



# the table is set

## BIBLE SUNDAY 2018

## **Bible Sunday Sermon 2018**

**Isaiah 55:1-11**

### **Background**

God asked Isaiah to bring his message to the kingdom of Judah. He spoke out, proclaiming God to both kings and commoners over a period of about 40 years. Chapter 55 lies in the second part of this message, specifically speaking to the future exiles in Babylon. The message encourages them to return to the Promised Land, giving hope and blessing to those who turn back to God.

It was a turbulent time in the southern kingdom of Judah, which was under threat from surrounding nations. There was idol worship, oppression and marginalisation of the poor – people were going against God’s law. Isaiah was a messenger to the people at a time of crisis.

### **Isaiah’s Message**

God’s message to Judah is to “Come to the waters”.

Isaiah often refers to God’s kingdom and its divine blessings as an abundance of water. He invites the people to “come to the waters” (55:1); for the thirsty to find refreshment and sustenance in God’s kingdom.

Jesus says, “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.” John 7:37-38 (NIV)

The Spirit says, “Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.” Revelation 22:17 (NIV)

This invitation to come to the waters is one that is given to all people. Indeed, the only requirement that Isaiah puts on it is that you must be thirsty. The invitation to the kingdom, to salvation, is offered to all – it is a free and gracious gift to all who desire it. This gift is invaluable, we cannot put a price on it; neither are we asked to. This offer of salvation is extended to the people of Judah as it was to David (55:3); it extends to us today in the covenant of grace in Christ. What God promised our ancestors, he has fulfilled in Christ (Acts 13:32-34).

But the offer doesn’t stop at water: “Come, buy wine and milk” (55:1). God doesn’t offer to only quench the thirst. He nourishes the body and revives the spirit. What a wonderful example of the abundant richness of the life that is offered to all through Christ.

Are we thirsty for God’s gift? Isaiah tells the people to “come, buy and eat” (55:1). The response to this invitation must be to accept it, to approach the waters. But we must remember to take it and ‘eat’. We must use what we are given rather than simply laying it to

one side. When we receive this gift not only are we transformed, but those around us will grasp hold of the invitation. Isaiah tells the people of Judah that other nations will come running because he will make them magnificent (55:5).

This extravagant and abundant gift is hard to comprehend. That all people – rich and poor, oppressed and blessed, shackled and free – all can turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on them (55:7). But Isaiah reminds us of who God is and how his ways are not our ways (55:8-9). God's thoughts concerning grace exceed our human imagination. We cannot limit the power of God or the movement of his Spirit. Isaiah reminds the people of Judah that the Word of God is not controlled by human thoughts and plans. As the rain falls and produces plants, so God's words fall and accomplish exactly what he desires (55:10-11). There is power and purpose in the Word of God.

## **The Message Today**

Have you ever been invited to someone's house for dinner? You're given the time and the place. You ask if there's anything you can bring. You worry about what you should wear. But your host tells you to just come as you are, no need to bring anything. The time comes, and you are welcomed at the open door. "Come in, take a seat". There's a place at the table for you. The table is set, and the dinner is ready. All you have to do is tuck in!

Just as the people of Judah were extended an invitation to God's feast, through Isaiah, so we are invited. The table has been set (Psalm 23:5).

## **The Generous Host**

God has prepared a feast for us. The table is set.

- Isaiah paints a picture of who God is. His love is faithful. He welcomes those who come to him. He is generous. He is present. He is merciful. His ways and thoughts are bigger than us, and there is purpose in all his words.
- God is a generous host who holds the door open for us. Through his grace and love he invites us into his kingdom.

## **All are invited**

God invites us to the feast.

- The invitation has been sent to you. It says "come". There is a place set for you at the table, your name is there.
- All are invited to come to the feast – whether male or female, young or old, rich or poor. It doesn't matter what religious or cultural background you have; nor does it matter what you have done or said in the past. All are invited to come as they are.
- The people of Judah had not been living the way God desired, still they were invited. It can be easy to look around our own towns and communities and decide who should be invited, but God's ways are bigger than ours.

- Are we making sure that people know they are invited? The Bible Society NI believes that all should be reached with the Word of God. People all over the world need to receive the Bible so that they can read or hear the invitation that God sends out. Read the 'Bible Society and Bible Access' information sheet to find out more.

## **RSVP**

What is our response to the invitation?

- Isaiah tells us that God's Word has a purpose and will create a response. God has sent out the invitation, but how will we respond?
- The Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15-23 shows us some examples of RSVP's. Some will be too busy, some will have other priorities, but those in need will come. Isaiah says those who are thirsty will come to the waters. Are we thirsty? Do we long to be with God in his kingdom, to be refreshed and nourished by him?
- People are responding to God's invitation all over the world – his word is achieving the purpose for which he sends it. Read the 'Bread of Life Project' pages to find out how children in Peru are being invited to a physical and spiritual feast.

## **The table is set. Will you come?**

(There is also a Sermon PowerPoint for you to adapt as use.)