

## God's word is for Today: Isa 55:1 - 13

My car was nearly 14 years old last year, and things had started to go wrong with it, so I decided to buy a new one. You can imagine how frustrated I was to discover that the model I bought was so new that the handbook hadn't yet been published. All that was available was a file in very small print on the screen on my new car's dashboard. The technology in today's cars had moved on a long way since my previous car was new, so there was a lot I didn't know. So I was mighty relieved when at last the handbook containing the maker's instructions was published.

You might say that we all need a handbook showing us how to live. Well, thank God: he has given us our Maker's instructions. Of course, it's the Bible, sometimes called God's word. Maybe, you only ever read the New Testament, and perhaps you think that we no longer need the Old? But, if we're going to understand who Jesus is, we need to study the OT as well. And when we do, we'll be amazed at how Jesus fulfils all these ancient prophecies.

Jesus, when he was talking to the Jewish leaders, said: "*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.*" **John 5:39.**

So, let's look together at this passage and discover how this part of the Maker's instructions testifies about Jesus.

**Read v1, 2a:** *<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?*

### God's word is for All People

Through the prophet Isaiah, God invites *all* to come. There are two requirements:

- He invites *all who are thirsty*. This invitation is repeated in the NT by Jesus. *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."* **John 7:37** and, talking to the Samaritan woman by the well, he said "*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.*" **John 4:14** So, it's Jesus who is behind this invitation: the invitation is to come to *him*. Ultimately, Jesus alone is the only one who satisfies.
- The second requirement is that we have no money. We come to Jesus with empty hands, or we don't come at all. We can't buy or earn what God is offering. All our own efforts will ultimately fail: *Why spend money on what is not bread?*

On this first Sunday of the new year, I'm reminded of the words Abba sang in their song *Happy New Year*:

*Man is a fool, and he thinks he'll be OK,  
Dragging on, feet of clay,  
Never knowing he's astray,  
Keeps on going anyway.*

*Seems to me now that the dreams we had before  
Are all dead, nothing more  
Than confetti on the floor.*

For all their success, their wealth, and their adoring public, Benny and Bjorn wrote poignantly of their sense of emptiness, that there was something that all their money couldn't buy. In *Super Trouper*, they wrote: *Facing twenty thousand of your friends, How can anyone be so lonely? Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?*

Come, all who are thirsty. Jesus, God's only Son, is for *all people*—for you and for me—but we must acknowledge our need of him, our thirst, and come to him with empty hands.

**Read v2b, 3:** *Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. <sup>3</sup>Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.*

### God's word is for All Time

*I will make an everlasting covenant with you.* Out of his great love for us, God promised to be utterly faithful, making and renewing a covenant with his people from the earliest times.

Notice that a covenant is different from a *contract*. I may make an appointment to see my doctor – a sort of informal contract. If I fail to show up, the doctor won't ring my home number to see where I am – he'll simply see the next patient.

But if your child unexpectedly fails to show up for dinner one day, then, you'll immediately want to find out where they are, and make sure they're OK. Unlike the doctor, a parent's responsibility isn't cancelled when their child fails to appear. Isaiah wrote: *Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!* **Isaiah 49:15** God's covenant with his people is even stronger than the ties between mother and child.

To Adam, God promised life if he would be obedient. But Adam failed, and the result was death. The history of God's people has been marked by one failure after another. Man's side of the covenant was broken again and again. But the good news is that God's everlasting covenant remains in place – unlike a contract, where the obligation ceases if one party fails.

Paul wrote this: *For since death came through a man* [that is, Adam], *the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man* [that is, Jesus]. *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor 15: 21, 22)*

In OT times, God made a covenant with his chosen people Israel, and sealed that covenant with the blood of sacrificed animals. But his eternal covenant was sealed once and for all through the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross. *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.* God's word – his eternal covenant, fulfilled in Jesus – is for all time.

Our next heading:

### **God's word calls for Action**

**Read 2** again: *Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. <sup>3</sup>Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.*

Eat what is good says the prophet. *Do what I say* is the Good News translation of this verse. We need to respond to the invitation to come – to *do* something. So what must we do?

First: Listen, listen, listen. What urgency there is in these words! 4 times God says to pay attention to what he's saying: listen, listen, give ear to me, listen. Some of us are very good at talking; but we have a problem with listening

I expect we've all got little family stories about the times when we were young. One day, when my brother Pete was about 4 years old, he was out walking with his Grandma. It was a wet day, and Peter insisted on splashing in every puddle. Finally, Gran became so exasperated, she told him crossly, "Stop jumping in the puddles, Peter." Pete then came back with the reply that has been passed down through the generations of my family: 'I can hear you, Gran, but I'm not listening.'

Man is a fool, Abba sang. A fool – that's what Jesus called the man who heard God's voice and did nothing about it – a man building his house on sand. Don't just hear God's voice: listen, and do something about it.

Isaiah goes on to tell us in more detail what we're to do. **Read vv 6, 7:** *<sup>6</sup>Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. <sup>7</sup>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*

Seek the Lord and call on him while he is near. Note again the urgency here. There'll be critical times in our lives when God is particularly near. When this happens, don't put off making a decision for him: you may not get another chance. Jesus told a chilling parable of a wedding feast, where many of those who were invited found excuses not to come. Then, Jesus said those fearful words: *I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. Lk 14:24* Don't delay: if, today, you hear God speaking to you, then call on him to save you.

*Let the wicked forsake their ways (7).* Calling on the Lord means turning away from sin and receiving his forgiveness. The Bible uses an old-fashioned word: repent. This is more than simply feeling sorry for what we've done. To repent means to turn completely around and face the other way.

Suppose one of you were to come to me at end of the service, looking troubled, and say: "I want to become a Christian." I say: "What's the problem?" "I've been stealing from my employer, and I can't break the habit." "How much did you steal last year?" "Around £1,000." Suppose I say, "Look, I don't believe in quick decisions. Don't steal more than £500 this year. Then next, £200. In a few years, you'll break habit and not steal anything." That would be ludicrous! There has to be a clean break with sin. *Let the wicked forsake their ways.* That's what repentance means.

God will *freely* pardon (7). In v1, God says that his invitation is free to us. But forgiveness cost God everything: the death of his Son on the cross. Again, we see Jesus as the fulfilment of this promise that God will freely pardon. But we need to accept that invitation. God's word calls for action.

**Read vv 8, 9:** *<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. <sup>9</sup>As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Our next heading:

### **God's word is Accessible**

It's true: God's ways, God's thoughts are higher than our ways, our thoughts. And it's true that we can't find our way to God by our own efforts. Our intellect, our reasoning will always sell us short.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4: *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" 1 Cor 2: 9*

Now this is pretty bad news, isn't it? God has prepared something wonderful for those who love him, but our eyes can't see it, our ears can't hear it and our minds can't even imagine it. But Paul goes on to say (and here's another of the Bible's great 'buts'):

*...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. 1 Cor 2:10*

Do you see? God has revealed himself to us. It's not from us – it's all God's initiative. God has revealed the truth of the Gospel to us by his Holy Spirit. People sometimes talk about words in the Bible leaping off the page when they experience the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And that was true of me. After Christian friends had prayed with me, and laid hands on me, I was amazed when I next opened my Bible: the words spoke directly to me – as though God had written them just for me.

God has revealed himself to us through his Holy Spirit, giving us the gift of faith. And he has revealed himself to us supremely in the person of Jesus Christ. In OT times, God spoke to his people through the prophets, but they didn't listen. The writer to the Hebrews says: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. Heb 1:1, 2* All three Persons of the Holy Trinity were involved in that first Christmas. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the virgin Mary conceived a child. And the Bible tells us in that child dwelt the fullness of Father God himself, *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. Colossians 1:19.* God has spoken to us through his Spirit and through his Son. God's word is accessible.

And finally

### **God's word is being Accomplished**

**Read vv 10, 11:** *<sup>10</sup>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, <sup>11</sup>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.*

The primary purpose of the Bible is to reveal to us God's plan of salvation. Our hearts ache when we think of any of our loved ones who have heard the gospel but seem determined to reject it. We may pray for them every day, but there seems to be no change. I remember talking to a man whose son had gone very badly astray. "Each day for forty years," he said, "I prayed for my son. And finally my prayers were answered. He gave up his life of sin and accepted Jesus Christ as his saviour."

You may have been praying for a loved for many years, too, as I have, and your prayers seem to go unanswered. For now, we can see only the clouds, the rain and the snow that Isaiah speaks of. But, take heart, God's word says that it's the rain and snow that bring the promise of new life. God's word will not fail; it will not return to him empty. So, my dear friends, let's keep praying for our loved ones, trusting in God's promises.

In a Bible Society prayer letter, supporters were asked to pray for Algeria, a country many would like to make a hard-line Islamic state. According to Bible Society, in the 1980's there were around 2000 Christians in Algeria, that's all. There are now estimated to be at least 100,000. This is still a tiny minority in country of 46 million, nearly all of whom are Muslims. But even there God's word is being accomplished.

God says through the prophet Isaiah, 'My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.' Jesus's final words on the cross before he died were, *"It is finished!" (John 19:30)* – Literally, it has been accomplished. Jesus, the Word of God, did not return to his

Father empty, but on the cross accomplished all that his Father desired, and achieved the purpose for which he sent him.

God's word is for all people, and for all time. It's accessible and calls for action. And it is being accomplished.

So, in all circumstances, we have reason to rejoice with Isaiah as he bursts into praise at the end of this wonderful chapter:

**vv 12, 13:** *<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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's word is for today. Hallelujah! Amen.