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Isaiah 55:1-5

17th Message

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AN INVITATION TO A BANQUET

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

I like to run our home with very few rules, but we have one rule that I try to abide by. When sales people or marketers telephone and offer something free (and they all seem to call around dinner time), I have told my wife to never accept a free gift from any of them. Once, however, it seems she succumbed to their pressure tactics. She accepted a free vacation. The salesman would call around dinner time, she told me; he would demonstrate something, and we would get a free gift vacation. When the man called, I told him we didn't want to see the demonstration and we didn't want the gift, either. He said his company was obligated to give us the gift anyway, and he handed me a brochure which offered "a free vacation to the city of your choice." Inside it said, "A free, three-day, two-night vacation to the city of your choice, free hotel, etc. The only charges you pay are transportation to and from the city and meals while you are there." A free vacation costing around \$800 per person! And the cities of choice were Atlantic City, Las Vegas, and Reno. The only thing free about this vacation offer was the air space between the four concrete walls of a resort area hotel bedroom. I'd rather be in prison, I said. How typical of the world. Temptingly, they lay out their wares and cry, "Come and feast yourself at no cost." When you read the fine print, of course, you discover that there is a price; it will cost you dear.

Our text today from the book of Isaiah describes a very different kind of banqueting table. In this feast, the Lord God himself is host, and he invites all of Israel to participate in a rich life which the world knows nothing of.

Having thoroughly described the richness of the age to come, with its New Seed, New Land, New Covenant and New City, which the Servant would inaugurate through his death and resurrection (Isa 52:13-53:12), the prophet now sends out the invitation to Israel to come and enjoy the richness of this new age, employing the metaphor of a feast which the King has prepared for his special guests. The King sends out the invitations, and then pleads with his people to enjoy his rich banquet. This feast is free, and it delights the soul, in stark contrast to the empty feasts of idolatry which cost us dear and ravage the soul. The prophet declares that the King in question is a new David. The Lord is about to act in history to fulfill his covenant with David (see 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:26-37); he will raise up a new David whose kingdom will endure forever. Not only does the King invite his guests to eat at his table, he also invites them to share in his reign as co-regents! Isaiah expresses the Lord's grief and surprise that anyone would be so foolish as to turn away such a free gift.

This same poetic language was used by our Lord on several occasions when he identified himself as the "feast" (John 6), and he invited all in Israel to share in his glorious reign by feeding upon him (Luke 14:14-24). But only a remnant of the nation responded. The feast must be shared, so Jesus told his disciples that if the invited guests (Israel) would not come, they should go out into the highways and hedges (outside of Israel) and compel others (the Gentiles) to come and enjoy it (Luke 14:23-24).

Our text breaks down into three sections: First, the motivations to come to this feast; second, the way to enter into the fullness of the feast; and third, the life which this feast offers. These verses serve as a model of what God offers his people and the nations (thus it is a marvelous text to use in evangelism); and, furthermore, it should convict our hearts concerning our own foolishness in feeding our souls at the empty banquets of idolatry.

I. Motivations to come to the feast (55:1-2)

**"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat,
Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without cost.
Why do you weigh out silver for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself [your soul] in abundance." (NASB)**

A. The glory of the banquet

Three things make this a glorious feast. First, its availability. Notice that there are no requirements demanded before one can attend. Who may come? "Everyone who thirsts," says the Lord. There is no class to attend, no creed to believe, to rules to obey, no liturgy to memorize, no traditions to learn, no dress code to adhere to. Just come!

Next, we see the quality of the food offered. This feast is costly and rich in quality. "Waters, wine and milk" hearken back to the Promised Land, a land rich in natural resources, with an abundant supply of milk and honey (Deut 8:7-10). This feast is like a restored Promised Land.

But it is even greater than that. Notice the prophet says, "Delight your soul in abundance...that your soul may live." "Delight" is a rare word in the OT, meaning, to take exquisite pleasure in something because it is a rare luxury. This feast is not common food. It is rare, unknown to the world. Why? Because when you partake of it, your soul will live. This is the same language which was used in the Garden of Eden. God instructed Adam, "Eat of all the trees," which not only were good to partake of, but were "a delight to the eye." In that garden stood the "Tree of Life" that would cause man to live forever and would give him a level of life in his soul beyond the original creation. This would do something far more profound than food could ever do: it would give him eternal life.

But this feast which God is offering is even better than the Garden of Eden. Notice that all the commands here in Isaiah are positive: "come," "eat," etc. But in the Garden it was, "Eat of all the trees but one, and if you eat of that tree, dying you shall die." Something has happened in the New Covenant. If you eat at this banquet in this new garden, there is no evil, no temptation. It is all good! You can eat all you want. There is no cholesterol, no fat, no preservatives!

Everything is wholesome and good for the soul, and it will give you eternal life.

A man shared at our men's Bible study last week and said, "Men, I have AIDS." Then he went on to say that we should not feel sorry for him that he has a terminal illness; everyone is terminal, he reminded us. "I don't think of AIDS as a disease," he went on, "but as something that brought me ease, because through it I met Christ. The Spirit of God has filled my soul and I am content for the first time in my life. I have life I knew nothing of before." After a lifetime in the wilderness, he has come to the banquet table of the Lord.

The third aspect of this feast's glory is its cost. How much does it cost? Absolutely nothing! "Come...without money and without cost." This is amazing, isn't it? The host of the banquet, God himself, is going to pay all the expenses. Just like the father of the bride at a wedding, he will pick up the tab. There are no hidden costs, no presentation of a check at the end of the meal. The gospel is always offered free of charge to all who will come.

B. The empty comparisons of other tables

If the availability, the quality of its fare, and the free cost of this banquet do not convince you to come, the Lord now goes on to compare his table with the table of idolatry, greed, ambition and adultery. First, its expense: "you weigh out silver for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy." Silver, hard-earned wages, and other resources too—like wives and children and relationships—idolatry consumes them all. Isaiah is astonished that anyone would weigh out silver for other feasts that offer nothing. So was the Son of Man. He fed the five thousand to demonstrate that he was the Bread of Life, and he was astonished that the people came back the next day looking for more bread. He told them, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal" (John 6:27). My own children have had a graphic visual aid of the cost which their aunt paid at the world's banqueting table. After she had spent \$70,000 on cocaine, and was almost destitute, they saw her empty soul, her broken body when she visited our home. They saw that idolatry not only paid her nothing, it cost her her very life.

Lee Atwater, the Chairman of Republican Party, died a few weeks ago. Though the cancer which attacked his brain he came to Christ near the end of his life. I will quote part of an article he wrote for *Life* magazine in February:

Long before I was struck with cancer, I felt something stirring in American society. It was a sense among the people that something was missing from their lives, something crucial. I was trying to position the Republican Party to take advantage of it. But I wasn't exactly sure what "it" was. My illness helped me to see what was missing.

The 80's were about acquiring—acquiring wealth, power, prestige. I know. I acquired more wealth, power and prestige than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty. What power wouldn't I trade for a little more time with my family? What price wouldn't I pay for an evening with friends? It took a deadly illness to put me eye to eye with that truth, but it is a truth that the country, caught up in its ruthless ambitions and moral decay, can learn on my dime. I don't know who will lead us through the '90s, but they must be made to speak to this spiritual vacuum at the heart of American society, this tumor of the soul.

I've come a long way since the day I told George Bush that his "kinder, gentler" theme was a nice thought, but it wouldn't win us any votes. I used to say the President might be kinder and gentler, but I wasn't going to be. How wrong I was. There is nothing more important in life than human beings, nothing sweeter than the human touch.

This month marks my 40th birthday—that deadline I set for achieving my life's goals. I lie here in my bedroom, my face swollen from steroids, my body useless and in pain. I will probably never play the guitar or run again; I can only hope to walk.

There is one man's testimony to the emptiness of America's tables of idolatry.

Thus we have to motivate us the glory of the banquet, and the emptiness of the tables of idolatry. There is one further motivation, by far the most important one, I feel.

C. The passion of the Host

The Host longs to have us come and eat at his table, and he expresses his longing three different ways. First, in the opening word of the text, the exclamation *Ho!* This is the Hebrew word *hoi*, which is usually a cry of judgment, but here it is changed to an impassioned cry to be heard with a touch of pity and empathy. The Host longs to eat with you.

Second, he expresses his grief, using the word *Why*, at your dissatisfaction with your experience of eating at the tables of idolatry. "Why do you weigh out silver for what is not bread?" Compare this with the Lord's word in Jeremiah, expressing his grief at Israel's pain,

**"Has a nation changed gods,
When they were not gods?
But My people have changed their glory
For that which does not profit.
Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD.
"For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me,
The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns,
That can hold not water." (Jer 2:11-13)**

How can you refuse the Lord who looks at you, with tears in his eyes, grieving over what you have done?

If this doesn't convince you, maybe his persistence will. The third word is, *Come*. It is repeated four times for emphasis: "Come, come, come, come to my feast!" In Romania I learned that if you want a Romanian to accept a gift, you must offer it three times. For politeness' sake, the first two offers are refused. Here, God offers his gift of a glorious, free banquet not thrice, but four times. He wants you to come to his feast! If you respond negatively, and mail your "No!" answer to him, saying you are not interested, he will, in effect, send you a fax, saying, "Come to my banquet. I want you there." But you are still not interested. So he calls you on the telephone, pleading with you to come. You refuse, and hang up on him. Still he persists. Then on the day of the feast he arrives at your front door in a limousine! "Come on, the party is beginning and I want you there with me!" he cries. How can you possibly turn down such a gracious, loving and persistent Host?

Such long-suffering persistence we see illustrated in Israel's history. How many prophets did God send to Israel, inviting them to the feast? Most of them paid with their blood for their persistence. Then, in an effort to whet the appetite of his people, God ordained 400 years of prophetic silence. Following that, he broke the silence by sending the greatest prophet, John the Baptist. But Israel still refused. Finally, he sent his Son. Incredibly, Israel said no to him too. Even this refusal, however, did not dissuade the Lord. He still persisted. Following the death and resurrection of Jesus, when the apostle Peter preached to the same crowd that had cried, "Crucify him!", through the gift of the Holy Spirit, three thousand people believed. How many of you here this morning could give testimony of the number of times you refused him and turned away, yet you are here because of his loyal-love and persistence? Can there be any stronger motivation to come than his amazing persistence? How gracious, how tenacious is the God we worship!

From this text we discover that before you do anything for God, he wants to feed you. He doesn't desire any of your possessions, your service, or your money. He wants to feed you until you are satisfied. Come as you are, and eat freely. Delight yourself in him. This theme is repeated all through the Scriptures. He fed Israel in the wilderness; he fed Elijah when he was depressed; he fed Peter by the sea. Thus the hallmark of the Christian is joy and satisfaction. Come, and eat of him.

So accept God's invitation and come to his feast. Now, how do we enter into the fullness of it and partake of its benefits? There are so many distractions today to lure us away from partaking fully.

II. The way into the feast (55:2b-3a)

**"Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight your soul in abundance.
Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that your soul may live."**

A. Listen to the King: Hear

Notice the repeated use of the verb listen, hear. In contrast to idolatrous feasts, which capture us through the eye, this Host captures us through the ear. We can illustrate by using this guitar which you heard played this morning. If we wanted this guitar made glorious and beautiful, the world might suggest, for example, overlaying the wood with gold leaf, with a border of mother of pearl, etc. But that wouldn't move our emotions, would it? The guitar wasn't designed to please the eye. People are moved when someone plays the strings. A skilled guitarist moves the soul to a whole range of feelings and emotions. Remember, the soul is not fed through the eye (just watch television; you'll see what I mean); it is fed through the ear. Listen to the Word. Let it penetrate your mind, not with facts and information, but with the glory of the image of Christ himself. Then your soul will be enlightened as this glorious melody takes hold of your heart. You will experience a level of life you never before knew was possible. This is why the great commandment to Israel was, "Hear, O Israel, and give ear to My commands." But we have neglected the ear for the eye, haven't we? We have lost our listening skills. Let us turn off our televisions, throw away our walkmans, and listen in silence to the voice of God through his Word.

Once you begin to hear, and your inner eye sees the glory of Christ, then you can come to God, "that your soul may live" (see 2 Cor 3:18).

And second,

B. Come to the King: Believe

God wants you to come to his table in order to have a relationship with you. Eternal life is not some sort of abstract life form that flows in your veins. It is an intimate relationship with the King himself. We visited Washington D.C. once as a family. Our congressman gave us a tour of Congress, and a friend introduced me to the chaplain of the Senate. What I really wanted to see was the White House, but there were no visitor's passes available that day. While I was standing on the Mall, however, the President's helicopter suddenly appeared in the sky and landed on the White House lawn. From three-quarters of a mile away I strained to see the figure of the President exiting the helicopter. That was as close as I got. Now how do you think you would feel if President Bush personally invited you to eat with him in the White House? When you arrived, you saw a dining room set for 2,000 guests, and your heart dropped. But then you saw on the side a private room, with a table set for two. The President came down the hallway and said to you, "I'm not eating with all those people tonight. I want to have dinner just with you." What do you think that would do for your soul? Yet our text is saying that the King of kings wants to eat alone with you, with no crowds around and nothing to distract you.

But we don't enter in, I believe, because we are nervous about relationships. Many of us have been hurt in the past, therefore we are fearful of taking a risk and being vulnerable. But God wants to be intimate with us. When my father came to Christ at our men's retreat, the most profound thing he heard all weekend, he told us, was Michael Green's statement, "Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship." I have known that truth for 20 years, but that was what impressed my father. Christianity is a one-on-one relationship with God—and this is what he wants to have with each one of us.

So there you have your invitation to the feast, to dine with the King himself. What will happen to you if you do come and eat?

III. The life this feast offers: Sharing in the reign of the King! (55:3b-5)

**"And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
According to the faithful loyal-love of David.
Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
A leader and commander for the peoples.
Behold you will call a nation you do not know,
And a nation which knows you not will run to you,
Because of the LORD your God,
Even the Holy One of Israel;
For He has glorified you."**

Up until now, Isaiah has been speaking of this feast to come in terms of metaphor, but now he comes to the reality of the feast. Here we learn that, by sending the Messianic King, God is about to fulfill the covenant he made with David. He is the feast, and those who feed on him will share in his reign.

A. A new and greater David will arise (55:3b)

In 2 Samuel 7, God made an everlasting covenant with David that Israel would never lack a man to sit on David's throne, and that God would establish his throne forever: "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod

of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My loyal-love shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam 7:12-16).

King Solomon, David’s son, who built the earthly temple, was the first fulfillment of this text, but it finds its ultimate fulfillment in David’s greater Son, Jesus, who is building the heavenly temple without hands, eternal in the heavens. Isaiah thus identifies the feast as “feeding” on the Messiah to come, which results in eternal life. For those who enter in, this covenant will be established forever: “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst...for this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:35, 40). “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38).

B. God will fulfill his promise to David’s seed (55:4)

Just as God established David’s rule over Israel and also over the surrounding nations (particularly the Philistines), God will establish the rule of David’s greater Son. And God kept his oath in the resurrection of Christ who now reigns over all nations. “God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus...and as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David’” (Acts 13:33-34).

C. The benefits of the Davidic Covenant are offered to the whole nation (55:5)

Anyone who eats at this banquet will not only have the privilege of eternal life itself, but will also share in the Messiah’s reign. The glory which the Messiah has, he graciously shares with his people! We have an example of this with Peter in the New Testament. Although he denied his Lord, following his resurrection Jesus fed his apostle a meal by the sea (John 21). But it was not just a meal. Jesus also made him a pastor and ordained him to share in his reign. This is what eating this meal does for you, too: you become a king, which is what you were originally designed to be.

And in the New Covenant a wonderful change occurs. In David’s time, the king’s rule over the Philistines was established by the sword, but when God exalts the Messiah, Isaiah says, God’s people will merely “call,” and a nation they know not will come “running.” Nations will not be coerced into the kingdom; they will come willingly because of the glory the Messiah shares with his people. In John 4, the disciples went into a Samaritan town to buy food because they were hungry, while Jesus remained behind to talk with the Samaritan woman. When they returned, Jesus said to them, “I have a feast you know nothing about.” They looked toward the village and they saw the whole town, a nation they did not know, running toward Jesus. We catch another glimpse of this in Acts 8:26-40 in the conversion by Philip of the Ethiopian eunuch (although in this case Philip is the one who is running!). This Ethiopian represented the first African nation to hear the gospel. Although Philip had never met this man, the Lord had already prepared the ground. All Philip had to do was ask (“call”) one question, and the highway was opened

for this man to accept the Messiah. In the new age there is no coercion, no marketing of the gospel to arouse people’s interest. On the contrary, “A nation which knows you not will run to you, because of the Lord your God.”

Our missionary in Paris, Dudley Weiner, wrote recently about a woman he ministered to. She was a troubled single mother, who began to dabble in the occult. Finding no answers, she painted a question mark on her forehead and left it there. One day she saw a man walking through a town outside Paris carrying a large wooden cross, and this caused new questions to come to her mind. She saw him again, two years later, standing outside a Christian bookstore in Paris. A few Christians who were in the store invited her to come to a meeting that evening. The speaker did not arrive in time, so Dudley had to give the talk. His message was “Change Your Master,” from Romans 6. As he concluded he asked, “Would anyone like to change masters tonight?” The woman raised her hand, and accepted Christ right there. She returned the following week, and this time the question mark on her forehead was replaced by a cross. When Dudley asked her why she had done this, she replied, “I don’t need to put the question mark there any longer, all my questions have been answered. And I no longer need to display my need for answers; but only display the answer itself...the cross! I put the cross on my forehead so other people will ask me why I have it there, and then I can tell them...I used to have so many questions in my heart; but now I have Jesus.”

Yes, God is preparing a feast, rich in quality, free of charge, and abundant in measure. This feast not only imparts eternal life to the soul, it allows us to share in the glory of the Messianic King who reigns over all the nations. No wonder Isaiah is astounded that anyone would turn from this rich feast to feed on emptiness. Who can refuse such an offer of life?

IV. Implications of the feast

A. Come and eat in abundance

How can we continue to feast on the empty food of idolatry that destroys our soul, when God offers us in Christ a far richer banquet at no cost to ourselves? Why do we keep on refusing it? The only answer I can think of is our twisted pride which deceives us. Come to this feast which is rich beyond measure.

B. Invite others

Then, having eaten and been satisfied, how can we be silent around those who are thirsty and starving? Like Christ’s first disciples, let us be co-regents with him. Let us go out into the highways and byways and compel people to come in and eat with us. And be sure you share it as freely as you yourself received it. Set your table, and invite people.

C. Be expectant

Finally, you don’t have to market the gospel, you don’t have to come up with strategies to make it popular. Don’t water down this fine wine; don’t put preservatives in this rich bread. Do not adulterate eternal life by seeking to make it more attractive. This feast is pure. God has already made people interested in the New Covenant. Just call, and they will come running. Amen.

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