

FIVE REASONS WE SHOULD RSVP “YES” TO GOD’S INVITATION (Isaiah 55:1-13)

About three-quarters of a mile north of where we sit, on the southwest corner of Van Buren and Garriott, there is a building that sits cockeyed to the corner. There is a sign on the corner that bears the initials RSVP. That building serves as the home office of a social service agency that seeks to serve the aging population of Enid and North Central Oklahoma.

When it began 45 years ago, those initials stood for Retired Senior Volunteer Program. At that time, the agency received government funding, but as time went on, and as they discovered the great needs facing our seniors, they added services that went beyond their original goals. RSVP gave up that government funding and raised money to do what they now do. While their goal is no longer limited to getting seniors involved in serving the community, they do rely on the help of over 400 volunteers most of whom are seniors. I happen to be one of those volunteers, and while I don’t want to think of myself as a senior, since I am over 55, I do qualify to have lunch at the RSVP Senior Center at 202 West Walnut. I think I am going to check out their menu because lunch is only \$3.

RSVP is a catchy name for an agency. We are used to seeing those initials. We usually see them at the bottom of an invitation we might receive in the mail. It could be an invitation to a wedding reception, or a birthday party, or an anniversary party.

Just last week Enid hosted an Inaugural Ball for Governor Stitt. I am sure I was sent an invitation to that ball, and for some odd reason, the invitation just failed to make it into my mailbox. Had I gotten it, I would have RSVP’d.

I remember, as a child wondering what those letters RSVP meant. I am sure I asked somebody. What I don’t remember is whether I was told this or I imagined it, but for decades, I thought RSVP stood for “Respond Very Promptly.” That works. That gets at the idea of what RSVP means, but that is not what the letters RSVP stands for. It actually comes from a French phrase. Those French words are *repondez sil vous plait*, which simply mean, “Please reply.”

Whenever you receive an invitation of any kind with the request to RSVP, you are being asked, “Hey, what you gonna do? Are you coming or not?” And so, you should politely let them know of your intentions.

Had I received the invitation to the Governor’s Ball, that was so obviously lost in the mail, I would have replied, “I am honored that you asked, but \$100 a plate is just a little too rich for me. Therefore, my wife and I will not be attending.”

In Isaiah 55, God sends out an invitation. He invites us to come. I believe God deserves a reply. I have entitled today’s message, “Five Reasons We Should RSVP ‘Yes’ to God’s Invitation.” We will be looking at all 13 verses of Isaiah 55.

Let’s start by reading the first five verses. So, why should we RSVP “Yes” to God’s invitation?

Reason #1: God’s Offer Is the Best We’ll Get.

You and I will never get a better offer or invitation than the one we read about in v. 1. Look at it again. It should go without saying that Isaiah is not referring to physical thirst. He does not have in view actual wine and milk. The prophet is referring to a spiritual thirst and an inner hunger.

It has been said that every man and woman is born with a God-shaped hole. You can try to fill it with everything this world has to offer, but nothing this world can provide will fill it because it is God-shaped. Only God will fill it.

In the 60's and 70's, many young people tried to fill that God-shaped hole with drugs, sex, and roll, but it left them disillusioned. In the 80's and 90's, many tried to fill that hole with materialism and prosperity, but that didn't work either. Today, many are turning to other means to find fulfillment. For some it might be a relationship. For others, it might be a position of authority. For still others, it might be experiences or travel or something else. Nothing will fill that hole in your soul other than God. Anything else is like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. It just won't fit.

God, through the prophet's pen, is calling out, "Come to the waters." That is what Jesus talked about when He spoke with the woman at the well in Samaria. You can read about it in John 4. That woman, apparently, sought satisfaction and comfort in the arms of a man. She had been married five times and was presently living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus said to that woman, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. That water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

God says, "If you want that kind of water, come. Come, but leave your money at home because that life-giving, soul-satisfying water can't be purchased. It can't be bought. It is free. It is offered without price to those who by their coming humbly admit their need."

God asked an important question in v. 2. All of us are guilty of buying what the world has to offer thinking that it will slake our thirst, that it will sate our hunger, but it doesn't. We buy technological devices so we can participate in social media and stream movies and play games, but even though we are connected to the internet, we feel disconnected from people and relationships and the things that bring true meaning to life.

Verse 2 reminds me of an oil company who at great effort and expense drilled for oil in what they thought was a promising location. They were hoping for a gusher, but in the end, all they had to show for it was an dry hole.

That is us. We spend our money looking for something that will satisfy, but in the final analysis, we end up with a feeling of emptiness—a dry hole.

God offers something better. Look at v. 3. If we will come to God and listen to Him, we will receive life for our souls. This life comes as a result of a covenant, an agreement. He compares it to the agreement He made with David. He holds up David as a witness of His grace and power. David conquered neighboring nations and peoples by His military might, but God's people will draw peoples to themselves from across the world because God has made His people beautiful.

The Apostle Paul latched on to what we find here in Isaiah 55. While he was in Antioch, he entered the synagogue, read from the Scriptures, and he addressed the worshipers. He said to the people:

What God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus . . . And as for the fact that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David” (Acts 13:34-35).

God can offer to us what no one else can offer, and He can do for us what no one else can because Jesus did what no other can do. He rose from the dead. He conquered death. Because He did that, He can give us life that is true life—a life that truly satisfies.

Don’t refuse God’s offer. You will never get a better one.

Reason #2: God Calls for an Urgent Response.

We should RSVP “yes” to God because we must act while we still can. The situation is urgent. Look at v. 6. We don’t come to God when we feel like it. We don’t come when we are good and ready. We come to God when He calls or we don’t come to God at all. If we fail to come when He calls, we have no guarantee that He will call again. The implication of v. 6 is that if we don’t seek God while He can be found, there may come a time when He can no longer be found. The point is not that God will hide from you. The idea is that as you travel away from God through your disobedience and willfulness, there may come a time when you can no longer see Him, when you no longer feel His tug upon your heart. We are to respond to Him while He is near.

Look at v. 7. This verse speaks of the unrighteous man’s ways and thoughts. He is to forsake them, turn from them, repent of them.

The evangelist D.L. Moody taught that every person is born with his or her back to God. When that person repents, her or she turns and faces God.

When you turn from your ways and your thoughts and turn to God, He will have compassion on you. He will pardon you, and His pardon is abundant. His pardon is greater than your sins. The pardon God provides covers all our wicked ways, all our unrighteous thoughts.

His name is Edward Michael Grylls. At the age of one-week old, his sister nicknamed him *Bear*. The name stuck, and he is known to the world as Bear Grylls. He grew up in Great Britain, and became world-famous through his show *Man vs. Wild* followed by *Running Wild with Bear Grylls*. His shows have featured him climbing cliffs, parachuting from helicopters, hot air balloons, and planes, as well as paragliding, ice climbing, running through a forest fire, wading rapids, eating snakes, wrestling alligators, field dressing a camel carcass and drinking water from it, free climbing waterfalls, and many other ridiculous things. In the mid-90’s, Grylls served in the British Army Reserve where he taught among other things, survival skills.

Bear Grylls happens to be a Christian. He is featured in a commercial that promotes the Alpha Course, a powerful, evangelistic course that is offered in many communities. In the commercial you see Bear Grylls running through the jungle, calling in a helicopter, and you hear him say, “When you get a chance to be saved, you gotta grab it.”

That is why we should RSVP “yes” to God’s invitation. When you get a chance to be saved, you gotta grab it.

Reason # 3: God's Plans Are Much Better Than Ours.

While v. 7 addressed the ways and thoughts of sinful man, vv. 8-9 speak of the ways and thoughts of our Holy God. We are assured that His ways and His thoughts are higher than ours. God doesn't think the way we think, and He doesn't do the things we do. God acts and thinks on a plane far higher than the one we occupy.

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever prayed for something and God failed to deliver on the very thing for which you asked? If you can't say *yes*, either you haven't been a Christian very long or you hardly ever pray.

Let me ask another question: As a parent or simply as an adult, has a child ever asked you for something and you had to say *no* because you knew if they got what they asked for, it would not be in their long-term, best interest?

You see, some children would be quite content to have cake and ice cream every morning for breakfast. Some children want pop or a sugary drink with every meal. Some children don't want to go to school on Monday morning just like you don't want to go to work on Monday morning. Are you being cruel in not giving them what they want?

In the same way, God knows what we need, and often, what we want conflicts with what we need. As a loving Father, He will not give us what we want so that He can give us what we need. His thoughts and ways are higher than ours, and His plans are much better than ours.

Ruth Bell Graham, the wife of Billy Graham once said that she thanked God for unanswered prayer because if God had answered all her prayers, she would have married the wrong man, several times.

God's invitation to come to Him and to receive Jesus may conflict with your hopes and dreams. If that is the case, my best advice to you is, jettison your plans and go with God's because His are better than yours.

Reason #4: God's Word Will Help Us Do God's Will.

Look at vv. 10-11. In these two verses God compares His word to rain. The word *rain* would have caught the attention of a Jewish reader who lived in Israel. Israel was completely dependent on the rain. Their southern neighbors who lived in Egypt had the great Nile River. Their neighbors on the other side of the Fertile Crescent had the long, winding Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The people living in those lands could weather a drought because those three rivers provided all the water they needed to live and irrigate their crops.

God's chosen people, however, lived in the little land of Israel. The Jordan River couldn't hold a candle to the great rivers to the south and east. Little Jordan provided no help in farming the land. The people were completely dependent on the rain. We are told that sometimes God withheld the rain to discipline His wayward people. When they returned to Him, He would graciously and mercifully send the rain.

God's people were just as dependent on God's word as they were on the rain God sent, and just as the rain made the crops grow and blessed the people, God used His word to bless His people. God used His word to accomplish His purposes for His people. Still

today, God does His work through His word. God saves people through the ministry of His word. God grows and matures believers as they wrestle with His word. God comforts and encourages His children as they take in His word.

We call His word *The Holy Bible*. The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which simply means *book*; so, this is *The Holy Book*.

I am reminded of the story about the minister who called on a family in his church. The wife met the preacher at the door, invited him in, and sat with him in the living room. She said to one of her children, "Go get that book that mama loves so much." The child returned carrying the Sears and Roebuck Catalog.

The Sears Catalog, by the way, quit being published in 1993, but the Bible tops the bestseller list every year. The Bible is not just the most purchased book of all time, it also is the best-selling book each year, every year.

Verse 11 contains an amazing promise. I like the way the *New Living Translation* puts it. Of His word, God says, "I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it."

Consider a story told by a pastor named Hugh Litchfield. One afternoon he had gone to the Norfolk General Hospital to make a visit. He heard his name being called from across the lobby. As a man approached, he asked; "Hi, Dr. Litchfield, remember me?"

About 10 years earlier the young man had visited the church where Dr. Litchfield was serving. At that time, he was facing possible jail time over tax violations. This had led to alcohol dependency, which had in turn jeopardized his marriage and his relationship with his children. To put it bluntly, his life was a mess.

The man said, "I want to thank you."

"For what?" the pastor asked.

The young man replied:

One Sunday you preached a sermon about taking responsibility for our lives, not to blame what we become on somebody else. God used that sermon to speak to me. That afternoon I got down on my knees and prayed to God and promised to take responsibility for my life. With God's help, I did. Since that time, life has been great. I got out of trouble with the IRS, I became the master over the bottle, my marriage is better than ever. I want to thank you.

Pastor Litchfield later reported:

I was overwhelmed by what he had told me. . . . When I went back to the office, I dug down into my sermon files to get out that sermon that had meant so much to him. Early in my ministry, on Monday morning I would jot down a phrase or two at the top of my sermon manuscript as to how I felt the sermon had gone on Sunday. For that sermon, I glanced at what I had written. "Dead in the water! No one listened! A waste of time!"

Please understand that whether it is in a Sunday School class or in a coffee shop with a friend or a chance meeting on the street, when you speak the word of God, it is never a waste of time. God will accomplish what He intends through His word every time.

Reason #5: God Promises His Joy and Peace.

Look at the last two verses of the chapter (vv. 12-13). After the Israelites were released from their bondage in Egypt, they were pursued by Pharaoh and his army. Isaiah is looking forward to the time when the children of Israel would be told by Cyrus, the King of Persia that they could return to their homeland in Israel. When that time came, they would be pursued by joy and peace. Instead of making that trek in fear as did their forebearers, they would make their pilgrimage with great celebration.

I am reminded of what the psalmist said at the end of Psalm 23, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (23:6a).

Peter Kreeft is an 85 years-old, and he has written over 100 books. He is a professor, not a retired professor, but a professor of philosophy at Boston College. He is also a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Listen to this quote from his book, *Heaven: The Heart’s Deepest Longing*. He wrote:

Now suppose both death and hell were utterly defeated. Suppose the fight was fixed. Suppose God took you on a crystal ball trip into your future and you saw with indubitable certainty that despite everything—your sin, your smallness, your stupidity—you could have free for the asking your whole crazy heart’s deepest desire: heaven, eternal joy. Would you not return fearless and singing? What can earth do to you if you are guaranteed heaven? To fear the worst earthly loss would be like a millionaire fearing the loss of a penny—less, a scratch on a penny.

I don’t want to make light of your losses. Each of us can name a loss, a source of grief that has pained us and wounded us deeply. I do not wish to make light of that. I do want to make much of our future because of God’s great love and grace. Those great griefs pale into insignificance when seen in the light of the eternal joy which shall be ours because of Jesus and what He did for us.

God says, “Come!” Don’t dawdle. Don’t procrastinate. Don’t overthink it. RSVP today. Say “Yes” to Jesus.