

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 22: An Everlasting Covenant; Come to the Waters -- Isaiah 54:1–55:13

Picture a woman who has spent her whole life listening to other people's children laugh in other people's yards. In the ancient world, to be barren was to be forgotten, and she has come to believe the silence in her own house is permanent. Then a prophet stands in front of her and says the last thing she expects to hear: "Sing!" Not someday, not when the nursery is full, but now, while it is still empty. "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear," Isaiah says, "break forth into singing and cry aloud." That is how chapter 54 opens, and it is a stunning picture of grace. God does not wait for our circumstances to change before He hands us a song. He hands us the song first, because the song is built on His promise, not on what we can see in the yard.

These two chapters come right on the heels of the Suffering Servant of chapter 53, the One who was wounded for our transgressions. And that is no accident. Everything in chapters 54 and 55 flows out of what the Servant did. Because of His finished work, the barren woman gets a family, the storm-tossed city gets a foundation of sapphires, and the thirsty get water without price. We are standing downstream from the cross here, drinking from what it purchased. The order matters: first the Servant pours out His soul unto death, and then the invitations go out far and wide. The grace is free to us precisely because it was costly to Him.

Then comes one of the most beautiful invitations in all of Scripture. "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!" God is like a merchant who has set up His stall in the marketplace and is shouting at the people walking by, except His prices make no sense. "Buy wine and milk without money and without price." Why would anyone spend their wages on bread that does not satisfy when the real feast is being given away? This is the gospel offer in seed form, centuries before the Servant came. And the question Isaiah presses is painfully practical: what are you spending your one short life chasing, and does it actually fill you?

As we work through these verses, we will see the everlasting covenant of peace that cannot be removed (54:10), the sure mercies promised to David that the New Testament tells us were fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus (55:3, Acts 13:34), and the promise that God's word does not return to Him empty (55:11). We will hear "Seek the LORD while he may be found" (55:6) and feel the urgency in it. And we will let the invitation land on us personally. God is still calling people to the waters. The only real question this lesson asks is whether you and I will come.

Group Discussion: Isaiah 55:1–2 pictures God offering bread and water "without money and without price," yet asks, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?" As a group, name some of the things people pour their lives into hoping to be satisfied. Why do these things leave us still thirsty, and what does it mean that God's true provision is free yet cost the Servant everything?

Personal Reflection: Isaiah 55:6 says, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.” Is there an area of your life where you have been treating God’s call as something you can answer later? What would it look like for you to respond today rather than tomorrow?

Read Isaiah 54:1–55:13

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 54:1–3, the barren woman is told to sing and enlarge the place of her tent because her children will be more than the children of the married woman. Galatians 4:27 applies this very verse to the church, the Jerusalem above. What does this teach us about how God grows His family, and why is it good news that the harvest depends on His promise rather than on what we can produce?
2. Isaiah 54:4 tells the woman not to fear, for she will forget the shame of her youth. Are there past failures or seasons of shame that you still let define you? How does God’s promise to remove that reproach change the way you see yourself today?
3. In Isaiah 54:7–8, God says, “For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you... with everlasting love I will have compassion on you.” How do we hold together the reality of God’s discipline and the permanence of His love, and what guards us from reading every hardship as God’s rejection?
4. Isaiah 54:10 promises, “My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed.” When the mountains feel like they are shaking in your own life, what practical difference does it make to rest on the steadfastness of God rather than the steadiness of your circumstances?

5. Isaiah 54:11–12 describes a city rebuilt with sapphires and precious stones, and verse 13 says, “All your children shall be taught by the LORD.” Jesus quotes this in John 6:45. How does this picture point past physical stones to the people of God taught by Him, and what does it say about the place of God’s word among His people?
6. Isaiah 54:17 says, “No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed.” How is this a comfort without being a promise of an easy, trouble-free life? Where do you need to trust this assurance right now?
7. Isaiah 55:1–2 invites the thirsty to come and buy without money. How does this free invitation expose the difference between earning God’s favor and receiving it, and why is grace offensive to the human instinct to pay our own way?
8. Isaiah 55:7 calls the wicked to “forsake his way” and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return to the LORD. Repentance here is more than feeling sorry; it is forsaking and returning. What is one way or one thought you sense God asking you to forsake and turn from?
9. Isaiah 55:1–3 issues the great invitation, “Come, everyone who thirsts,” and promises, “I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” In Acts 13:34 Paul says this “sure love for David” was fulfilled when God raised Jesus from the dead, never to return to corruption. Trace how this free gospel invitation, the everlasting covenant of peace (54:10), and the sure mercies of David all come together in Christ. How does the New Testament teach us to answer this invitation today, by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ, and why is it crucial that we let the gospel define the response rather than treating the offer as a vague spiritual feeling?

10. Isaiah 55:11 says God's word "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose." Name one specific way you intend to put yourself in the path of God's word this week so that it can do its work in you, and how do you want Christ to be forming you through it?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Galatians 4:26–27, the church as the rejoicing barren woman who becomes a great family; Acts 13:32–39, the sure mercies of David fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus; John 7:37–39, Jesus stands and cries, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink"

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