

Delight Yourself in the Lord! Isaiah 55
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I've been excited to get to this chapter of Isaiah. This is a chapter of Scripture that I've loved for a long time because it's such a great text for unpacking the God-centered Gospel of the Bible that calls us to delight ourselves in the Lord. That will be the message of this sermon.

I want to start by reading a quote from **Blaise Pascal**, who lived in the mid-1600s. He said, "**All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.**" Pascal is saying that every single one of us is looking for happiness in life. We may look for it in different ways and in different things, but we all have the same goal. We all want to be happy. I think if you analyze your life a bit, you would agree with his statement. We would all prefer happiness over sadness. And more than that, we crave happiness. We long for peace and contentment and satisfaction in our lives.

Pascal goes on to recognize the fact that outside of faith in God, no one has found this happiness that they so desperately want. We all complain because we want something more, and we try to find happiness in so many things, but nothing ultimately satisfies. And Pascal says the reason none of us can be satisfied by the things of the world is because we have a God-shaped hole in our hearts. He calls it an "infinite abyss." And we try to fill that hole with all kinds of things, but there will always be an emptiness there until we turn to God for our satisfaction. He alone can fill that void in our souls. We all want to be happy, and the only way we can find true happiness and joy is by pursuing our pleasure in God.

When we go to the Bible, we find that we are repeatedly commanded to seek our happiness in God. This is what the Christian life is all about.

Psalm 32:11 "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad . . ."

Psalm 37:4 "Delight yourself in the Lord . . ."

Psalm 81:1 "Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob!"

Philippians 3:1 "rejoice in the Lord!"

Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

The Bible is full of this idea that we are to seek joy and happiness IN God! We're all seeking happiness, and the Bible tells us to pursue that happiness IN God, because that's the only place we'll be able to find it.

Here in Isaiah 55 we find an amazing invitation from God for us to be satisfied in Him. God wants us to find our delight in Him. He calls us to enjoy the free gift of knowing Him, delighting in Him, being satisfied in Him.

There are four questions I want to address in relation to these verses.

I. What is the gift that is being offered?

What is God inviting us to experience? Look at verse 1. These are the words of God, inviting, indeed, commanding His people to be satisfied. Notice the imperatives, the commands. “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

God is pleading with us to accept this amazing gift that He is offering.

Look at how the Lord describes the gift. In verse 1 it is water, wine, and milk. In verse 2 it is eating what is good and delighting in rich food. Then in verse 3 it is also described as life, “hear that your soul may live.”

The Lord is obviously not talking about mere physical food and drink, or simply about physical life. The water, food, wine, milk and life are metaphors for the great spiritual peace and delight that the Lord is offering. He is calling us to enjoy a great feast. He is inviting us to join the banquet. He is appealing to us to experience life to the fullest.

So what does all this imagery point to? The answer is in the beginning of verse 3 where the Lord says, “Incline your ear, and come to ME.” “COME TO ME!” In verse 1 He says, “come to the waters,” “come, buy and eat!” “Come, buy wine and milk.” And now in verse 3 He says, “Come to ME.” **Answer: God** is the gift being offered. You see, God Himself is the treasure. He is the banquet. He is the water and the wine and the milk and the bread and rich food. He is life. He is the One who satisfies us. The gift that is being offered is the gift of knowing God. God, Himself, is the gift.

II. What is our problem?

The second question I want to raise is, “What is our problem?” Why are we in such desperate need of this gift that God is offering to us? Look at how God describes our desperate condition in this passage. First, we are thirsty. Verse 1, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.” We are all desperate to find meaning and purpose and joy and peace in life. We are made for something more than this world, and therefore we are spiritually thirsty for something to quench that desire.

Secondly, we have no money, “he who has no money, come, buy and eat!” We are all spiritually bankrupt. The reason for this is that we are all sinners. We were born with a sinful nature that we inherited from Adam and Eve, and that sinful nature causes us to rebel against God.

Sin is our problem. Sin is what causes us to turn away from God. Sin is what separates us from God. Sin is what keeps us from enjoying this great gift that is offered. **Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** We sin against God by lying or cheating or gossiping or lusting or acting out of jealousy or hatred or pride. We turn away from Him in so many ways, and verse 2 illustrates the foolishness of this rebellion.

The Lord says in verse 2, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” This is a rhetorical question and it vividly highlights the insanity of sin. We are hungry and thirsty, we have no money, and yet we spend money on things that are not bread and we work for things that will not satisfy. We all want to be happy. We all want joy and peace and meaning in our lives. And the problem is not that we want joy, but that we look for it in all the wrong places.

This is our problem. Instead of running to this lavish banquet and enjoying the pleasures of knowing God, we turn our back on Him and try to be satisfied on other things. In Jeremiah 2 the Lord describes this in a similar way. **Jeremiah 2:12-13, “Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”** Can you see the picture? Here is the fountain of living waters, fully satisfying. But what do we do? Instead of running to that fountain, we forsake it. We turn away from it and try to dig our own cisterns to store water for ourselves. But they are broken cisterns and cannot hold water. This is the insanity of sin. God is pleading with us, commanding us, to satisfy ourselves in the only thing that can truly and completely satisfy, and yet we turn our backs on Him and search for pleasure in other things. And as we pursue those other things, our hunger only increases.

Let’s think about a couple of examples. Pride is a way that we try to be satisfied in ourselves. We think too highly of ourselves and try to find happiness in our accomplishments or what others think of us. That is a broken cistern that cannot hold water. It is not bread. It will not satisfy. Or sexual immorality. So many people try to find pleasure in the lustful thought or the pornographic image or the extramarital affair. But these things don’t satisfy. In fact, they leave a person less satisfied than before.

It's spending money for that which is not bread, and working for that which does not satisfy. Broken cisterns. We try to fill that God-shaped hole with so many things, but none truly satisfy.

We need to see that God is the One who satisfies. He is the fountain of living water. He is the wine and milk and bread that we crave. And instead of turning our backs on Him and foolishly running after other things, we should run to Him.

As **Augustine** wrote in a prayer to God, all the way back in the late 300s A.D., in a book called the *Confessions* she wrote about his conversion experience, and he expresses so poignantly the change that happened in his heart. He says to God: **“How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy.”**

Do you see what he's saying about God? He is comparing sin, which he calls fruitless joys, to God, whom he calls the sovereign joy. God is the triumphant joy. He is the ultimate, absolute joy. Nothing else compares. And when God saves a person, He reveals Himself as the sovereign joy. Before God changes our hearts, we're blind to the fountain. We're blind to the banquet. We're dead in our sin, and we think the sinful pleasures are the only pleasures. But then God regenerates our hearts, giving us new life and new eyes to see that all these other things are fruitless joys and He is true joy.

Many people think the Christian life is simply about doing your duty. These people have the idea that unbelievers are the ones who pursue pleasure and happiness, while believers reject that pursuit of happiness and do their duty for God. There can be a lot of pride in that mentality. I believe that distinction is false. The difference between non-Christians and Christians is NOT that non-Christians are looking for happiness and Christians aren't. I agree with Pascal that we ALL seek happiness. The difference is that non-Christians are searching around aimlessly for happiness in the dirt and mud of their broken cisterns, while Christians have found true joy and happiness at the feast of God!

C. S. Lewis put it this way: **“it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”**

We ARE far too easily pleased, friends. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean you give up the pursuit of happiness. It means you discover what it means to pursue true and lasting happiness. So, going back to verse 2 again, don't spend your

money for that which is not bread, and don't work for that which does not satisfy. Rather, God says, "listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food." In other words, turn away from sin which will never satisfy, and come to the banquet, which is God Himself.

III. What does the gift cost?

The third question we need to ask is, "What does the gift cost?" God is inviting us to enjoy this great gift, but what is the price? The end of verse 1 invites us to buy wine and milk without money and without price. That means it's a free gift. We can't work for it. It's not offered to us on the condition that we do this or that. It is offered as a gift.

But this gift of knowing God can be given to us freely only because someone else paid the price. Turn back a page to Isaiah 53 and recall some of the things we talked about at Easter time. This chapter contains some of the most well-known prophecies about Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Even though Isaiah put these words down on paper more than 700 years before the Incarnation of Christ, these verses clearly portray the suffering of Christ and the meaning of that suffering. Look at verses 5-6. "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Salvation comes at a price, a great price, and God sent His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to pay it. As sinners, we deserve a very severe punishment for our disobedience against God. We deserve to spend eternity in hell apart from God, and yet Jesus Christ took that punishment upon himself. And He paid it fully. How do we know that? Because He rose from the dead on the 3rd day. He is risen! And that is how this amazing gift can be offered to us freely. The cost of the gift is the suffering and death of Christ.

IV. How is the gift received?

The final question is, "How is the gift received?" How can I come to benefit from what is being offered here? If God is offering me infinite delight, and if Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin so that I don't have to go to hell, but I can spend forever with Him, then what do I need to do? How can I get signed up? I know I can't work for it, I don't need to work for it, but what do I need to do?

Look at verses 6-7, back in chapter 55 now. There are essentially two actions called for in these verses. First, let's look at the command at the beginning of verse 7. We are to forsake, turn

away from our evil sinful ways of life. Another word we use for this is repentance. In light of what we learned from verse 2, we can picture this repentance as turning away from those things that cannot satisfy. We recognize that those behaviors, those idols, are worthless. Repentance is the first half of what must happen in us.

The second action that is called for, which is really just the other side of the same coin, is the command to “seek the Lord,” “call upon him,” in verse 6. So as our desires are turning AWAY from sin in repentance, we are turning TOWARD God in faith. We seek Him. We call upon Him in faith. **Repentance and faith.** These are the two components of what takes place in conversion. When God changes a person’s heart, He gives that person a distaste for sin and a desire for Him. Apart from God’s grace we only have a desire for sin, and no desire for God. But when God chooses to save a person, He changes that. He opens our eyes to see that sin will never satisfy, and that He will satisfy. Unfortunately, that doesn’t mean that all of a sudden we cease from sinning altogether. But it does mean we battle against sin because we can now see that sin will not ultimately deliver on its promises of pleasure, but God will.

So when God regenerates our hearts, we immediately begin to repent of sin because we can see how horrible it is. And we begin trusting in Jesus Christ, because we see Him as our glorious and satisfying hope of salvation. And when God brings about this repentance and faith in a person’s heart, He also pardons their sin. He has compassion on that person, as verse 7 says, and he will abundantly pardon. He will forgive us for all the wrongs we’ve committed against Him and against others. No matter what mistakes you’ve made in your life, God will have mercy on all those who seek Him and call out to Him.

God is the gift being offered. Sin is our problem. The suffering and death of Christ is the cost of the gift. And repentance and faith is how the gift is received.

What about God’s glory?

There’s one last point I want to make, because some might listen to what I’ve said so far and accuse me of being man-centered rather than God-centered. And I said at the beginning that I think this is a great passage for unpacking the God-centered Gospel of Jesus Christ. But someone might say, “all you’ve talked about is *our* satisfaction, *our* delight, *our* happiness and joy. What about God’s glory?” Someone might listen to everything I’ve said so far this morning and say, “that sounds like a man-centered Gospel because it emphasizes the benefits we receive in salvation, rather than a God-centered Gospel, which would focus on the glory of

God in all things.” So which is it going to be? Our satisfaction or God’s glory?

Look at the last two verses of Isaiah 55. Verses 12-13. These verses paint an amazing picture of how glorious and awesome our salvation is. We are filled with joy and peace, and even the mountains and hills and trees join in the celebration. Then look at the second half of verse 13, “and it shall make a name for the Lord.” When the Bible talks about God’s Name, it is often synonymous with God’s glory, God’s greatness, the beauty of who He is.

So when it says, “it will make a name for the Lord,” it is the same as saying, “it is for the Lord’s glory.” But what is “it” in this verse? What will be for the Lord’s glory? Well, it’s the whole work of redemption that the chapter has been talking about. It’s the water for those who are thirsty. It’s the wine and milk and bread for those who are hungry. It’s delighting yourself in rich food. It’s the mercy of God to forgive our sins. It’s the joy and peace that comes from knowing God. This salvation, this gift of infinite and eternal delight, is to make a Name for the Lord, it’s for His fame, it’s for His glory.

Everything God does, He does to display His greatness. He wants to demonstrate His goodness and power and beauty, which is to say, He wants to glorify Himself in everything He does. And the salvation of sinners is no exception. In fact, it’s the pinnacle of His plan to bring Himself glory. God saves us in order that we will glorify Him.

This is how it works. When we find delight in God, His greatness is put on display. When we desire Him more than other things, He is shown to be more valuable than those other things. So our pursuit of joy and happiness in Him in no way detracts from His glory, but rather it magnifies His glory. So you see that our desire to be satisfied in God is NOT at odds with God’s desire to be glorified in us. Our desire to be satisfied in Him does not detract from His glory in any way. On the contrary, our desire to be satisfied in Him highlights His greatness.

It’s like the delight I have in my wife. When I tell her how much I enjoy being with her and how happy she makes me and how it’s a delight to be married to her, she doesn’t respond by saying, “Why don’t you quit being so selfish. All you’re thinking of is your own joy.” No, she loves those comments. They’re a compliment to her.

And it’s similar in our relationship with God. When we long just to be in God’s presence, and enjoy His beauty and greatness and love, we honor God by putting a spotlight on His worth and value. Our joy in God greatly glorifies God. As **John Piper** says, “**God is most glorified in us when we are most**

satisfied in Him.” God’s glory and our joy in God are not in competition with each other. So you see this IS a God-centered Gospel. We get the joy, He gets the glory. We get the pleasure and happiness and satisfaction of seeing Him, and He gets the pleasure of seeing His greatness reflected back to Him in our adoration of Him.

As we close, I want to draw your attention to two phrases in verse 6. **“Seek the Lord *while he may be found*; call upon him *while he is near*.”** There’s an urgency in this message. There’s a window of opportunity that will not be open forever, and you don’t know when it’s going to close. But it’s open now. The Lord is near; He can be found. Do not let this opportunity pass you by. You need to be sensitive to what God may be doing in your heart at this moment. Repent of your sins and turn to Christ. Give up on the attempt to be satisfied in anything less than God, and come, experience the great joy and delight of knowing Him. That is something that could happen in your heart even right now. Simply cry out to the Lord in your heart, repenting of your sins and trusting in Jesus Christ as your only hope of forgiveness. I want to urge you, friend, for the sake of your joy and eternal happiness, **“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”**