

Come to Me

Isaiah 55:1-13, John 7:25-52 (ESV)

March 11, 2007

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” Thus spoke Isaiah on behalf of the Lord centuries before the Christ. Then Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” If you have never been thirsty, these are of little significance to you. But if you have ever wanted for anything important—life, breath, food, drink, love, communion, meaning, direction, purpose, forgiveness, redemption, salvation, abundance of life, joy, grace, gratitude, or even life eternal—if you have ever wanted, do now want, or anticipate ever wanting anything important in life, these invitations might be of great interest to you. They could be what we might call a godsend.

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” If you have never been thirsty, I cannot possibly explain this to you. There is no way. But if you are thirsty, surely you realize how grand this is. If you are thirsty and nothing quenches your thirst, if you are desperate and you know not which way to turn, if you are so lonely that your heart aches, if you cry at night and no one hears you, if the wrong you have done haunts and overwhelms you, if the good you want to do seems forever beyond your reach, if you are lost and cannot find your way home, if you are confused and cannot make sense of what is going on around you or within you, if you are mourning irreparable losses—in short, if you are thirsty, come to the waters. You know who you are.

The Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, who saved his people *from* the water of the great flood, who saved his people *through* the waters of the Red Sea in the Exodus from Egypt, and who saved his people *with* water when they thirsted in the wilderness invited his people *to* the waters again so that he might sustain them as he led them out of exile in Babylon, through the wilderness again, and back home to Israel. Thanks be to God! This is an invitation to salvation. This is an invitation to hope. This is an invitation to joy. This is an invitation to come home to God. What is offered is available “without money and without price.” The purpose is “that your soul may live.” And the promise is “I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” God’s word shall not return to him empty, but it shall accomplish that which he purposes, and shall succeed in the thing for which he sent it. This is an invitation to you and to me to go forth in joy and to be led forth in peace.

How do we come to the waters? How do we come to God? According to Isaiah, we do so through hearing the word of God. The Lord says in three ways, “Listen diligently to me.... Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.” This is how his word is to accomplish what he purposes. We are to listen to it. We are to believe it. We are to cherish it. We are to live it. Indeed, we are to consume the word of God. We are to devour the word of God. We are to fill ourselves with the word of God.

Why are we to do this? Despite all that may seem to count against it, despite the evil of the world that weighs upon us, despite the corruption and rot that eats away from within, it is the will of God that our souls may live, it is the purpose of God that our souls may live, it is the plan of God that our souls may live, and God has provided all that we need so that our souls may live.

Thus the purpose of God is compassion and pardon. The very life of our souls is being crushed and stolen from us by our own wickedness and unrighteousness. This is not pleasant for us to hear. But it is necessary for us to face reality. And it is good to know that God has an answer to our problem, a solution to our predicament, a cure for our sickness unto death. God’s answer, strangely enough, is love and forgiveness. We might have expected much worse. We might have anticipated judgment and punishment. But the very purpose of this invitation, directed not to good and righteous people but to miserable sinners like all of us, is compassion, pardon, and life! Thanks be to God!

This incongruity between what we expect and what we receive, between what we deserve and what God promises, points immediately to the radical and absolute otherness of God. God is God, and we are not. God is creator, and we are creatures. God is provider, and we are recipients. God is redeemer, and we are redeemed. God is judge, and we are pardoned. God is God, and we are made in his image. God is God, and he is *not* made in our image. How, then, can we know God? How can we come to God? In that God is so different, so far away, how can we draw near to God? Humanly speaking, it is impossible.

Actually, of course, the drawing near occurs the other way around. God has already drawn near to us. A hint of this is given in the invitation: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.” God has drawn near to us. How is he near? Where is he near? Not only is God radically and absolutely other, but also God has drawn near to us and come to us in our only mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth.”

So it is that hundreds of years after Isaiah, Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” Jesus Christ was born into this world for a reason, to

serve the good and ancient purpose of God for compassion, pardon, and life, and this mighty word has accomplished God's good will and succeeded in his work of redemption. God has spoken, God has communicated with us, God has told us what we need to hear, and Jesus Christ is what God has to say to us. In him the silence of heaven has been broken! We have been given the word of life. This is the word we are to hear. This is the water we are to drink. This is the source of life for our souls.

The birth, life, teachings, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God's word to us, God's message to us, God's gospel and good news to us. The suffering love we see in Jesus reveals God's character and disposition toward us. The grace which Christ embodies brings about the forgiveness of our sin and gives us the courage and strength we need to resist sin and to go on living. Jesus Christ himself is the very word of God, spoken from heaven into the silence of our lives. Jesus Christ is the one word of God we have to hear. Jesus is not one rabbi among many but is the only Son of God. Jesus is not one prophet among many but is the one Word of God. Jesus is not one teacher among many but is God himself with us and among us, drawn near to the emptiness of our lives. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Savior. Jesus is Master. Jesus is the water which we drink to live.

Consider the alternatives. Do we want to drink from the wells of political integrity? Politics is an important aspect of human life, but it is not adequate to sustain life. Do we want to drink from the wells of society and culture? We live today in a time of societal confusion, disarray, and cultural disintegration, but even if times were good, society and culture could not sustain human life. Do you want to drink from the wells of nationalism? As important as patriotism is to us, when we treat nations as if they were worthy of divine worship, they become harsh and deadly gods. They cannot sustain life. The list of alternatives goes on and on. We have tried them one and all. And that is part of the reason that today's invitation looks so good. God is inviting us to enter into an everlasting covenant with him, a covenant of his steadfast, sure love, rock-solid, constant, year in and year out, whether the market goes up or down, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, *not* merely until death us do part but instead in this life and in the next, an everlasting covenant of love. Are you thirsty? Would you like a taste of eternity? Would you like to experience the love of the one who created the entire universe as an arena within which we are to come to know his love and so to respond in kind?

Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" William Temple has written of this passage:

He who trusts in Christ not only receives the water of life that springs up to eternal life, but becomes the source of that gift to others. For no

one can possess (or, rather be indwelt by) the Spirit of God and keep that Spirit to himself. Where the Spirit is, He flows forth; if there is no flowing forth, He is not there.¹

That is to say, whoever has accepted Christ's invitation to salvation will necessarily share it with others. The gospel of Jesus Christ is uncontainable. Christian faith is contagious. The Holy Spirit will not rest content until all the world has heard the word of God.

Do we live in hard and frightening times for the faith? John Calvin cites the example of Jesus Christ standing alone before the hostile crowd at the festival as an inspiration to our own confidence in the goodness, power, and protection of God and therefore to our own courage in adversity:

From this a general doctrine must be gathered; for though we live unto the day, the hour of everyman's death has nevertheless been fixed by God. It is difficult to believe that, subject as we are to so many accidents, exposed to so many injuries and dangers from man and beast, and liable to so many diseases, we are safe from all dangers until God wishes to call us away. But we must fight against our own mistrust. And first we should hold to the doctrine taught here and next to its object and the exhortation drawn from it—namely, that each of us should cast his cares on God and serve in his own calling and not be led away from his duty by any fears. Yet no man must go beyond his own limits. Confidence in the providence of God must go no further than God Himself commands.²

We should not be stupid and place ourselves in harm's way. We are not to step in front of an oncoming truck and say, If today is not my day, I will be okay, and if it is my day, I am going to die anyway. That would be fatalism not faith, and that would be stupidity not wisdom. Nevertheless, the memory that the enemies of Christ could

¹William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1949, p. 130.

²John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. 4: *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1988), 4:193.

not touch him until his hour had come should inspire in us the confidence that God has placed us on this earth for a good reason and the courage that God has called us into his service and intends that we should complete it. That should set us free from many of the day to day worries of life and fill us with peace, energy, and determination to go about doing the will of God, which is the only reason to live.

Of all the people who have ever walked the earth, Jesus Christ is the one sent from God in order that we might live. On the face of it, this may seem implausible to you. But I would encourage you to come, try it out, take a long, deep drink of living water, believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and through him believe in God his Father who sent him here for our sake, in order that we might live and live eternally. Step out of the ordinary. Reject all the other world views. Take courage for the living of this life. And share this gift with others. Are you thirsty?

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To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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