

# Isaiah 55

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[ 0 : 00 ] Imagine the scene.

You're bursting with joy, but of a depth and quality you've never before experienced. And that joy is accompanied by a peace that is deep and rich, and nothing, nothing at all is able to cast even the slightest shadow on your sense of happiness that is both settled and exuberant. But this scene that is being set that I'm asking you to imagine is not on some solitary mountaintop. Rather, you're part of a festive multitude from every nation under heaven that is being led out of a world marked by decay and pain and suffering and frustration into a new world where such dark realities are banished and banished to the point where they are no longer even melancholy memories.

And as you cross from that world of darkness into a world of light, the tears of the old world are still rolling down your cheeks.

[ 1 : 42 ] But the one who is leading this festive procession wipes away your tears. And you know, somehow you just know that you will never weep again.

And this is no silent procession that is singing and dancing and laughter. You're walking through a valley on either side or mountains and hills.

And then you witness a scene that is out of this world. It's out of this world. But very much part of that world.

You hear the sound of a choir bursting into song. But the choristers are the mountains and the hills bursting into song before you.

And not only before you, but because of you. And then on either side of the multitude that you are part of this festive procession, there are the trees of the field.

[ 2 : 49 ] And they seem to be forming a kind of guard of honor. And before your very eyes, the trees begin to clap.

And they're clapping at the sight of and in acknowledgement of this festive throng that you belong to and are part of.

Can you imagine? Can you imagine such a scene? Can you imagine being part of such a carnival procession?

And you say, and maybe we all kind of just intuitively come to the conclusion, but this is the stuff of fantasy.

This is something that maybe you could read about in a Tolkien novel. But that's what it is. It's fantasy. Or is it? Or might it be, maybe, just maybe, what God has in store for you?

[ 3 : 52 ] What God has in store for us, for His people? Now, maybe some of you are skeptical at the scene that's been painted. Or maybe others not so much skeptical.

You're just not sure. But just suppose there is even a flicker of a possibility that the time for such a festival is marked in God's calendar.

And you could be part of it. We'll hold that thought as we read again the closing verses of Isaiah 55.

God is speaking to us through the prophet. And this is what He says. 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 thorn bush will grow the pine tree.

And instead of briars, the myrtle will grow.

[ 4 : 51 ] This will be for the Lord's renown. For an everlasting sign which will not be destroyed. I don't know about you, but I want to explore what this is all about.

And let's do so by asking some questions about what God is saying through Isaiah. The first question we want to pose, and it's important because it has to do with the relevance of what is being described here to you and me.

And the question is this. Who is God speaking to? Verse 12 begins with a word that points to an audience. You will go out in joy.

And then all that follows is directed to this audience. Captured by this word you. You will go out in joy. Who is the you of verse 12?

Well, it's the same you of this whole glorious chapter. It is the you invited to come and drink of the water of life. Come, all you who are thirsty.

[ 5 : 55 ] Come to the waters. It's the same audience. It's the you to whom God says, come to me and live. It's the you urged to call upon him while he is near.

It's the you that is urged to turn to the Lord. It is the you assured by God that he will freely pardon. And all of these invitations, all of these calls, all found within the verses of this chapter. And so the same audience is being addressed.

But crucially, the words of verses 12 and 13 are directed to those who have responded to the call. Who have turned from their sin to the one who freely pardons. These words are directed to those who have embraced the Savior and the person of Jesus, the eternal Son of God.

[ 6 : 59 ] And so as we continue to explore this festive scene that God assures us is on the horizon. And a festive scene that I would hope we would all want to be part of.

I've got to ask you this question. Are you among those who have responded to God's call to come to him and live? Are you among those who have been brought to a point of acknowledging your sin and seeing in Jesus the only and sufficient Savior?

And have you turned to him? Have you come to him to live? Have you been granted repentance unto life? And are you trusting in the God who invites you to trust in him and live?

Because it is to such that these final two verses of the chapter are directed. Who is God speaking to?

But let's move on and ask another question. What is God describing? We could call what is painted there in these two verses, we could call the captivating scene here described as a festival of forgiveness or a carnival of grace.

[ 8 : 22 ] But to grasp something of the breadth and depth of what is being described, let's describe it as a glorious picture of new life in a new world.

So, mark that phrase. Verses 12 and 13. An insight, a picture, a peek into what we could call new life in a new world.

And if we're going to think about what God describes under that heading, we need to ask further questions. So, we're under this second big question, what is God describing?

We've already thought about who is he speaking to. Now, we're thinking about what is God describing. But in order to discover what he's describing, we're going to ask two or three more questions. And I'll tell you what the three questions are.

First of all, we're going to think about and try and discover when this new world will begin. And then what this new world will be like. And what this new life in this new world will be like.

[ 9 : 27 ] But let's start with a question of calendar. When will this new world begin? Well, in our passage, in these two verses, there is a big clue in verse 13.

Let's read together verse 13. What is said there? It says this. Instead of the thornbrush will grow the pine tree. And instead of briars, the myrtle will grow.

So, in this new world, in this new environment, thorns will be removed. Thorns will be replaced by that which is more productive.

And what does that remind you of? The very presence of thorns in our cursed world that we live in. Well, I think you probably are reminded of where we first hear of thorns becoming part of human experience.

Of the landscape in this earth of ours. But let's just remind ourselves what the Bible says in Genesis chapter 3 and verses 17 to 19.

[ 10 : 42 ] As God outlines to Adam and Eve the consequences of their sin. The consequences of the fall. Not only on them, but on the humanity that they represent.

Indeed, the very creation in which they live. And we read there in chapter 3 of Genesis in verse 17. To Adam he said, The thorns you will return.

The thorns you see, even to this day, are a consequence and a reminder of the curse creation is under as a result of Adam's sin and rebellion.

Creation itself was subjected to frustration and decay as a result of Adam's sin. But on the day the curse was pronounced, God promised that it would be lifted.

And this festive scene described by God through the prophet, this festive scene is what erupts when the curse is lifted.

[12:16] And on what grounds does God lift the curse? On the grounds that Jesus, the seed of the woman, His Son, bore the curse of sin on the cross.

And so rendered it powerless and obsolete. And when Jesus hung on that accursed tree, what crown did He wear? He wore a crown of thorns.

The very thorns His death would banish forever. And so the prophet anticipates this glorious day when thorns will be no more.

And when will this happen? Well, it will happen when Jesus returns to reign in His new heavens and new earth. Listen to the words of Jesus recorded by Mark in His gospel in chapter 13.

Verse 13. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the earth.

[13:33] This is the same festive gathering of which Isaiah speaks. When will this new world begin? But what will this new world be like?

What will this new world in which God's people will live this new life be like? Well, there's no doubt much that could be said, but let me just suggest one or two features of it.

It will be a redeemed and renewed world. The Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 8, we read the verses. He speaks of how all creation was subjected to frustration and is groaning as in the pains of childbirth for the emergence of this new world, when all creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay.

But this new world, glorious and in a measure indescribable, certainly for us, it will be a physical world with mountains and hills and trees.

We won't be strumming harps on fluffy clouds. It's a material, physical, new world that will serve as our residence forever.

[14:51] We could say also that it will be, in a sense, paradise regained, a new Eden that will emerge at the creative command of God. But it will be more than just a recovery of paradise.

It will be a new paradise of a different order. It will be a world where mountains birth forth in song and where trees clap their hands.

Now, some, maybe with good reason, insist that the language of Isaiah is symbolic and not to be taken literally. Maybe aye, maybe no. For myself, I see no reason why trees in God's new world couldn't clap their hands.

But even if it is a picture, it is a picture of something so glorious that it defies the constraints of prose to describe.

What will new life in this new world be like? We can maybe think about this in terms of what will be absent and what will be present.

[16:06] First of all, let's think about what will be absent in this new world. And I think we can legitimately focus on this even in the grounds of our text before us. Notice how in verse 12, the picture that is painted is painted in these terms.

Now, that verb, go out, very deliberately echoes the language of the Exodus. When the people of God, the people of Israel, went out from Egypt, from slavery, from suffering, from bondage, and were led forth to the promised land that flowed with milk and honey.

This is the language that God is using. And so, by using that language, He's drawing us to consider not only all that awaits us, but also all that will be left behind as we are led forth out of the old world into the new world.

So, what will be absent? What will we leave behind as Jesus leads us in glorious procession? Well, all that is the product and consequence of sin and the curse will be absent in the new world.

With the unsought consent of the proclaimers, we could speak of what will be absent in these terms. Suffering, no more.

[17:38] Pain, no more. Disease, no more. Cancer, no more. Dementia, no more. Injustice, no more. High school shootings, no more.

Mental illness, no more. Sexual abuse, no more. Bullying, no more. Infidelity, no more. Heartbreak, no more. Racism, no more. Death, no more.

And when you can go on, all those things that bring pain and suffering, no more. They will all be absent in this new world. In the new heavens and the new earth.

In the words of Revelation, this same Jesus who leads us in glorious possession, He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

As we're led into this new world. I wonder if the words of the African American spiritual will ring out with joyful conviction.

[ 18 : 41 ] Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we're free at last. What will be absent.

But let's also think about what will be present. And what does the passage tell us? Well, the passage tells us that there will be joy. You will go out in joy.

And this is a joy that is both shared and personal. The joy of coming home. The joy of encounter.

The joy of friendship. The joy of freedom.

The joy of tears being wiped away. The joy of seeing our Savior face to face. And will this not be our greatest joy?

Again, we listen to the words of John in Revelation. We read a moment ago, verse 4 of the 21st chapter. Let's just read the previous two verses.

[ 19 : 38 ] John in his vision shares with us what he sees. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. As in some way that it's difficult for us to conceive.

The earth and heaven merge. In the new heavens and the new earth. Coming down out of heaven from God. Prepared as a bride. Beautifully dressed for a husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men.

And he will live with them. They will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be their God. There will be joy.

And there will be peace. And this is a peace that will govern every relationship. Peace with God. Can you imagine?

Altogether, undisturbed. Peace with God. No guilt. No sin. No doubt. Casting a shadow over that peace with God.

[ 20 : 42 ] And peace with one another. With everybody. With every fellow festive rejoicer. Can you imagine that?

Peace with everybody round about you. How good will that be? Just ponder on that for a moment. Just ponder on all that you've maybe experienced of frustration in your relationships.

Maybe even today. Or certainly in this week that has ended. Misunderstandings. Suspicions. Hurt. Disappointment.

Being let down. All of that will be gone. You see, there will be peace with God and with one another. And peace with self.

No more issues of foolish pride or crippling self-doubt. All that will be banished in the new world. We will be content in the deepest sense of that word.

[ 21 : 45 ] Utterly and fabulously content. Content with who we are. With where we are. With who we're with. And with who we worship.

What will be present in this new world? Joy and peace. And it will be a new world of fruitfulness and prosperity. This is the picture being painted in verse 13. Instead of the thorn brush, we'll grow the pine trees.

It's not just that the thorns are removed. But in their place, we find the pine trees. The briars will be removed. And in their place, the myrtle will grow.

And pictures of fruitfulness and prosperity. And there's another thing about this new world. And to introduce this other aspect of this new world that we find in the passage, let me just tell you a story or an anecdote that ties in with the Winter Olympics that I'm sure many of us have been watching, at least a little bit of, in these past days.

Yesterday, Lizzie Arnold won the gold medal in the skeleton. She retained her Olympic gold medal. Fabulous result.

[ 23 : 01 ] But some of you will remember that the pioneer of British success in that discipline was Amy Williams, eight years ago. She won the first individual gold medal in the Winter Olympics by a British woman in 58 years.

And this is what Amy Williams said on being interviewed after winning her medal. And what she says is not particularly striking. It's what we often hear people saying.

But listen to what she said. I think I'm in a little bubble which hasn't quite burst, and I'm not sure it ever will. I'm just loving it. It's been a great experience. And I hope it never ends. I hope it never ends. How often do we maybe naively speak like that? Oh, I hope this day never ends. But of course it does, doesn't it? It does. It does end. But not in the new world. In the new world, you'll never have to hope that it never ends. It just never will.

[ 24 : 03 ] You see, this is what God tells us here in verse 13. This will be, this new world, this new heavens and the new earth, this will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign which will not be destroyed.

It's everlasting. It's indestructible. It will never end. So who is God speaking to? He's speaking to those who come to Him to live.

He's speaking to those who respond to the call to repent, to turn from their sin and trust in Jesus. He's saying, this is your future. This is your destiny.

This is your heritage. This is for you. This is what I'm preparing for you. And what is He preparing for us? This new world where a new life will be lived, where all of sin and suffering and the curse will be absent and banished.

And we will live in a world where joy and peace and fruitfulness reigns forever and ever. There's a third question, just very briefly, I want to pose and answer.

[ 25 : 18 ] What will this all reveal? And the this that I'm talking about is the this in the second half of verse 13 where the final statement is made and begins with the word, this will be for the Lord's renown.

What will this? Everything that we've attempted to describe of what God is preparing for us. What will this all reveal? Well, we're told that there is a purpose.

This will be for a purpose or with an end in view. This will be for the Lord's renown. Or another way in which that language, the Hebrew, can be translated is this will serve to make a name for the Lord. The word translated there, renown, is simply the word name. Now, what does that mean? Well, God's name, as we find in different parts of the Bible clearly addressed, God's name captures or reveals who God is or what God is like.

And this carnival of grace, this new life in a new world will bring glory to God by revealing to us what God is like.

[ 26 : 36 ] In all, maybe all is too strong. I don't know if we'll ever be able to capture all. But in something of His beauty and majesty and glory and love and grace.

Simply being there, experiencing what we experience will tell us so much about God. And so the very experience is a monument to God and to what God is like.

And the more we see, the more we discover, the more we experience, the deeper our joy and the purer our worship.

Can you imagine that day? Even so, come, Lord Jesus. But let me end really where I began, by posing a question to you.

Will you be there on that day? Will you be part of this festive throng? Will you go out in joy and be led forth in peace?

[ 27 : 50 ] Will you witness the mountains and the hills bursting forth in song? Will you hear the trees of the field clap their hands? Will you be there?

Where does all this begin? Well, it begins in the gracious purposes of God conceived in eternity. But in our experience, where does it begin?

It begins when we hear the gracious call, an invitation of God, come to me and live. And we respond to that call.

And we say, yes, that's what I need. That's what I want. It begins when we acknowledge our sin and God's gracious disposition and power to forgive.

And we repent. We turn from sin and turn to God and embrace the Savior He has provided, putting our trust in Jesus. That's where it begins in our experience.

[ 28 : 52 ] And when we do, then this is what awaits us. When we do that, then this is our destiny.

This is where we will be. And this is what we will enjoy. This is what we, what you will be part of. If you would but turn in repentance and faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you. We thank you that you are a great God. We thank you for the great purposes that you have for your people. We thank you for all that we already

enjoy.

Of joy and peace and fruitfulness in you. And yet we thank you that what we already enjoy is a foretaste of what awaits us.

We thank you that there is yet more for us to experience. There is yet more of your goodness and your generosity for us to be the objects of. And we do thank you for that day.

[ 29 : 56 ] When your Son, our Savior Jesus, will return in the clouds. And at the voice of His authoritative command, we'll establish the new heavens and the new earth.

Where righteousness dwells and where we will dwell. And we look forward to that day. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.