

**Isaiah 55:1-3**

**SI:** This is a sermon series on the Gospel. Gospel means good news. It's the good news of forgiveness and salvation and resurrection life through Jesus Christ. We've been looking at different facets of the Gospel in Scripture. This morning let's look at something that is often called the free offer of salvation.

**INTRO:** A number of years ago our family went to New York City for four days. We discovered the most economical way for us to get around the city was to buy everybody a seven-day unlimited metro pass.

That was actually cheaper than buying four one-day unlimited passes.

So when our trip was over and we got to the airport to fly home, that meant we still had these five metro passes that were good for three days.

I hate to see something good go to waste and I love to stick it to the man—so I decided to give the passes to some lucky traveler, hopefully a family of five who were just arriving in New York for a vacation, or a group of five friends.

We were at the airport gate waiting to board our plane, so when another plane arrived and people started getting off, I held the cards up and said:

I've got five free metro passes here. Five free metro passes.

Everybody ignored me. I managed to catch the eye of a few people and tried to personally engage them: Do you want some free metro passes?

They acted like I was offering them drugs.

Finally, when I thought nobody was going to take them some college students said, Free! Cool! This is awesome, we're set for our trip. Thanks so much!

Over the past few weeks we've looked at the content of the Gospel and we've seen that it's everything Jesus Christ did for our salvation.

The most extraordinary things that have ever happened in the history of the world Jesus did.

The incarnation. The Son of God took on human nature and came into this world.

The crucifixion. He became a man so he could offer his life a sacrifice for our sin.

The resurrection. He conquered sin and death by rising from the grave.

You couldn't save yourself and escape God's judgment but God himself intervened to deliver you from judgment and to give you life!

By faith in Christ, his life-giving power comes to you so that your life is transformed, your suffering is redeemed, and you too will one day be raised.

This passage in Isaiah tells us something else about the Gospel.

It tells us that God himself invites, urges, calls everyone to come and receive the free gift of salvation.

This is the facet of the Gospel that I want us to explore this morning.

As I said a moment ago, theologians call this the free offer of salvation.

God saying to all people: Come and welcome!

Come to the water. Come to my Son. Everybody come.

What I'm offering you cannot be bought by money or labor and I'm not asking you to pay. Jesus has already paid.

So I want to look at this under two points.

1. The mystery of the free offer of salvation
2. The good news of the free offer of salvation

Credit where credit is due: Sermon on this passage by Robert Rayburn

## **MP#1 The mystery of the free offer of salvation**

In Isaiah 55 God extends an invitation to everyone.

He doesn't limit his invitation to social or economic position, or education, or ethnic, racial, national, or religious background, or even to a person's moral background and past deeds. There's no discrimination.

Anyone who will listen and respond can come to the waters and drink.

And it's clear from the tone of this passage that God wants everyone to come.

This isn't the only place the Bible says God wants everyone to be saved, or the only place God extends an invitation for anyone and everyone to come.

There are lots of passages that say this. Let me give you some examples.

Is 45 Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.

Ez 31 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

Mt 23, Jesus was weeping over the unbelief his fellow Jews and he said:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Mt 11, another time Jesus said:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

2 Pt 3 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Throughout Acts, whenever and wherever the Apostles preached, their message to everyone was: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Many people rejected their offer, but it wasn't because God didn't love them or want them to be saved.

We are commanded to love our enemies because God loves his enemies.

Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to them . . . and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

There are other passages with the same message, but Psalm 145 sums it up:

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

These passages raise a deep question:

If God wants all people to be saved, and invites everyone to be saved,  
and if God is all-loving and all-powerful, then why isn't everyone saved?  
If this is really what God wants and he's a sovereign God who can change hearts,  
then why doesn't he change everybody's heart to accept the invitation?

There are two popular answers to that question.

The first answer is that all are not saved because in the final analysis, salvation is up to the individual person to decide.

God may wish for a particular man or woman to be saved.

But God is helpless unless that person chooses him.

The second answer is that God doesn't actually desire the salvation of every person.

He just wants the salvation of some people and only extends an invitation to them.

We can't accept either one of those answers because they both contradict the Bible's teaching.

Salvation does not depend ultimately on the decision of man.

It is a work of God from beginning to end, every link of the chain.

God the Father had to plan salvation in eternity.

God the Son, Jesus, had to come to earth to carry out that plan.

God the Holy Spirit has to spiritually awaken and transform dead hearts.

Every human person is in bondage to sin, dead in sin, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All helpless apart from God's intervention.

So we can't accept that the first answer.

The second answer requires us to take all those verses I just read to you, all those perfectly clear statements about God's love for all, his desire for all to be saved, and give them a twisted, unnatural meaning.

You have to make them say he doesn't really love everybody and he only extends his invitation to a few.

So those are two popular answers.

God is helpless to save anybody apart from the decision of man.

God does not actually desire the salvation of all and only invites those he wants.

But there's another answer that accepts all the biblical data. It's this:

God genuinely desires all people to be saved and he grieves over the lost.

And yet, for his own purposes, God does not save everyone.

God wishes to save all, and he can save all, but God saves only some.

Look at Jesus weeping over Jerusalem.

He wanted everyone in Jerusalem to be saved. He invited them to believe in him.

He saw that their unbelief was keeping them from salvation.

But in another place Jesus says:

No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

God saves people by overcoming their unbelief and drawing them to Christ.

If God doesn't draw people then they remain in unbelief and aren't saved.

So why didn't God do what his Son wanted and draw everybody in Jeru to him?

Jesus wanted it. God the Father wanted it. So why didn't he do it?

I don't know. I can't explain that.

And there are many other things I can't explain.

I know there is only one God, and that he exists in three persons, Father, Son, HS.

But how these three person are one God, I can't explain that.

And nobody has ever come close to explaining it.

I know Jesus of Nazareth was both God and man.

Almighty God, creator of the universe, and a mere human being with all the limitations of humanity. The Bible teaches both. Both are true.

How those were both true at the same time in one person, I have no idea.

And people who try too hard to explain it either downplay is divinity or humanity.

I also don't know how the Bible can be written by men and also be God's word.

I also don't know why God allows evil things to be done if he is all good and all powerful, and particularly why he allowed evil into his creation in first place

Draw a circle on a piece of paper and imagine it's the infinite mind of God.

Now take your pencil and draw a dot to show how much of your mind and understanding corresponds to the mind and understanding of God.

It would be a microscopic dot.

God wants everyone to be saved and none to be lost and he sincerely invites everyone to come to the water and drink freely of eternal life.

And in the secret counsels of his will, God draws some to Christ and not others.

Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor?

How unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable his ways.

That's the mystery of the free offer of salvation.

You need to wrestle with that, but that's not the important thing.

The important thing is the next point . . .

## **MP#2 The good news of the free offer of salvation**

The good news is God wants everyone to be saved.

Paul says in 2 Tim,

God our Savior desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Let's think about some of the implications of this.

It means that all people are of infinite value and worthy of respect because God cares for them and wants them to be saved.

Apply this to the most hardened unbeliever you know or can imagine.

The person in your mind most unlikely to become a Christian, the most resistant, the most hostile to Christianity.

God says it again and again in his word that he loves that person and wants him or her to be saved. God wants him to enjoy the fullness of life.

God wants him to know he has a Father in heaven  
and an elder brother and Savior Jesus,  
and the Holy Spirit as his ever-present helper.

I recently read a new book called *A Change of Affection*

It's the spiritual autobiography of a man named Becket Cook.

He was born in a nominal Roman Catholic home and came to see Christianity as rules and doctrines that made no sense but couldn't be questioned or challenged or you were going to hell. So it was a religion for ignorant, close-minded people. As a very young man he began to experience homosexual attraction.

That became a major issue in his life, so he turned his back on Christianity as he understood it and followed own path.

After college he was accepted to both med school and law school, but his love was art and fashion so he ended up in Los Angeles pursuing his dream.

He became an enormously successful set designer, especially for fashion shoots.

He says: “As a set designer I worked with many stars, including Meryl Streep, Katy Perry, Carrie Underwood, Christina Aguilera, Nicole Richie, Paris Hilton, Nichole Kidman, Kate Beckinsale, Jessica Chastain, Natalie Portman, and Oprah Winfrey, and for many fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. I also worked with many supermodels such as Claudia Schiffer, Guinevere Van Seenus, and Cindy Crawford.”

His work also took him around the world photo shoots in Chicago, New York, Tokyo, Bangkok, Manila, Hong Kong, and Beijing.

Becket was utterly committed to the gay rights movement, all the liberal causes, and had disdain for anyone with opposing views, especially Christians.

He was surrounded by people who believed the same and who celebrated him.

He felt that he had arrived and accomplished all his dreams.

“But,” he admits “lurking underneath all this, deep in the recesses of my mind and heart, was a longing that had yet to be satisfied.”

He went to psychotherapy for five years to try to find satisfaction.

But he finally left his therapist when he asked him in frustration.

“What am I doing here? What is this all for? What’s the meaning of life?”

And his therapist responded: “What do *you* think the meaning of life is?”

In March of 2009 he was in Paris for fashion week, a week packed full shows and activity. One night he was at Stella McCartney’s party in a glamorous Parisian club, the place was packed, music was throbbing, he was sipping champagne at a small table with some big name Hollywood stylists and something happened.

“I took a moment to look around and contemplate the scene. In this sea of beautiful people, I suddenly felt an intense sense of emptiness. I’m not exactly sure what brought it on, but there I was, in the middle of Paris at an ultrachic fashion party, feeling dead inside.”

He describes how he was filled with panic thinking, what if this is all there is?

What am I going to do for the next 50 years of my life?

He returned to Los Angeles, his latest boyfriend broke up with him, which devastated him and added to his sense of emptiness.

Then a few months later he was in a coffee shop and a customer invited him to church, the Reality LA Church in Hollywood.

Going to church went against everything he stood for, but he decided to go.

Let me read you how he describes what happened. This is a little long but it’s good.

The Scripture reading was from the book of Romans.

[The pastor] opened the sermon by saying, ‘Most people think Christianity, or the Christian life, means being a good person and not sinning.’ Yep. That’s what I always thought. As he continued, I began to realize that I had never understood the true gospel. For the first time, I learned that a loving Creator designed us to exist in relationship with him, with each other, and with the rest of creation. Our Creator is a holy, good, and loving God. But we, humanity, turned away from him because of pride. We sought to establish our own autonomy, our own independence, and attempted to become our own god rather than trust in and depend on him. An when this happened, the very fabric of our being went awry. This is the origin of our downfall. Having rejected the Source of our being, our hearts became twisted, self-centered, disoriented, and corrupted. All of us are born into this. We spend much of our lives pursuing our own self-interests at the expense of so many around us. Instead of living to serve others and helping them flourish, we seek our own agendas to others’ destruction, as well as our own. We violate the very creatures God loves so deeply. And in the process, we all remain in enmity with our holy and good Creator.

I had seriously misunderstood the Christian religion to be all about man trying to morally perform, in his strength, to be approved by and made acceptable to God. So, he spends his life just trying to be a good person, thinking maybe if he lives a good enough life he will one day be accepted by God. But now it became clear to me that *no one* could ever perform well enough to measure up.

The overwhelming wonder of God's infinite love is this: While I was broken and a failure, God came to rescue me. He came to love me, to redeem me, and to heal me from sin. Where I failed, Christ succeeded on my behalf. Where I distrusted, Christ was faithful. Where I proudly resisted, he humbly surrendered. Through his obedience, he bridged the chasm between my darkness and his light. On the cross God's Son took my place and became a sacrifice for all my failures. In his resurrection, he triumphed over all my destruction. And now he stands as my victorious Redeemer, offering me—and all who will simply receive him—his forgiveness and vindication. Christ clothes my shame and brokenness with his righteous and holy life.

I heard the Christian message loud and clear that day: I, in and of myself, had nothing to give or do . . . I had only to receive. This *is* the good news.

And that was the beginning of something new in Becket Cook's life.  
I won't read you what happened next but I bet you can guess.

You have a Friend in the highest of all places who wishes you well.

He wants things for you that are more wonderful than anything you have ever even imagined wanting for yourself.

This Friend asks you a probing question:

Why do you spend your money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Why do you do that?

Why do you spend your energy and resources looking for happiness and salvation in things that ultimately disappoint and fail you?

He says, Come to me, and I'll give you food and drink that satisfies.

I'll make an everlasting covenant with you.

What's a covenant? It's a personal relationship affirmed by promises.

I'll make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

Why David? Because he's the forefather of Jesus Christ.

Your Friend in heaven is more concerned for your happiness and fulfillment in this world and the world to come than you have ever been for yourself.

He knows the two options, heaven or hell. He's experienced both of them.

Jesus knows the pain of hell and the joy of heaven and he wants heaven for you!  
So if you haven't yet this morning, accept his free offer of salvation!