14:6** says, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Sinners can only come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Verse 5 says, *“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.”* Here the Lord directly addresses the Messiah-Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. He promises that the reign of the anointed King will not be limited to Israel. It will expand to all the nations of the world. This is THE GREAT COMMISSION of the Lord Jesus Christ in

Matthew 28:18-20: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

C. GOD COMMANDS SINNERS TO REPENT OF SIN.

The great invitation is extended to all who come. But you must come on God’s terms. Sinners must repent immediately and completely.

Repent immediately! Verse 6 says, *“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”* To seek the Lord is to call upon him. Sinners must seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. There is a time when God may be found and a time when God may not be found. *When is God not near enough to be found?* I don’t know. And I don’t want to know. Neither do you. God is sovereign. Life is short. Death is sure. Hell is hot. Eternity is long. No one has time to waste. The great invitation is a limited time offer. The benefits last forever. The offer does not. Get right with God while you still have a chance. **Psalm 32:6** says: *“Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.”*

REPENT COMPLETELY! Repentance is more than regret or remorse. It is not being sorry for your sins. It is being sorry enough to quit. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of behavior. Verse 7 says, *“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.”* The wicked must forsake his way. The unrighteous must forsake his thoughts. Once sin is left behind, sinners must come back to God. You do not have to wonder how God will respond to the returning sinner. God will have *compassion* on him and will *abundantly pardon*. **Isaiah 55:7** confirms **Isaiah 1:18**: *“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.”*

II. GOD EXTENDS A GREAT INVITATION THAT IS TOO GOOD NOT TO BE TRUE.

It is often said that if something is too good to be true, it probably is. This is the skeptical perspective of the world. The world has every right to think and feel that way. The world is filled with bait-and-switch invitations. But **Romans 3:4** says: *“Let God be true though every one were a liar.”* God extends a great invitation that is too good *not* to be true. Ray C. Ortlund Jr. wrote: *“The gospel is not a little psychological uplift; it’s tomorrow’s world headlines today.”* Verses 8-13 give three reasons to trust the great invitation.

A. TRUST THE GREAT INVITATION BECAUSE OF HOW GOD THINKS.

Verse 7 says if the wicked will forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts, the Lord will have compassion and will abundantly pardon. This seems to be a promise that is too good to be true. But we must not confuse our thoughts and ways with God's. Verses 8-9 says, *"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."*

God's thoughts and ways are different than ours. John N. Oswalt wrote: "Our understanding is not the measure of what God can do." I would often sit with my father as a boy. As he would teach me, I would respond, "Wow, dad, I didn't know that!" He would occasionally say, "Son, there's enough you don't know to start a whole new world." This is true of all of us. **Proverbs 3:5** admonishes, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."* God's thoughts and ways are different than ours. Moreover, God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. *How high?* Verse 9 says, *"As the heavens are higher than the earth."* God is transcendent. His thoughts and ways are infinitely higher than ours. **Ephesians 3:20** declares, *"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think."* The gospel immeasurably surpasses anything we would think or do. **Romans 5:7** says, *"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* We have no right or reason to second-guess a God like this. We should trust him, obey him, and praise him. **Psalms 145:3** says, *"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."*

B. ACCEPT THE GREAT INVITATION BECAUSE OF HOW GOD SPEAKS.

God's thoughts and ways are absolutely different and infinitely higher than ours. *How can we know God's thoughts or understand God's ways?* Verses 10-11 answers: *"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."*

God uses storms to accomplish his agenda. Rain and snow do not fall from heaven and evaporate. Precipitation from heaven produces transformation on earth. It waters the earth. It makes the earth bring forth and sprout. It gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater. The God who uses storms to accomplish his agenda, sends scripture to accomplish his agenda. Verse 11 calls it *"my word"* that comes from *"my mouth."* **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says, *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."* The Bible is not man's thoughts about God. It is God's self-revelation to man. The nature, character, and authority of scripture are inexorably rooted in the nature, character, and authority of God. God's word will never return to him empty. God's word will accomplish its divine purpose. God's word will succeed in the thing for which it is sent. **Isaiah 40:8** declares, *"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."*

C. TRUST THE GREAT INVITATION BECAUSE OF HOW GOD WORKS.

Verse 12 says, *“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.”* Israel will not come out of BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY by their own strength, resources, or ability. They will *“go out”* and be *“led forth”* by divine intervention. By God’s sovereign and gracious work, they will experience pure joy and true peace. What God will do is so great and glorious that Isaiah predicts nature will join in the celebration: *“the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”* This is our hope in Christ. **Romans 8:21** states *“the creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”*

Verse 12 describes how he graciously gives what we do not deserve. Verse 13 describes how God mercifully withholds what we do deserve: *“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, and everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”* When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, the ground was cursed. As Adam worked, the ground produced thorns and thistles. When God works, death is transformed into life, judgment is transformed into salvation, and curses are transformed into blessings, barrenness is transformed into fruitfulness, and briars are transformed into evergreens. *Why does God work this way?* Verse 13 says: *“and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”*

Over the years, I have shared my books with associate ministers. But books started to be missing. When I would spot an associate with the book, he would claim it was his. I started writing my name on the top, side, and bottom of the book. For good measure, I put my initials on the bottom of page 25. My name made it clear who the book belonged to. God extends a great invitation to guilty sinners. But God does not want sinners to take credit for what belongs to him. **Psalms 115:1** says, *“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!”* God will be glorified forever by the display of his triumphant grace in the virgin birth, righteous life, atoning death, physical resurrection, glorious ascension, intercessory ministry, and imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A rich man passed a beggar, as he walked into his bank. When he did a double take, he realized it was his college roommate. The poor man, dressed in rags, and holding a sign for help, told the rich man he lost his family and career to drugs and alcohol. The rich man wrote a sizable check to help his old friend get back on his feet. When he returned to the bank some time later, he found his old friend in the same condition. He confronted him, convinced his friend spent his money on drugs. The friend assured him that was not the case, reaching into his pocket to produce the check. He never cashed it because he was afraid they would never accept a check from someone who looked like him. The rich man took him by the hand and marched him into the bank, saying, “It doesn’t matter what you look like! My name is on the check!”