

Good morning. Next week we're going to commence a new series in the book of Colossians. Small Group Leaders might want to see what study material might be available.

This morning I want to take us to the beautiful words of Isaiah 55 and 56. I trust that you will be encouraged in your faith this morning and your love for the Lord will grow deeper as the Lord speaks to us through His Word.

Isaiah was a prophet to the Hebrew people. His prophetic word came over a period of forty years, just prior to and including the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and the exile of the people into Assyria. So, the southern kingdom of Judah encompassing Jerusalem remained intact, yet his words were still so applicable to them. He wrote of those in exile in Assyria, but his words rang true in the hearts of those who would later be exiled into Babylon. Chapter 55 contain beautiful words that bring comfort and encouragement to those in exile. And these are God's words, delivered through Isaiah; words that regardless of circumstances being anything but what the people desired, God invites them (and us) to come to Him.

So, let's look at this chapter. V.1 begins, **“Come, all 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.”** (Isa55:1)

What a magnanimous God! Exceedingly kind and overflowing in generosity. Come, all who are thirsty – come to the waters. You can freely come and drink as much as you like; if you are thirsty, quench your thirst. But more than that – if you come looking for water and you have no money in your pocket, I will freely give you wine and milk if you so desire. I ask nothing in return. There is no cost. You'll get more than you ask for. What an exceedingly kind and generous God!

V.2, ... **“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fair.”** God now makes it clear that deepest satisfaction comes not in the physical, but in the spiritual (for the soul). Listen! Feed on what you hear from Me says the Lord, and you will not only be satisfied, but you will delight in the best – the richest of fair. This is like a spiritual chocolate indulgence – the richest, most desirable and satisfying of fair that will bring you great delight. **“Give ear and come to Me; hear Me that your soul may live.”** (V.3a) Truly live! Live in and with all abundance – overflowing; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be given to you! But you have to come – to Me! And listen!

So, are you finding that the offerings from this world are all too fleeting and misleading – they simply don't satisfy? Come to the Lord and truly live; listen to Him. Although you may feel like the Hebrew people, that life has treated you poorly and left you disheartened and disillusioned, God has made His covenant with you and will not abandon you. Not only that – He will bring you to a place of peace and joy – your soul may be filled with delight as you listen to Him and rest in presence.

As we read on, remember that Isaiah is writing to a people living in exile. These are a people who have been sent into exile by the will of God. They may feel as though they deserve their punishment; but God says, “listen to Me, and you will be truly satisfied, regardless of your circumstances.”

These are also tough and difficult days, and days that hold so little hope. They are despairing, despondent and feeling hopeless; they live in Desperate Court – and the way out is blocked. But God says, ○ **“I will make a covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.”** (V.3b-5)

These are God’s words. Verses 6 and 7 are words from Isaiah, but the rest of the chapter are words spoken from the Lord. And the Lord says, I made a covenant with David and the surrounding nations bore witness to my faithfulness to him and the nation, and now you too can trust in Me. You will be restored to a place of splendour; nations you know not will come running to you. Why? Because I am the Lord your God!

Like any good preacher, Isaiah then brings his words of application. ○ **“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.”** (6-7)

God says, “come to Me” and Isaiah says, “I implore you, to come to Him; seek Him; call on Him. For our ways and our thoughts are wicked and unrighteous, but as we turn to the Lord, He will be merciful toward us and forgive us.” To forsake their ways and their thoughts was to refrain from committing the same sins again. Are we forsaking our ways and thoughts that do not bring honour and glory to our God?

And here’s a thought! I wonder if forsaking your ways and your thoughts might involve taking a fast off social media. Do your ways and thoughts tend to revolve around what you read, see and post on social media? Do you have to live your life through your phone? Or can you see something without the need to share it? Have you lost the art of taking time alone with your own thoughts and allowing yourself to contemplate on the beauty and character of our Great God? Are we forsaking our ways and thoughts that do not bring honour and glory to our God?

But these verses also reveal that our God is magnanimous. ○ The word magnanimous does not only mean exceedingly generous, but infused with forgiveness. A person who is magnanimous, abhors injustice but is driven by self-sacrifice for the interests and safety of the other. ○ When we break the word down, we see, “animus” which means alive and spirited, and “magnus” meaning great. “Great Life” is the result of one described as magnanimous.

And God is certainly that; willing to sacrifice self for the interests, safety, wellbeing, salvation of us! Exceedingly generous, bringing abundant life from a position of forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And so, Isaiah says, “Come to God, Seek the Lord, Call on Him, Turn to Him; for He will be merciful and pardon your sin.” What a magnanimous God we serve!

God then continues to reveal more of His ways and thoughts. ○ V.8, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** (V.8-9)

Psalms 145 speaks of the greatness of God. ○ **“Great is the Lord and *most worthy of praise*; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty. ..They tell of the power of your awesome works. ..They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.”** (V.3-7) The Psalmist goes on to speak of God’s grace, compassion and love. His thoughts and ways are so much higher than ours.

Bill Mills spoke on this passage from Isaiah, and he noted that in verses 10 and 11 we see that God in His goodness gives us His thoughts and His ways through His Word. ○ **“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, 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.”** (V.10-11)

What is the result for us when God speaks through His Word? The Word of God transforms us! He begins to give us thoughts and ways that are like His. Just as the rain falls for a reason to produce beauty and food, so God’s Word transform us and brings beauty and blessing that sustains and satisfies. God describes the blessings of spending time in His Word to us in this way in V.12-13. As you spend time in God’s Word...

○ **“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. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD’s renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.”**

God is essentially saying, “Your lives are transformed as you spend time in My Word, and your faith in Me displays my glory forever. You are transformed. You experience joy and peace, and blessings in your temporal life, as well as eternal life.”

You see, God’s ways are not our ways; His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He is truly magnanimous. For our safety, wellbeing, salvation and blessing, He is exceedingly generous, bringing us abundant and eternal life. We celebrate His greatness, mighty and awesome works, glorious splendour, majesty, abundant goodness, righteousness, mercy, love and compassion.

I trust that you have been encouraged in your faith; your love for the Lord growing deeper through this chapter in His Word.

Then in chapter 56 God gives us a couple of examples that show how our ways are not His ways; our thoughts not God’s thoughts, but God is encouraging us to pursue His ways and thoughts. And we see an example here of how God’s Word transforms us. We’ll pick it up at verse 3. ○ **“Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.” And let no eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.”** God is addressing both racism and discrimination. And He says that neither are in His ways or thoughts.

We still struggle with that within our society, the foreigner still feels like a foreigner because of the way that we view and treat one another. We steer clear and don’t trust people who are not like us. The childless couple still feel incomplete due to the underlying values and ideologies that form our society. It was no different in Isaiah’s days, children were viewed as a sign that they were under God’s blessing. It was a sign of honour to have children and pride to think that your name would go on into the future. And in pride the Jews looked down upon all other races – “we are God’s chosen.”

God on the other hand says, “My ways are not your ways... ○ V.4, **“For this is what the Lord says: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant - to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.”** To the childless I will give you better than sons and daughters – a name that will endure forever.

And to those suffering under racism... ○ V.6, **“foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord,”** V.7, **“I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”** Not just Israel.

God says, “My ways are not your ways... My love is not exclusive – but rather fully inclusive. Whether you feel like you fit or not; whether accepted or not – you are included in My love. I will always love and accept you.” God’s ways are higher than our ways; are always for our best – bringing life; great life! A magnanimous God calls us to follow Him and His ways and thoughts. ○ **“For there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** (Gal 3:28) **“There is no difference - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.”** (Rom 10:12)

Our magnanimous God as displayed through the story of Jonah – willing to save the people of Nineveh – enemies of Israel, but not despised by God. He is overflowing in generosity, and willingly gave His Son to bring us life, and so we are encouraged to come to Him and His Word, we seek Him, we trust Him, and we serve Him.

In spite of racism or discrimination you are accepted and loved. In spite of unfavourable circumstances God loves you; has not abandoned you. And He is most worthy of praise! Amen.

Come to Him! Receive from Him! Great Life!