

Isaiah 55:1-13
(Psalm 19:1-14; 1 Peter 1:22-25)
“Hear, That Your Soul May Live”

Introduction

This week, we have seen – some of us have taken – another wild ride on the Wall Street roller coaster. It is good to remember that here we have no continuing city, that our true and lasting citizenship is not in man’s city but in God’s. In these verses, the Lord questions his people Israel through the prophet Isaiah: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” And then he says, “Listen diligently to me ... hear, that your soul may live.”

So, too, he calls across the millennia to us and asks us why we spend our time and money, why we invest our hopes and dreams, on what does not last and cannot finally satisfy. But Isaiah is not a prophet of doom. He points the way to life, and ends with the soul-satisfying promise, “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace,” as he pictures the future for those who listen and take God at his Word.

So how do we get from the warning to the promise, from being people whose hopes are tied to the economy to people who are invested in the coming age, children of the living God? We find in this tremendous chapter the way of life, from God’s call to God’s promise of the way things shall one day be for those who respond to his call.

Look with me at four stages on the path to the renewal of all things. Hear, as the Lord says to us this morning, “Listen diligently to me ... Incline your ear and come to me; hear that your soul may live.”

Body

1. God calls, questions and challenges us (55:1-3a).

Only the poor in spirit can hear this word, those who hunger and thirst for the things of God. This is not mere physical food, but soul food: “hear, that your soul may live.”

2. God describes his offer of grace (55:3b-5).

God is offering an everlasting covenant, the covenant he made with David and fulfilled in the Messiah Jesus. And don’t miss this: those who enter this covenant are entrusted with God’s mission to the nations.

3. God explains how he gives and how we receive his grace (55:6-11).

He prepares our hearts by convicting us of our sin and of our utter spiritual poverty, our inability to rescue ourselves. He calls us, not merely to confess, but to repent, to turn from our rebellion and “return to the Lord that he may have compassion ... and abundantly pardon.”

But how does God convict and convert us? Through his Word, which will not return to him empty, “but shall,” as he says, “accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

4. God shows us what happens to those who receive his grace (55:12-13).

What does his Word accomplish in his people? He turns us from people tossed about by every twist and turn of contemporary events, into people whose lives are anchored in the covenant promises of God, people who know that our God reigns and is able to use even the most desperate and tragic things that happen to accomplish his eternal and good purposes for those who are in Christ Jesus.

He pictures the age to come and tells us, “You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.” He depicts the renewal of the cosmos, the new heavens and new earth: “The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the forest shall clap their hands.” In that day, God’s name will be glorified, “And it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Conclusion

So, as the apostle Paul wrote, whatever happens *around* us, whatever happens *to* us,

We do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (1 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Hear God’s call today: “Come, everyone who thirsts!” Don’t spend your life on what cannot satisfy. “Return to the Lord that he may have compassion on [you], and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”