

Come Thirsty; Leave Quenched

Isaiah 55:1-5 (NIV)

¹ "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. ⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. ⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor."

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." (verse 1) I love these initial words from Isaiah chapter 55. I get thirsty all too often every single day, and God is calling to me and to you to come and get a free drink. What's better?

However, as I started to dive into this section of the Bible, I realized what this is a picture of. It's a marketplace vendor. For the Israelites in the Old Testament, this was a part of their life. They shopped in the marketplace where vendors were calling for their attention, offering bargains and deals that you would be a fool to pass up – supposedly. For me, the picture started to set in of God having a booth set up at a county fair or something like that, desperately, forcefully hawking his stuff to anyone passing by.

I don't know about you, but that picture of God is off-putting. When I've gone to a county fair or when I've passed by marketplace vendors, I try so hard not to make eye contact because I know if you make eye contact, they cue in to start a conversation to work an angle for their pitch. "Can I interest you in a free roofing quote?" "Not in the market right now." "We can match and beat the price of your auto insurance." "No, thank you." "Have you heard about our latest DirectTV deal?" "I'm good." I don't like that environment because I know that they want to sell me on their product and do it before I've had a chance to think about the ramifications of getting said product. They don't want me to have time to research. They want me to make a split-second decision without shopping around and finding out if they are the best deal. They want me to buy their product so that they gain from it. I don't want them to act like they know me and know what I need and what I want. I want the luxury of going to the grocery store, shopping at my pace, choosing of my own accord what to buy and what not to buy without anyone twisting my arm to buy their product. I want the luxury of going on Amazon.com and methodically researching for the best price, selecting it, paying for it – all without needing to interact with a single human being to sell me the product. That's why I say to the vendors, "No, thank you. I'm good."

So, you hear this call, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." (verse 1) And I feel like, "What's the catch?" "What's your angle?" "How do you benefit from this?" "What am I going to lose out on by getting this supposed deal?" By saying this, God seems like another marketplace vendor looking to hustle me.

Do you feel like that with religion today? Is religion just a consumer product? Wading into the marketplace of organized religion like going to a live marketplace. "Belonging for sale! Never be lonely again!" "Have a higher purpose in life. We can give it to you!" "You got problems; we'll fix them in six easy installments." "Come get your forgiveness! We'll remove your guilt for the low, low price of \$19.95 a month...every month...for the rest of your life. Small price to pay." All these various religions are offering supposedly what I need, but I know they are just vying for my attention for their own personal gain. They want me so that they can increase their numbers. They want me so that I will give them my money. They stand to gain something by having me buy into what they're selling. They're in this for them, not me. No sale, man. I've seen organized religions burn my friends, my family, leave them out in the cold. I've been burned by it. They weren't there when I needed them. They didn't tend to my needs. These religion vendors failed me.

Yet, you and I thirst for the things that religions seem to be selling. We feel lonely and want belonging. We want to be a part of something bigger in our lives. We've messed up lives, and we want someone to fix us. We carry around baggage of guilt everywhere we go, and we want someone else to take it on. When life decisions need to be made, we want clear guidance and direction. Maybe you are thirsting for some of these things right now. Maybe these were some of the things that brought you to come to this Lutheran church in Layton. You need direction and a higher purpose than just yourself. You feel lonely and desperately want belonging. You want to check your baggage of guilt at the door in hopes that it will be hauled off never to return to you. You've made mistakes, and you want to fix them starting now.

You've tried some of the other remedies, maybe some of the other religions, and they left you thirsty. Their message, their way of doing things, was like drinking salt water. It looks like it will refresh. "Here are 8 simple rules to follow for a holier life." That might work. "Give your life to Jesus and always be happy and never have trouble again." That sounds good. God wants me to be happy, right? I mean, why wouldn't he? "Become more spiritual through this simple act and the problems of your life will melt away." I can do that. These proposed solutions look just like regular water, like something God would say, like something that would work, but as soon as one of them hits your taste buds, as soon as you drink one in, you want to spit it out. If you're thirsty enough, you drink it down thinking that this will work. But then your throat feels drier than before. Your thirst actually increases, and you are not satisfied. Your thirst for life was not quenched by these religions trying to sell you their product.

But God is not selling you a product. Listen to what he gives: "Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David." (verse 3) What you thirst for, God gives you through this everlasting covenant, this faithful love promised to David. God had promised to King David that from his family line, a king would rise who would rule over all nations, the whole world. David's offspring, his kingdom, his reign, would last forever. And this son of David would rule with this message, "I will forgive [your] wickedness and will remember [your] sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

This covenant came about because God the Son came down as Man. Jesus lived in your place and never messed up or made a mistake or broke a commandment. He was perfect so that he could serve you, so that he could fix your life. Jesus paid for your sins with his innocent suffering and death to take the guilt of your failures off of your shoulders. Jesus left you this account of what he has done for you – his Holy Word, the Bible – to give you that clear direction and guidance for all of life that he is the focal point, he is the Way and the Truth and the Life. He is your direction. By his perfect life lived for you, his sacrifice on the cross, his Word preserved and given to you, God has made you belong to something much bigger than yourselves. He has made you a part of something higher by bringing you into the family of God, connecting you to all the Christians who have gone before us, all who will come after us, and all on this earth right now who believe this message. He has made us part of a family of billions, trillions, and counting. And he promises never to leave you or forsake you, but instead to be with you always to the very end of the age.

God doesn't offer this so that he can profit from your thirst like some marketplace vendor. He doesn't do this because he needs people to love him. He doesn't do this to beef up the numbers in heaven to please the shareholders. God does not invite the thirsty to him for personal gain. Actually, it cost him to make this offer, to quench your thirst. It cost him his life, a life lived for perfection for us. Forgiveness bought and paid for by the blood of Christ freely offered to cover all of us, all of our sins, with no catches, no asterisks, no loopholes, no taxes, no hidden subscription fees. God has offered us himself to quench all our spiritual thirsts because he has taken the entire bill on himself, leaving nothing for us to pay. In fact, he refuses to have us contribute at all to his offer of water and wine and milk without money and without cost.

I may not like the picture of God being a marketplace vendor, but he is offering to me and to you and to everyone exactly what we need to quench our spiritual thirsts and without a hidden agenda. There are no substitutions for what God offers. Everything else is salt water. It might look like it quenches your thirst, but it only leaves you thirstier than before.

You have had your thirst quenched by God and the everlasting covenant that he made with you. You have the greatest deal with the water that has been offered to you by God, and we get to offer it to others. We're not going to extend God's invitation like some kind of marketplace heckler. Instead, we share God's offer of free water to the thirsty like we would a good deal. You're compelled and freely tell people, "Hey, Smith's is running a great deal on ground chuck – a buck a pound!" or "Maverik is running a BOGO on Snickers bars" You do this not so that you gain from their purchases or even that Smith's and Maverik gain from it. You share this deal with people because you want them to have it and enjoy it. You want them to benefit from it because you care about them and you want to give them something good.

You have something good. In fact, you have the best deal ever. God has given you water to quench your spiritual thirst without any cost to you. This offer is extended to you every Sunday you come to church. You hear it when you dive into God's Word. God quenches your spiritual thirst with an everlasting covenant to remember your sins no more, by carrying off your mountainous pile of guilt over the things you have done wrong, by making a place for you in his family never to be alone again, and with the direction to always pursue him first in everything you do. This is all bought and paid for by God with no repayment plans, no loopholes, no subscription fees. It is free to you – life offered to you without money and without cost. Some people will come running to you to get this deal. Others, you're going to share it with them because you care about them and you want them to benefit. So, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." (verse 1) Come thirsty; leave quenched by what God offers. Amen.