

Come to the Lord (Isaiah 55)

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Thank you. Hi everyone. How are you? Good. My name's Johan. In case you don't remember me, I was here last time about almost a year ago now I think.

So it's really good to be back and to have the chance to share with you. And it's also really great to see how you've been involved in different projects like a Vanuatu and Evangelism Project as well.

I've been talking to William and we're hoping that we'll have a lady coming in October who can share some ways in which you can be involved in sharing the gospel through telling Bible stories, using the scriptures to be sharing the gospel with people in a really natural and in a good way as well.

[3 : 18] So hopefully we'll be able to organize so you can hear more about that in the future. Debbie, my wife and I, we come from Sydney. We worked in Thailand as missionaries for a long time and now we're working here in Auckland.

So it's really great to be here and to be living and working here. We really love it. We do miss our family and our friends. We have three children in Sydney and one little grandson and we get to see him occasionally.

And these days with social media we get to see pictures of him all the time. So that's really great. But, you know, that's one of the things that really gives us a lot of joy and satisfaction is connecting with our family and our children.

And having social media today really makes that worthwhile as well. I wonder what it is that gives you joy in your life. What is it that you really love doing? For me, there's lots of different things I love.

I love exercising and playing different kinds of sports. You know, what is it that gives you joy and satisfaction in your life? We're going to be talking about that in a way in a minute.

[4 : 28] So I wonder if you could just turn to someone next to you and just share. You know, what is it that you really enjoy? What is it that makes your life really fun and worthwhile living? Just to turn to someone next to you.

I'm going to give you one minute. Okay. I'd like to hear what some of your answers were. Maybe someone over here could call out.

What is it that you really enjoy? What is it that gives you joy and satisfaction? Anything interesting? What were some of the interesting answers you heard? Nobody's brave enough to say anything.

Yeah. Family is really important, isn't it? I think that's, for many of us, that's really important. If we have a family that we like spending time with, that's good.

What about some of the other answers? Not brave enough to say? Yeah. Okay. Good. God. Yeah. That's good.

[5 : 30] Coming to church. Learning about God. Is that fun? Yeah. Good. I'm glad you enjoy it. Glad someone didn't force you to come. All right. What else?

Anything else? Pilates. Pilates. Very good. Okay. Yeah. Okay. Someone you know. A friend of yours. Someone nearby you.

Okay. Good. Very good. Any other interesting answers? Traveling? We've heard somebody just travel to Vanuatu.

Travel can be very interesting and eye-opening. Food. Yeah. Of course. Everybody loves food. At least three times a day. All right.

So, there's lots of things about life that gives us joy and satisfaction, isn't there? Okay. You might find it in family and friends or people, some people even enjoy their work.

[6 : 27] Lots of people complain about their job but, you know, some people also really enjoy their job. I actually happen to really like my job. It's a great job that I have and, you know, hopefully some of you enjoy your work as well.

But, you know, often it's not just one thing that gives our lives joy. It's a balance of a lot of things, you know. You know, it's a balance of work, rest, play, friends, you know, lots of different things.

And if there's one thing that kind of binds it all together, isn't it? It's, we don't do these things just for themselves but what brings, what helps to bring them all together is this sense of purpose.

You know, I can go to Vanuatu and stay in a resort. But, you know, but going there and actually using my skills, if I'm a dentist or if I'm a doctor, actually using skills to help people and to show them something about the love of God, now that makes it, you know, even more fulfilling, doesn't it?

Because it's filled with a sense of purpose and helping others and teaching about God as well. So we're going to be looking at this sense of purpose now.

[7 : 42] So we're going to be turning to Isaiah chapter 55. The book of Isaiah is like a little mini Bible. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought about how many chapters are in Isaiah?

Do you know how many chapters are in Isaiah? Okay. How many books are there in the Bible? 66. Now there's two broad divisions in the book of Isaiah.

So the first is the first 39 chapters. Okay. How many chapters in the Old Testament? 39. Very good. And the second division of the book of Isaiah is 27 chapters.

And in the New Testament there are how many books? 27 books. That's right. So Isaiah is like a little mini Bible in a sense. The first 39 chapters is a lot of judgment, what God is going to do.

There's some good bits in there too, but a lot of it can be reading it all the way through. You can get kind of depressed and think, oh, it's all about judgment. The second part, from chapter 40 onwards, has a lot of positive things in it.

[8 : 53] And just like, you know, Christians tend to read the New Testament more than the Old Testament because the New Testament is all about the new life we have in Jesus. It's all about Jesus coming and, you know, looking forward to heaven as well.

And so Isaiah is a little bit like that. Okay. Not exactly, but if you want to think about it, it helps a lot. Isaiah wrote over a long period of time.

It was over 40 years. And he covered the period of four different kings of the people of Israel. And so he urges them to uphold justice, to, you know, to become the kind of nation that God had intended for them to be.

And we're going to look at chapter 55, which comes at the end of a section which is called the Book of Comfort. So chapter 40 to chapter 55 is full of hope.

It's looking forward to the comfort that God is going to give to his people through the coming of his servant, who we now know, looking back, is Jesus.

[10 : 05] Especially in chapter 53, he talks about, you know, the servant who's going to give his life for the sins of the people. You know, he died for our inequities.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray. But God has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And I was pointing directly to the Messiah, Jesus, who is going to come.

And so here is an invitation. So the last chapter of the Book of Comfort, God says to his people through Isaiah, he says, Come, all you who are thirsty, 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 spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good.

And you will delight in the riches of fare. Give ear and come to me. Listen, that you will live. So we have an invitation to those who are hungry and thirsty.

[11 : 20] To those who long for satisfaction. Not just physical hunger or physical thirst, but a spiritual hunger and a spiritual thirst. For those who want real fulfillment.

You know, we all long for that, don't we? I think we all do. I think we all long for something that is deeper than the drudgery of just eat, work, sleep, start again the next day.

We're just living for the weekend. And then thinking, oh, I've got to spend all week at work now. And these kinds of themes would have been very familiar to the people of God.

Because they knew, right in their history, they had wandered for 40 years through the desert, looking for the land flowing with milk and honey, full of satisfaction and peace and joy.

And that was part of the history of Israel. But there's not just a promise of water here. There's a promise of much more wine and milk. The produce of a rich and fruitful land.

[12 : 27] Images of a prosperous and fruitful life of satisfaction and delight. It's not something that we can buy. It's not something that comes to us through working.

But it's a promise of delight and satisfaction that God gives to those whom he chooses for himself. But what's the condition?

Listen. Listen to me and eat what is good. We need to listen. Give ear and come to me. Listen that you will live. Are you prepared to listen?

Because this satisfaction comes by listening to him and his word. I found when I was 15 years old, I came from a family that had moved from Sweden to Australia.

And for many migrants, life can be pretty tough. I don't know if you've probably heard stories here in this church. But after living in Australia for just a few years, my parents split up.

[13 : 40] And we stayed with... My mum moved away and we lived with my father. And it was pretty lonely. It was pretty hard. We struggled in many different ways.

Having friends, money, all kinds of stuff. And anyway, I went to a Christian camp. And I found Christ through going to this Christian camp and going to listen to a preacher afterwards.

And my life changed. And it was an amazing change in my life because before that, life had felt pretty bleak. Like there wasn't a lot of purpose to it.

It's like, why am I here? What am I doing? You know, it seemed kind of empty. But after coming to Christ, it was like my life had found the source of fulfillment.

And I had a joy and a satisfaction and a peace in my life that I had never experienced before in my life. It was an amazing change. And for me, it was like walking on cloud nine for a number of months before, you know, sort of reality hit.

[14 : 49] But it was an amazing experience coming to Christ and to find that fulfillment. And I think that that is the kind of experience that Isaiah is talking about here. That if you're looking for your satisfaction and your joy in anything else outside of a relationship with him through Jesus, then you're looking in the wrong place.

You're not going to find it. But so many of us, we keep looking in the wrong directions. We keep looking for other things that we think are going to satisfy us.

Isaiah then reminds us of the purpose that we are called as well. It's not just about finding joy and satisfaction for ourselves. That's not the end goal. The end goal is actually that God has called us for a specific purpose.

He called Israel for a purpose. He formed the nation of Israel to be a witness and a light to the nations around them. And that's the same with us. God's purposes have not changed.

And that's what he reminds them of. And he says it this way. And we probably need to unpack it a little bit because it might be a little bit hard to understand. He says, Now we don't have King David today, but we do have his son.

[16 : 57] The son of David, King Jesus, who now sits on the throne and has been raised from the dead. And the purpose is still the same. That we will be a witness and a light.

That we will call the nations to God. That we will be the kind of people that will reflect the image of God. And that we will reflect his splendor to the nations around us.

Not because we're fantastic. Not because we're good or have done anything special. But because of Jesus and the way that he has changed us. So for us, coming over 2,500 years after this was written, We have now received that same promise and purpose through Jesus, our King.

The one who is the true son of David. The Holy One of Israel. That is already talked about in chapter 53. And explained that he is the one to come.

So when Jesus says, as Ella read out, you know, you will go and make disciples of all nations.

[18 : 09] Teaching them to obey everything. Jesus is not saying anything new. He's saying something that has been the theme of scripture right from the very beginning. That all nations will come to know and to love and to live under the lordship of the Lord God.

How are we doing in taking that witness to all nations? Are we working in line with what God has called us to be?

What he's called you to be? Where you are? In your workplace? In your family? At your school or college? I want to give one example today of the tremendous impact that the gospel can have on a nation.

I want to talk about Myanmar. I want to talk about the life of Adoniram Judson. Adoniram Judson was one of the first missionaries to go and share the gospel with the people of Myanmar.

In the mid-1800s. Adoniram Judson. And he became known as the Apostle of the Love of Christ to Myanmar. That would be a wonderful title to have, wouldn't it?

[19 : 26] He was in prison for his faith because he got caught up in a civil war. So he was American and the people of Myanmar, the Burmese people, they rose up and they rebelled against British rule.

And he got caught in the middle even though he wasn't British but he was captured and imprisoned and he was held for a long time. He actually went out from America as a Congregationalist missionary and was sent by the Congregationalist.

But he was going to meet up with a famous Baptist missionary in India on the way to Myanmar, William Carey. Have you heard of William Carey? So he thought, oh I'm going to meet with the great William Carey so I better study up on my Baptist theology so that I have an answer to the question of baptism.

And so he studied this on the boat over to India and by the time he arrived in India he had become convinced that believers' baptism was the way that we should be practicing our faith.

And so he asked William Carey to baptize him and so he went to Myanmar as a Baptist and not a Congregationalist which is a very interesting. And the biggest church in Myanmar today is the Baptist church for that reason.

[20 : 44] Anyway, he was imprisoned. Prison in Myanmar in those days was terrible. They were basically hung upside down to sleep during the night. His wife had to bring him food every day in the prison and exhausted herself.

So shortly after he was released she died. She had a baby and died. And so he lost more than three children. He lost two wives in Myanmar. After the death of his first wife he was so bereaved and was in such grief he just went away and lived in a small hut for a few months just to grieve and to recommit his life for the Lord.

And when he came back he had a renewed sense of call that God was calling him to reach the people of Myanmar with the gospel of Jesus. And so he took up that call and a very interesting thing happened.

He really didn't really have much success in entering into the Burmese people because they're Buddhist and very resistant and still are to this very day. But he did have some inroads into the Karen.

And there was one particular man who was a Karen man who was a thief and a murderer. And he'd murdered, from what my reading was that he'd murdered over 30 people.

[22 : 03] But he needed a job. And so Adoniram Judson took him on and said, okay, you can work with me. And through the patient explaining of the gospel many times to this man, this man became a believer in the Lord Jesus.

Now the Karen had a prophecy or a kind of a, what do you call it, I call it a prophecy or a tale going right back from the old days.

That one day a white man was going to come with a book and explain to them the way back to the one true God. Yawah they called him. Isn't that amazing?

And so they had this fable and when this man became a believer in the Lord Jesus, he said, it's come true. This man is actually the guy. He is the white man who has brought us the book to teach us the way to Yawah.

And so as a result of that, many hundreds of Karen people became Christians and gave their lives to follow Jesus. And today there are over 150,000 Karen Christians.

[23 : 10] And the Karen are a people of Myanmar, but they're also spread into Thailand. And I don't know if they go up as far as Laos and China, but certainly in Myanmar and Thailand there are many of them.

You see, when God's people take the call to be a witness to the nation seriously, we're actually joining the Lord in his plan for the people of the world.

And as a church, we can't shut our eyes to this responsibility that we have to be a witness to all nations around us. Not just to the people who are friends or that we feel comfortable with.

And so Isaiah reminds the Israelites of their purpose in calling out the nations to embrace the Lord. And now he's reminding them to turn to him and to embrace his ways.

And this is the very foundation of our faith. He turns to them and he says, Verse 6, he says, Israel has rejected God, but in the last few chapters, especially in chapters 50 to 54, that precede this one.

[24 : 37] And he tells them about how he's going to restore them to Yahweh. God is near to each one of us. The time to turn to him is now.

This is the same message that we need to obey. And it's also the same message that we take to others. We need to stop pretending that God is not watching or he doesn't care.

Or that he's not strong enough to help us. Or that we've been too bad for God to be able to forgive us. He can.

And he has. And he will forgive you, restore you. And he's opened the door for you to do that. And if you turn to him, he will restore you. Because God does not think like you or I think.

You know, we think, oh, you know, if, you know, we're so difficult for us to think that if we accept God, that he will forgive us.

[25 : 40] And that he will restore us. But that's what he reminds us of. He says, 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 send it.

God does not work like us. His ways are different to ours. We often think that humbling ourselves and being sorry for what we've done is somehow weak and inexcusable.

How often do you see politicians saying, oh, look, I'm sorry. I made a mistake. I'm going to do better next time.

We expect life to be comfortable, predictable and secure. And in New Zealand, that's pretty much what we have. A comfortable, predictable and secure life.

[27 : 12] But God's way is different. He shows us what he's like in sending Jesus to us. Weak and vulnerable as a little child.

Not forcing himself upon us, but expressing his desire to forgive us with love. To bring us back to himself. Giving himself on the cross.

Taking the punishment for our sins. So that we can go free. Simply by believing in him. And giving our lives to him. And identifying ourselves with Jesus' life.

The disciples didn't understand that. They thought, this is crazy. They wanted a victor. They wanted a king. They wanted someone who was victorious and powerful. Someone who would come and defeat their enemies.

And then, in Isaiah's time, a huge tragedy happened. The nation of Israel was wiped out under the Babylonians.

[28 : 21] Many people were killed. And the whole nation was exiled for 70 years before they could return and rebuild the nation. And you might think, well, Myanmar is a great success story.

Well, it's not. In the last few years, the same thing has happened in Myanmar. I'll just read to you what the Victorian Baptist Association wrote on their website.

They said this. Prior to the war, the Baptist Church in Myanmar was the fastest growing church in the world, with 1.7 million Baptists. But the last two years since the military coup in February 2021 have been horrific.

Many families have lost their homes and are hiding in the jungle from the ongoing military airstrikes and attacks. The military has shot protesters in the streets, released bombs that have burned entire communities, and used brute force against anyone who has pressed for peace.

Many have experienced the violence of a military willing to use whatever force is necessary to maintain their power over the people. Several prominent Baptist leaders have been arrested and remain in prison.

[29 : 33] You know, God has done amazing things among the tribal people of Myanmar. And there are many believers in Jesus there. And we need to pray that God will have his mercy on that country.

And that he will bring many more people to know himself. And as they do, as they receive that peace in their hearts, that they will be able to bring peace to the nation of Myanmar.

And that they will have true satisfaction and peace and joy, even in spite of the severe suffering and the pain that they're going through right now.

And in R.M. Judson, he found this sort of satisfaction in the love of Christ, which sustained him through all the trials that he faced. And that's what he says. Near the end of his life, he wrote this.

He said, The love of Christ, the efficacy of the love of Christ, the secret of life's inspiration, the source of heaven's bliss, a study for eternity.

[30 : 38] Oh, the wondrous love of Christ. So the challenge for us is to ask ourselves, where do we look for true satisfaction?

It's so easy to get caught up these days in the things around us. There are so many things out there to get distracted from walking with God.

You know, there are those things that are very addictive and bad for us. You know, gambling, alcohol, porn. I think most people would agree that, you know, these things are not healthy.

They're not good for you. But there are other things too that are, you know, they're good things. Great things that people get involved in. That can also draw our attention away from God.

You know, sport, computers, social media, gaming, fashion, socializing, hobbies, friendships, music, art.

[31 : 43] You know, the list is endless. These things are not bad. They're really good things. But they can draw us away from the most satisfying thing that we can have in our lives. And that is peace with God.

The invitation is to come to the Lord, to listen to his words, to seek him and admit that our ways are not honoring to God.

That we cannot find satisfaction in our own efforts, in our own pursuits. So as we start off this week, let's start off with a commitment to make him our priority.

And the promise is there that we will have joy and satisfaction and peace in our lives. You'll go out with joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you.

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush, we'll grow the juniper. Instead of the briars, the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign that will endure forever.

[32 : 47] I wonder if how we're living out God's purposes for us in reaching the nations. You know, I'm at we talk about six different ways that you can be involved.

So I'll just go through them very quickly. You've got the six ways there. So one is to be involved in sending someone. So you can be involved in standing behind somebody who's going.

So it's great to see the church, you know, being willing to sponsor people to go to Vanuatu and being involved in them and also probably praying for them and supporting them as they go to do that as well.

But you can also be involved in welcoming people right here. You can be involved in welcoming people who are coming to New Zealand for the very first time.

Some friends of ours, they opened up a whole business welcoming international students who are coming to study in New Zealand and welcoming them and looking after them and sharing the love of Christ with them as they did that.

[33 : 50] There are many projects like that. But you can also be a, you know, host people in your home, welcome people who come to church, you know, being welcoming to all kinds of people, especially new migrants.

You know, we've had this huge inflow of migrants into New Zealand since COVID. And this is a fantastic opportunity to be sharing the love of Christ with people from other nations as well.

We can mobilize people. We can encourage and train and raise up people who are willing to go and just make sure that they are spiritually prepared, that they are ready to go out and to encourage people to be involved in what God is doing among the nations.

And we can learn. You know, there are lots of books out there that we can read, hear, testimonies of people who've tried to cross cultural barriers and what it's like to be reaching people in different countries.

You know, and every country is different. You know, China is one place. Taiwan is another place. Thailand and Vietnam and Cambodia and Myanmar, they're all different.

[34 : 57] Indonesia. Indonesia. The context is different. And it takes different strategies and different ways of explaining and sharing the love of Christ in each one of those contexts. And then we can pray.

We can be involved in praying. So I've got prayer guides here specifically for Myanmar. So if you want to pray for Myanmar, you can come and get one of these prayer guides.

I'm going to charge \$5 for them, but I'll give you a bank account that you can send money to for that. So if you want one of these, then I'd be very happy to hand out some of these for you.

And there's stories there about what it's like for the local believers in Myanmar, how the gospel is entering into people's lives in that country and some of the challenges that they face living in that context as well.

And then, of course, we can go. We can take ourselves and we can be involved in actually going. And it will change your life. I'm sure as we've just heard this morning and this evening in Vanuatu, you know, it's life changing actually being involved in going and being involved in sharing the gospel cross-culturally.

[36 : 09] We had a young friend, Jeremy, and he got involved in a soccer ministry because every year, well, not during COVID, but this year is the first year, they're still looking for people to go on this soccer trip, by the way, to central Thailand.

And so you can join a team of internationals who get together and then they travel around to different towns in central Thailand and play soccer games with a local team.

So it might be the bank team or the police team or the local technical college team. And it becomes a big, you know, kind of community event where everybody goes and watches it.

And they use this project to work together with the local church to organise events around this soccer game. So they might go out and have big dinners with local community leaders and the other team.

And they look for opportunities to share God's love while they're doing that. Because in Thailand, you can be quite open about the fact that you're Christian, you love God and what a difference that has made in your life as well.

[37 : 13] And so Jeremy went on this trip and I think it was the second week, he twisted his ankle really badly. And so he couldn't play for most of the tour.

Instead, he was sitting on the side peeling oranges for the rest of the team. And he found that really frustrating. But he was really touched by the opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus with all the people that they came across.

And also to see that, you know, hardly anybody in central Thailand is a Christian. Everybody, you know, worships idols. And that really impacted him.

And so he had a really good job in a bank. And when he came back to Australia, he went to the Christmas party that same year for the bank.

And they had had a best year ever. They'd made a record profit. And they were handing out bonuses left, right and centre. They had their Christmas party in the Opera House restaurant.

[38 : 12] You know, the most expensive place they could find. And he just looked at this and he just thought, this is all so empty. You know, this is not where I want to invest the rest of my life.

You know, it looks good. It's a lot of fun. But it's not where my heart is. My heart wants to serve the Lord Jesus. And so he quit, went to Bible college, and he's now serving in a very multicultural church in Western Sydney, reaching out to Buddhist young people.

And they have a big group of 25 young people who are all struggling. They're following Jesus, but they all have Buddhist parents and just struggling to live in a different country to where their parents grew up.

And there's a lot of challenges and a lot of tensions. But they're seeing God at move. They're seeing God at work in the lives of these young people. And it's really exciting.

So where are you investing your life? Where do you want to go? How can God use you to be reaching out to the nations, to be reaching people who need to hear the gospel of Jesus?

[39 : 29] How has God gifted you in a special way? And where do you find that you want your true source of joy and satisfaction to be in your life?

So these are the questions I want to leave you with. And this is what Isaiah is challenging the people of Israel with. And this is what we also need to be thinking about as we make decisions about our futures in our lives as well.

So why don't we pray about that and just commit ourselves to the Lord? Father, we thank you for these words of Isaiah. We thank you that even though they were written two and a half thousand years ago, that they are still very relevant today.

Because your purposes don't change. Your plan is still the same. And we can see how they've come true in the Lord Jesus. Father, that the Lord Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that Isaiah talked about.

And that you've now passed on that responsibility to be a light and a witness to the nations. Not to Israel, but to us, Father, who have inherited all the promises that you've made to the nation of Israel.

[40 : 41] And we thank you for that. We pray, Father, that you will just help us to look to you for our true source of satisfaction and joy.

And that we will find it in you and following you and serving you and having that new life that you give us in Christ. We pray.

Amen.