

October 15, 2006

“Revive Us, O Lord!” (Part 5: “What is the Invitation?”)

Isaiah 55

Based on *The Heart of Revival* by Nicky Gumbel

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Billy Graham has said, “The Bible is one long invitation to come to God.” It is true. We see it from beginning to end in the Bible. In the opening chapters of the Bible in Genesis, after Adam rejects God’s perfect plan, God, angry for sure, yet with love and anguish calls out to Adam, “Where are you?” The Book of Revelation ends with the invitation from the Spirit and the Bride who say, “Come!” Jesus often invited people, saying, “Come to Me!”

Today we are going to look at Isaiah 55. In this chapter God once again offers the invitation to “come” and gives four reasons why we should come:

1. God Alone Can Satisfy The Hunger In Our Souls (v1-3a)

"Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink--even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk--it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen, and I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul!"

"Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, for the life of your soul is at stake. Ever been to a flea market and hear the cries of those selling their wares? That’s what God seems to be doing here. And His message is this: “Material things do not satisfy. Come to Me for the life of your soul!” All are thirst. All have a hunger in their souls. Yet go everywhere but to where or to Who could satisfy that hunger and thirst. Imagine trying to fill your car with gas, not realizing that you have a hole in the tank. You could stand there all day waiting for that tank to fill up...it’s just not going to happen. You keep pouring gas in but it just keeps leaking out. Without God we too are always partly empty, experiencing a lack of fulfillment.

Even an atheist philosopher (Jean-Paul Sartre) pointed out that we cannot find happiness in anything human or created and we cannot bear to live with the idea that fulfillment will permanently elude us. He wrote, “Man is absurd but he must grimly act as if he were not.”

The things we think will bring us continual pleasure and happiness only leaves us as victims wanting more. When I was 16 years old, I wanted to be 18, when 18 I wanted to be 21, when 21...I wanted to be 16 again! When we get a car or a house we are happy for awhile, then we want a bigger or better one. The problem with many of the things we pursue is that once we acquire them, they do not deliver the life they promised...that’s the problem with idols. Are you fully persuaded that material things do not satisfy?

This hunger for meaning and purpose in life can only be satisfied by God. God says, in v3, “Come to Me.”

a. The invitation is to all who are thirsty. *“Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink.”* Do you recognize your need? Then humbly ask God to come and fill you.

b. The offer is free. *“Come...even if you have no money! Come, ...it's all free!”* Store owners are not interested in people without money. But this Shop Owner, God, says come even if you have no money, it's all absolutely free. It is free because, in fact, it has already been paid for. God's servant, Jesus has paid for what you need. The cost was great, He gave His life.

c. Those who come are deeply satisfied. *“Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen, and I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul! Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, for the life of your soul is at stake.”*

The first reason, given in Isa 55, why we should come to God is that **God Alone Can Satisfy The Hunger In Our Souls.**

2. God Has A Purpose For Our Lives (3b-5)

I am ready to make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the mercies and unfailing love that I promised to David. He displayed my power by being my witness and a leader among the nations. You also will command the nations, and they will come running to obey, because I, the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, have made you glorious.”

God has a purpose for our lives, it is this: When we have enjoyed God's blessings we need to pass it on. David was a leader, a King, but Jesus is *The* Leader, *The* King! In Acts 13:34 Paul quotes Isaiah 55: 3b and says that this message is referring to Jesus: *“For God had promised to raise (Jesus) from the dead, never again to die. This is stated in the Scripture that says, ‘I will give you the sacred blessings I promised to David.’”*

Jesus has far more followers than David ever had. What David was called to be to Israel, Israel was called to be to the world (“among the nations”- v4&5). Now, this is our calling. 1 Peter 2:9 NIV- *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

God has called us -you and me - out of darkness into His wonderful light or as it says in Isaiah, He has made you glorious (v5) *and* He has called us – you and me - to go to the ends of the earth declaring His praises.

This is God's purpose for our lives: To know Jesus and to make Him known...in our communities and to every nation of the world. God has a purpose for our lives.

The third reason we should come to God is

3. The Greatness of God's Love and Mercy (6-9)

Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. Let the people turn from their wicked deeds. Let them banish from their minds the very thought of doing wrong! Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

"My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

We need to grasp our spiritual opportunities. *"Seek the LORD while you can... Call on Him now while He is near."* (v6) There are times when we sense God's presence. He speaks to us through His Word, through a friend, or at a church service, or through a blessed special event in our lives (e.g. birth of child). He may wait patiently until we are ready to listen. Or we may find Him in our suffering. In a strange way we know He is near. We need to make the most of these opportunities. They may never come again. In these verses we find a definition of the meaning of repentance, which is necessary in order to enjoy God's presence fully. Repentance is not easy. It involves turning away from sin: (v7a) *. Let the people turn from their wicked deeds. Let them banish from their minds the very thought of doing wrong!* It also involves turning to God: (v7b) *Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

The way to receive revival is still the way of repentance and holy living.

These verses are addressed to those who don't think they need forgiveness. I remember a woman one time who told me she never sins... then I spoke to her husband. He had a little different opinion about that. I thought I was a pretty good guy before I came to Christ. It actually took God awhile to help me see my selfishness. By the time I was ready to receive Christ I felt so unworthy and sinful. We all need repentance.

These verses are also addressed to those who feel they are too bad to be forgiven. I knew someone who was involved in an armed robbery. He was addicted to heroine. He just needed some money to feed his addiction. No one was suppose to get shot. But shots were fired. In prison he had a hard time finding relief from his guilt. He finally found that relief when he came to Christ. Once someone asked me, "If someone did some horrible things: murder and worse, but in prison just before he was put to death asked God to forgive him, what would happen. I said God would forgive him and take him into heaven when he died. The person said how can that be? My answer was that God's love is so much greater than ours. You see as Isaiah wrote: *"My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*

His forgiveness is far greater than we can ever imagine. The 4th reason to come to God:

4. The Transforming Power of God (10-13)

"The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it. You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands! Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where briars grew, myrtles will sprout up. This miracle will bring great honor to the LORD's name; it will be an everlasting sign of his power and love.

We all recognize the predictability of nature. It's inevitable. When rain or snow come down it waters the earth and that will cause seeds to grow. Gardening requires hard work and patience, but combine seed, soil, sun, and moisture, and sooner or later something is going to grow. There is a similar law in the spiritual world. "Plant" God's Word, in you or share it with someone else, and in time you can be sure there will be fruit.

Remember the Jews during the time of Isaiah's writing were in exile in Babylon. But it was said of Israel (Isa 55:12 NIV) *"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace."* Israel was to "go out" from Babylon and back to Jerusalem in joy and peace. On their journey home nature itself would burst out with joy and gladness. *"The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands!"* The real return from exile began with the coming of Jesus: His life, death and resurrection. He and He alone can truly transform our lives and give us hope. This prophecy will not reach complete fulfillment until the return of Jesus Christ. Then, nature itself will be renewed and restored.

We, represented in Adam and Eve, did not fulfill the calling for which we were created. The result was not only the alienation from God and one another but also from nature. Nature itself became our enemy: (Gen 3:17-19 NLT) *"I have placed a curse on the ground. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains."*

This is a picture of all the difficulties of life: ill health, temptations, battles, worries, and annoyances. They are the symbols of a distorted / marred creation with its natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes etc. The first Adam failed, Jesus, who is referred to as the "last Adam" (by Paul in 1 Cor 15: 22, 45) will eventually make right the wrong doing of fallen man. Adam failed and disobeyed, so God sent Jesus to be an example of true humanity. Only in Jesus can God's purpose for the whole of His creation be fulfilled. Only through Jesus can we be transformed, reflecting the glory of God as He planned from the beginning.

God invites all who are thirsty to come to Him, no one is excluded. We need no money. We need bring nothing with us. God invites us to be part of this amazing plan. Of course we are free to refuse His invitation...and lose out on all that He offers. However, if we

respond by coming to God, He will satisfy the deepest longings of our heart. He will give purpose to our lives, He will pour out His love and mercy, and we will experience His transforming power.