**God’s Ways Are Higher Than Our Ways**

December 13, 2020

Isaiah 55:1-13

Key Verse 55:9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Many smart people think that they know better than God. Tony Hsieh was a founder of Zappos, online shoe store. He was clearly very smart. He thought that he could bio hack his body according to his will. Once he did 26-day diet based on letters of alphabet. On day one, he would eat only food starting with A. On the last day, there was almost no food starting with Z. So he would fast that day. He thought that he could achieve happiness by his own will power. But he was a very unhappy man. He was addicted with drugs and alcohols. He died tragically at the age of 46 in a house fire. In this passage, God says clearly, “My ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” We must acknowledge that we are not God, and God’s ways are higher. We must come to God humbly in his way, acknowledging our need and our thirst and our hunger. Then God will satisfy us in fruitfulness, joy and peace.

Look at verses 1-2a. “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?” To whom is God’s gracious invitation given? The answer is, two kinds of people. The first kind is described in verse 1. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money.” The first kind of person that God invites to come is thirsty people who can’t pay for what they need. Two things: thirsty, and can’t pay. If you are in this category, you have come today with thirst in your heart. Your heart feels like the brown grass in a backyard. It has not rained for a long time. A lot of old hopes have dried up. Dreams have almost died. Dead-end streets again and again; Empty. Unfulfilled. Dissatisfied. Knowing there has to be something more to life. But now everything that looks good is out of reach. No money. No strength. No motivation. But at least a longing. A thirst. God says, “You are just the one I am after: Come, all you who are thirsty and have no money—no resources, no power, no prestige.” God is inviting you to enjoy the banquet of salvation.

But there is a second kind of person whom God invites. This kind of person is described in verse 2a. “Why do you spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” In verse 1, God said, “You who have no money, come!” In verse 2a, he talks to someone who has money, who has the strength to labor. The first kind of person is spiritually bankrupt and knows it. They are thirsty and broke. But the second kind of person isn’t there yet. He has money and he is spending it. He has strength and he is laboring. But what is the result? Frustration. He is not like the other guy—burnt out, at the end of his rope. He is still spending and still working, dreaming, searching— different job, different house, different wife, new computer, new books, new diet—there is still a lot of looking around left in this person. But no satisfaction. When you are honest, you know there is a deep need and longing on the inside, no matter how self-sufficient you look on the outside. God knows even better than you. He has you in mind when he says, “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” So, two kinds of people are invited by the Lord: the thirsty who are broke and cannot pay, and the thirsty who think they can pay and work their way to satisfaction. I think everybody would have to admit to being in one of those two groups, if we are honest with ourselves.

Nothing in life is free. If we are given a free food, we immediately look at it with suspicion. God’s invitation seems too good to be true. But God says that these life-giving beverages are free. They can be bought, but not by us. There is no price that we could ever pay. Another person had to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows and pay the price for our forgiveness and our life. That’s what Jesus, the Messiah, did for all who trust in him. Now the water and milk and wine of God’s grace is free for all who turn from sin and seek their satisfaction in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Look at verse 2b. “Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.” The word “good” means that what God offers is top quality; it is the best there is. And the word “richest of fare” means that it is abundant. The water is good and it is plentiful. The milk is good and it is plentiful. The wine is good and it is plentiful. The Bible loves to talk about the riches of God’s glory and the fullness of joy. He gives what is best and it never runs out. Jesus said in John 4:14a, “But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Wow! One drink satisfies our soul forever. This looks like a miracle drink. But this is true. When we taste goodness of Jesus by accepting his invitation, our spiritual thirst is quenched forever. This seems too good to be true. But God’s ways are higher than our ways.

Note that in verse 1 he says, “Come to the waters,” but in verse 3 he says, “Come to me.” God is our living water. God is our nourishing milk. God is our delightful wine. Look at verse 3b. “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.” God says that when we come to him, he makes a covenant with us. What kind of covenant? The same kind of covenant that he made with King David in 2 Samuel 7—a covenant of “steadfast, sure love.” This means that, when you come to God, he binds himself by an unbreakable oath to pursue you with goodness and mercy all your days right into eternity. Psalm 89:49 says, “Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?” Like this psalmist, we

could say to God, “O Lord, you promised to David a throne of triumph over all his foes that would endure forever. You promised to be his Shepherd, to lead him in righteousness and protect him in the valley of the shadow of death. You promised to follow him with goodness and mercy all his days. Now you promised me that if I come to you, and seek my satisfaction in your presence, you will make me a partner in that covenant with David. I believe that you will do it. I come to you. Show me now your steadfast, sure love for David.”

But you might ask, just like the psalmist, “Has God been faithful to his covenant? Where is his great love?” Yes. God has been faithful. The covenant made with David came to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the son of David who was raised from the dead and now sits on God’s right hand. So the awesome promise that God holds out to you in verse 3 is that if you will hear his voice and come to him, he will make a covenant with you that is just as sure, and unshakable as the covenant that brought his Son to earth and raised him from the dead and seated him forever at the right hand of God. If you are looking for something solid in life, something that doesn’t change or let you down, something that will make you happy and be satisfying to your soul forever, God offers you in this verse the unwavering love and unbreakable commitment that he has toward his own Son. When you believe this, you will be deeply rooted in God’s grace, and you can withstand against Satan’s accusations and deceptions.

In order to respond to God’s invitation, we must seek God. Look at verse 6. “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” The first thing we do to seek the Lord is call on him. That is part of our everyday language. We call the waiter. We call a friend on the telephone. We call for help on 911. You don’t need a Ph.D. to call for help. A child can do it. That is the first step in what it means to seek the Lord. We simply say, “O Lord, help me!” Or, “O Lord, I need you, come and save me, forgive me, make me new.” Or, “Father, I need your guidance, show me the way to go.” Look at verse 6 again. “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” There is a window of opportunity. You do not know when it will shut. It is open today. We know it is because the Word of God is being heard. Everybody needs to call upon the Lord—to seek the Lord right now while he may be found. Some need to call on him for salvation (Ro 10:13). If you put off a decision to accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord until after you have experienced the world a little more, you need to do it today; you may never have another chance. Some need to call on him for help in overcoming an evil way or an unrighteous thought. And some need to call on him for counsel and guidance.

Look at verse 7. “Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God for he will freely pardon.” To seek the Lord means to forsake wicked ways and unrighteous thought. If you take seriously the positive side of seeking God, you have to take seriously the negative side of turning from behaviors and thoughts that offend him. You cannot seek God and practice sin or plan sin at the same time. If you call out to God, “O Lord, I need you, help me!” one of the very first things that will happen in answer to that prayer is that God will awaken your conscience to something in your life that needs to be forsaken. If God answers your call in that way and you refuse to forsake what your conscience condemns, then you cease to seek God, and your words become empty (as in Isaiah 58:1–2). You can’t seek God where he is not found, in sin. If we repent, God will pardon us beyond our imagination. All we have to do is turn to God. Some people think that they are too sinful to be pardoned. But that’s not true. When we come to God, he will freely pardon. Why?

Look at verses 8-9. “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” God’s thoughts are as high as the heavens and are high above the earth. God’s thinking and his ways are different from our thinking and our ways. We thought it was impossible to receive God’s forgiveness but God forgave all our sins. Praise God. For example, in Noah’s day, men of God chose godless wives who were physically attractive. Man sees the outward things; God sees the heart. He saw that every inclination of the thoughts of men’s hearts was only evil all the time, and he decided to destroy the world with a devastating flood. One man, Noah, listened to God. He did not completely understand God’s ways, but he listened to God with humble heart and obeyed him. He was saved. Noah invited his friends to come but nobody came to the ark. Once the door was shut, it was too late. If we give up our own thoughts and ways and listen to God, he will guide us to Jesus who is our way and truth. God’s ways are higher than our ways.

Look at verses 10-11. “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 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.” We do not believe in God’s promise blindly. Our faith is based on the power of his word and his faithfulness in keeping his promises. In history, we see many times that when God’s promises seemed to have failed, God’s words never failed. When God said, “This woman who was past the age of child-bearing shall bear a son next year” (Gen 18:10; Lk 1:13), people laughed at the absurdity, but it happened just as God said. God said a little army of 300 men would defeat an army of 135,000 men (450 to 1)! Crazy? But it happened! One theologian said, “Unique among all books ever written, the Bible accurately foretells specific events in detail many years or sometimes centuries before they occur. Approximately 2,500 prophecies appear in the pages of the Bible, about 2,000 of which already have been fulfilled to the letter—no errors. The remaining 500 are prophecies yet future to us.”

When we deny our own ideas and accept God’s ways, God will do what we never thought could be done. Look at verses 12-13. “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow.” On your own, your journey through life mountains have been hard to climb, and forests tangled and dark have been your dread; but now if you come to God, and accept his ways, the mountain which you feared shall break forth into song, and the forest at which you trembled shall become an orchestra in which every tree shall clap its hands for joy. Your heart will be so filled with gladness that it shall overflow and flood all nature with joy. Here the myrtle is a beautiful evergreen shrub. Its fragrant leaves and white or pale pink flowers were used to perfume rooms and were also made into wreaths for the nobility in their banquet. Its edible bluish-black berries were swallowed to sweeten the breath. Instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This indicates the change of one’s character and personality. As one stays in the fellowship with God, God transforms them into a man or woman with Jesus’ image. Then their soul is deeply and fully satisfied. They then will never go thirsty.

If all this seem to be too good to be true, remember that God’s ways are higher than our ways. God can bless you beyond your desire. He can delight you beyond a dream. All that God asks you to do is to lend the willing ear and yield the believing heart. “Listen, that you may live.”

Big Idea: Accept God’s invitation and enjoy fruitfulness, joy and peace