

I. Introduction

- A. **Factoid:** Few of our traditional “invitation songs” are older than 1830. *Why?*
1. Preachers before 1830 didn’t offer an invitation as part of the sermon
 - a. They did an evangelistic hard sell (*Sinners in the Hands of Angry God*)
 - b. But conversion was seen as the work of Holy Spirit, not human agency
 2. During the revivals of the 1800’s, preachers thought Spirit needed help
 - a. Charles G. Finney popularized the idea of “*altar call*” in the 1830’s
 - 1) He invited believers to come to altar (*later added mourner’s bench*)
 - 2) This allowed Finney to be able to count the number of responses
 - b. Billy Sunday and Dwight L. Moody would later add songs to altar call
 - c. Many “invitation songs” were written specifically for these revivals
 3. Churches of Christ got our start during 2nd Great Awakening revivals
 - a. Many of our churches got their start after “*protracted gospel meetings*”
 - b. At many of these meetings, there was both an evangelist and exhorter
 - 1) Evangelist would preach the sermon which would last 1-2 hours
 - 2) Exhorter would emotionally offer the invitation (20 minutes)
 - c. And there was always an invitation song (Jimmy Allen, *Just As I Am*)
 4. Our basic format for doing church came from this revival model
 - a. If I skip the invitation, people say that I don’t believe baptism (*really*)
 - b. Worse, people will sit there for hours not realizing that church is over
 - c. We invented it in 1800’s, but you can’t end church without invitation
- B. Well, Isaiah evidently thought he couldn’t end his book with an altar call
1. Or table call; **Isaiah 55** offers an invitation to the table of the Lord
 - a. We sang, “*All who are thirsty; all who are weak, Come to the fountain*”
 - b. He writes to people who need to know God still loves and wants them
 2. We need that too! We tell others we’re doing fine, but often we’re not
 - a. Sometimes we struggle with the world around us and with our faith
 - b. Sometimes we just need to hear that a place at God’s table is prepared

II. All Who Are Thirsty

A. The Lord's Invitation (Isaiah 55:1-2)

1. Remember: Isaiah's audience here is Israel during the Babylonian exile
 - a. In Isaiah 1-39, he warns them what will happen if they don't change
 - b. In Isaiah 40-66, he says that though they suffer, things would change
2. To a weary people in a dry land, God offers His invitation (Isa 55:1-2)
 - a. This is a call to eat and drink of the bounty of the table of the Lord
 - b. All they have to do is show up; their money is no good at His table
 - c. When we first came, we went out to dinner with Mom and Dad
 - 1) Sometimes Dad would pay for our lunch; sometimes he wouldn't
 - 2) He never let us know, "*You get glass or water and toothpick...*"
3. God's invitation is free; our money is no good— but we do have to come

B. The Lord's Witness (Isaiah 55:3-5)

1. Israel saw herself as the chosen people of God in the absolute worst way
 - a. Not only did God choose and love them; He chose and loved only them
 - b. Rabbis thought only reason that God made Gentiles was fuel for hell
 - 1) Calvinist explaining "*limited atonement*" (Jesus died only for elect)
 - 2) He made the exact same point; God created the non-elect for hell
 - c. I can't believe that; neither should the Jews have believed it (Isa 49:6)
2. God will invite "*all who are thirsty.*" That means ALL who are thirsty
 - a. Yes, his covenant was with David; Isaiah has made that plain (Isa 55:3)
 - b. His invitation will include people they had never heard of (Isa 55:4-5)
3. The church I grew up taught it was the only true church— known for that
 - a. I once had an interesting conversation with someone in Beverly Hills—
Aren't you guys the church that believes you're the only ones going to heaven
 - b. I wanted to say a lot of our folks believe that most of us won't make it!
 - c. There are several problems with view we're the only people of God
 - 1) **First**, we equate who we know with who God knows (Mark 9:40)
 - 2) **Second**, we draw our own legalistic and artificial line (Acts 15:4)
 - 3) **Third**, it flies in the face of direct statements of God (John 10:16)
 - 4) **Finally**, it causes us to focus on identity rather than on mission

C. The Lord's Urgency (Isaiah 55:6-7)

1. Most of us have had a salesman tell us that an offer is "good today only"
 - a. You can get a great deal on this timeshare, but you have to act today
 - b. If you call right now we'll throw in an extra widget and a Ginsu knife!
2. But there is another kind of "*you must act today*" offer... like from doctor
 - a. Some offers have an expiration date because we have an expiration date
 - b. We must seek God today and accept his invitation now (Isa 55:6-7)
 - c. There is a sense of urgency expressed through the Bible, right?
 - 1) We may get to the point where we are too set in our sin (Ecc 12:1)
 - 2) That is what the Hebrew writer was concerned about (Heb 3:13)
 - 3) Like these texts, Isaiah is calling for repentance before it's too late
3. Seek God while He may be found? He isn't going anywhere... we are!

D. The Lord's Majesty (Isaiah 55:8-11)

1. You have to understand how improbable God's offer was to Israel
 - a. He is offering a reconciliation while they are slaves in Babylon
 - b. They are a displaced people in a foreign country... and God invites?
 - 1) It's like an email from a Nigerian prince offering million bucks
 - 2) You don't believe promises like that; they're too good to be true
2. So God reminds them who it is that they are dealing with (Isa 55:8-11)
 - a. The limitations of time, space and reality are not limitations for God
 - b. His promises come true; His word doesn't return to Him empty
 - 1) God can take the mess they've gotten into and make it new again
 - 2) God can do the same thing with our mess, but we have to believe

E. The Lord's Promise (Isaiah 55:12-13)

1. This is a picture of the second Exodus, right? Go out in joy...
 - a. As they return, the mountains and hills will burst into song
 - b. The trees will clap their hands... it'll be a Disney movie!
2. In Psalms 137, the psalmist can't sing God's song "*by rivers of Babylon*"
 - a. But there was a time coming when all creation would sing His praise
 - b. God would make things new for "*all who are thirsty, all who are weak*"

III. Conclusion

- A. Jarrid Wilson was young associate pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship
1. He and his wife Juli founded faith-based organization “*Anthem of Hope*”
 - a. This group works with Christian people struggling with depression
 - 1) The church often sees depression and mental illness as a faith issue
 - 2) To struggle with a mental illness is to not have enough faith
 - b. Many of us don’t get the help we need because we shouldn’t need it
 2. Last week, a day after blogging on suicide prevention, he killed himself
 - a. Jarrid had struggled all of his life with depression and anxiety
 - 1) He did believe in Jesus and poured himself into serving others
 - 2) But when you’re in pain, sometimes all you can see is the pain
 - b. He killed himself the day before National Suicide Prevention Day
 3. Suicide doesn’t get the last word; Jesus always gets the last word
 - a. No matter what our pain or struggle may be, Jesus gets last word
 - b. Our faith is not built on answers or explanations; it’s built on promises
 - c. We have to decide every day if we are going to trust God’s promises
- B. We sit here today looking freshly scrubbed in our Sunday go to meeting best
1. But sometimes we put on our Sunday mask and Sunday smile as well
 - a. We’re all “*just fine.*” We know because that’s what we tell each other
 - b. Many aren’t fine but fighting with unseen dragons... just like Jarrid
 - 1) But here is one inescapable truth if you are fighting dragons
 - 2) No matter how hard you fight, no matter how courageous you are...
 - 3) No matter how faithful you stay, sometimes the dragon will win
 2. That’s why Isaiah’s invitation text is so important for us to hear today
 - a. Satan will never give up in trying to convince us that God doesn’t care
 - 1) He will never stop telling us that we are worthless and hopeless
 - 2) Whatever is the dragon that he uses against us, he will not relent
 - b. But God keeps telling us, “All who are thirsty, all who are weak...”
 - c. Come to the fountain; remember that dragon doesn’t get the last word
 3. Jesus does. Don’t fight your dragons alone; come to the fountain!