

# **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for May 3: The invitation is inclusive**

April 22, 2009

Offering an invitation as an integral part of worship is a hallowed moment in which the Spirit of God calls his people to make a decision about their faithfulness, sinfulness, rebelliousness, disobedience or neglect. Freedom in the spirit urges and respects the right to choose. God initiates the calling, and the called respond of their will and volition to either accept or reject the divine persuasion of the human spirit. God, our Maker, meets the mind of man in a kind of spiritual intimacy that invokes righteousness, forgiveness, new life and hope, and parting from a sinful past.

The invitation from God may come at anytime and in any place, with or without a preacher. God stands at the door of the heart, knocking for entrance and waiting for anyone to open the door that he might come in and dwell in everlasting companionship (Revelation 3:20).

Israel, at God's invitation and through his forgiveness, was like the restored wife, redeemed from unfaithfulness to a union of health, holiness and wholeness. No nation on earth has had that kind of relationship with God. That relationship continued until the time in her history that God sent his only Son, Jesus, who would be given "the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33). The dramatic shift comes not because of Christ, but because of the rejection of Christ.

God, with the rejection, gave the church the position of being the bride of Christ. Israel's rejection of the Son of the covenant (see Peter's sermon,

Acts 2:22-41. Stephen's message in 7:51-53) brought an essential judgment and shift of strategy. The mantle for evangelism and proclamation of the gospel became the calling and glory of the local church. The church would have the responsibility of bringing honor to the name of God.

1 Peter was written to the "chosen ... by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). God offered his invitation to Israel and the gentiles, peoples of every race, color, nationality, position or status, and those who believed became "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" (1 Peter 2:9, see 2:1-12).

The invitation offered at Pentecost was this: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Since every Christian is a believer-priest, the offering of an invitation to friends, neighbors, acquaintances and colleagues is a sacred trust that builds a bridge from the sinner to the Savior, from bondage to freedom, from death to life, and from hopelessness to hope. Only Christ and His salvation can satisfy the emptiness of the human spirit, by grace through faith. Reconciliation with Christ fills the hungry heart with spiritual joy and completeness.

### **Awesome offer (Isaiah 55:1-5)**

The final chapter, or poem, of Second Isaiah, brings the thought process to a natural ending to these series of prophecies. Composed before the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians, the presentation of the Suffering Servant (chapter 53) along with the promise of a better future

(chapter 54), the prophetic invitation is given to everyone, thirsty and hungry, to come to a banquet table filled with plenty. Free without cost, the good things for the soul could be received and they would be completely satisfying.

The banquet is figurative, a metaphor of the soul feasting on God's grace and salvation. The spiritual nature of this banquet is voiced clearly: "Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live I will make an everlasting covenant with you" (v. 3). The invitation is filled with promise of certainty and an everlasting covenant that would bring leadership, influence and splendor from the "Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel" (v. 5). God's invitation always provides a promise of redemption, peace, contentment and an abundant life.

The Lord's Supper is but a foretaste of the great banquet for the family of God when the Lord comes again and calls the believing church home to glory.

### **Amazing pardon (Isaiah 55:6-7)**

One of the passages of Scripture I memorized as a Royal Ambassador, before I accepted Christ as Savior and Lord, was Isaiah 55:6-7. Isaiah gives one of the clearest expressions of God's invitation to the sinner. Eloquent in simplicity, understandable in meaning, direct in appeal, thorough in process, brief in completeness and self-limiting in opportunity, these verses communicate how God works and how anyone might have awareness and respond to the call of God.

No doubt, God used this passage to embrace me and lead me to that life changing commitment. God comes near, speaks to our spirit in a still small voice, and in those healing moments of penetrating warmth, an individual is called out by God's grace for pardon from sin.

God offers of the gift of salvation, but the spirit of man must also seek God

and his pardon. The critical time is when God is near. God comes near in love and judgment, creating in each person a sense of guilt and yearning or desperation within. God calls us away from sin: “Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts” (v. 7). Sin, any sin of any type, will be pardoned when genuinely and wholeheartedly confessed in conjunction with a trust in Christ, the crucified and resurrected Son of God.

Timing is everything. Invitations can come at exactly the right moment when God’s nearness and calling penetrate the mind and emotions. If rejection, rather than acceptance, dominates, pardon does not happen.

There are thousands of excuses, perhaps even reasons, that become barriers: embarrassment, lifestyle, friends, pride, arrogance, lust of the flesh, selfishness, inconvenience, pastoral spite, hypocrisy of Christians, hopelessness, resistance to spouse, flippancy, hardness of heart, interruptions, laziness, lack of knowledge, wrong expectations, waiting for a certain feeling, walking an aisle, a need to clean up one’s life first, pushy evangelist, give up too much, unforgiveness of others, fear of water, poor doctrine, parental pressure, past experiences of rejection, fear of the unknown, possessions or wealth, distractions and a host of other possibilities.

Not one is a valid reasons to reject the purifying experience of pardon. God’s pardon is complete, abundant, thorough and effective.

### **Abiding power (Isaiah 55:8-11)**

Isaiah enlightens by contrasting man’s ways and God’s ways (vv. 8-9). God’s nature and ways are mysterious, often beyond man’s comprehension and ability to grasp divine reality and divine truth. The godless and unrighteous have a worldly, secular mindset that seeks answers more suited to meet the desires of their own self-interest. Those who choose not to incline themselves in evil and dark affairs often participate in life,

unmindful or forgetful of God and routinely apathetic toward a relationship with God. God's ways always are aimed at the spiritual victories, at solving man's basic needs for peace of mind, contentment, love for others, moral behavior, belonging and significance (Galatians 5:13-26).

Even though the qualities of the human spirit is attracted to the ways of the flesh, God's word is powerful and adequate to convey what is needed to believe, repent, receive pardon and communicate the message of salvation. God's word is powerful, a living word, the word of life, the indwelling word, the true word, the flawless word and an eternal word.

Like a two-edged sword, a burning fire and a goad, God's word prompts the human spirit to respond to the call of God. Isaiah explains that God's word is like the rain and snow that comes from the heavens to nourish the seeds to sprout, grow and yield its harvest: "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. 11). Just as nature is transformed by the providence of God, God's living word will penetrate the hardest of hearts to reveal the nature and character of God and to call all people to repentance and faith. How powerful is that? The word of life changes, converts the heart and mind.

### **Astonishing blessing (Isaiah 55:12-13)**

The exile is over and the new exodus begins. Liberation from Babylon moved forward and release from bondage would find Israel going "out in joy" and being "led forth in peace." The whole creation would respond with the mountains and hills bursting "into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (v. 12). Their return, through and by God's intervention, would be an "everlasting sign" to the honor and acclaim of God, a witness to the "Holy One of Israel." In like manner, those who trust in God for their salvation are released from the bondage of sin to rejoice evermore in glorious fellowship with God.

## **Conclusion**

Everyone, with few exceptions, wants and longs for happiness. Unfortunately, the search goes on in all of the wrong places. Peace, contentment, joy, satisfaction, harmony and happiness come when the human spirit is united, reconciled, to God our Maker. Separated from God, people pursue tarnished dreams and unfulfilling quests of wealth, position, status, pleasure, appetite, influence, recognition and a host of other things which cannot and will not bring satisfaction to the spiritual hunger of the human heart.

People live in worlds of illusions created by perilous imaginations that lead down paths to nowhere that bring eventual destruction, hopelessness, loneliness, abandonment and eternal death.

Transformation through Christ is a universal appeal to “turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (v. 7). There is no other answer to the needs of the human heart.