

The Invitation

Isaiah 55:1-9

What is the greatest invitation you have ever received? Do you remember it? Invitations are wonderful things. They make you feel special because they're deliberate and have you specifically in mind. You have been chosen; I want you to attend; I am setting aside time in my life for you and I to be together. Invitations are wonderful things.

Unless, of course, they have a hidden agenda. "Come to the wedding, but don't forget a gift," or "Come enjoy a free night of vacation (provided you sit through a presentation on our new time share)." Invitations quickly lose their appeal when there is an agenda hidden behind them. But generally speaking, receiving an invitation means someone has taken the time to think of you and wants you to be part of something special.

The most blessed Invitation comes to us from the prophet Isaiah in chapter 55. It was originally extended to the people of God as they wandered in the wilderness, trying to find the way. In time they grasped at anything and everything in search of an answer. Remember the golden calf and the invitation to follow Baal? But the Invitation is timeless.

Since the period of the Israelites, The Invitation has been offered down through the centuries to those seeking to find the way: from prophets to peasants — from Paul to Priscilla — from mothers to monks — from Augustine to Calvin — from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham. Many have been the mouthpiece of The Invitation. Some accept it; others reject it. But The Invitation always stands as the greatest offer ever given to humankind.

It's offered to everyone searching for meaning and fulfillment in life. It's available to those who desire more out of life. It's ready for those who feel empty and lost and without hope. The Invitation is for those who have ever cried out, "What is the point of my life? Is there more to life than carpools, meetings, bills, and growing old?" And to that I would answer, "Yes."

God's invitation is to experience abundant life — the life which only God can provide. And The Invitation is officially extended to you today.

So the question is: What will you do with The Invitation?

Maybe your first inclination is to wait for a better invitation. This's what the Israelites seemed to do throughout their history, much to their disappointment. It didn't fare well for them then, and it won't do you much good today.

But if you insist on looking for a better offer, you're in good company. You can always find those who are looking for better invitations, and you can always find what first appears as a better invitation. In fact, our whole culture is built around the desire for a better invitation.

Advertisers make billions each year accommodating our desire for a better invitation, and we invite them into our homes to do it. Turn on the television or computer or go to the mailbox, and we'll find invitations galore, each one promising a new and improved, more exciting, wonderful life. They guarantee a better belly, a better bottom, a better boat, and a better business.

Honest advertisers will tell you that their goal is to convince you that you cannot live without their product. And many of us are convinced! In fact, advertisers are so

convincing that someone has said, “No one ever lost money underestimating the intelligence of the consumer.” Another put it this way: “The only reason a great many American families don’t own an elephant is that they have never been offered an elephant for a dollar down and easy weekly payments.”

We’re convinced that we cannot live without the items advertised through the invitations we receive.

Many people live in the illusion that they cannot live without more. And as long as there’s money to be made from gullible consumers, our culture will continue to accommodate and perpetuate this illusion by inviting us to have more, purchase more, and obtain more. We have been convinced that the more we have, the happier we are. But you and I know this is one of the greatest delusions humankind has ever produced.

For many people make a good living but live poor lives. Many people who have much but love little. There are people who look slick and appear to have everything they want, but inside they are decaying and rotting because they have been sold a bill of goods that “more will make them happier.”

But no matter the invitations we have received in the past, there is nothing big enough, powerful enough, thrilling enough, or pleasurable enough to satisfy our deepest thirst and hunger.

For example, consider Howard Hughes. All he ever wanted was more money, so he parlayed inherited wealth into a billion-dollar pile of assets. All he wanted was more fame, so he invaded Hollywood and became a filmmaker and star.

All he wanted was more thrills, so he built and piloted the fastest aircraft ever known. All he wanted was more power, so, in secret, he dealt political favors so masterfully that two U.S. presidents became his pawns. All he ever wanted was more and more and more. He was absolutely convinced that more would bring him complete satisfaction.

Unfortunately, history proves otherwise. In his final years, he was emaciated, colorless, and had a sunken chest. His fingernails had grown into inches-long corkscrews. His teeth were rotting, and all over his body were innumerable needle marks from his drug addiction. “Howard Hughes died believing the myth of more. He died a billionaire junkie, insane by all reasonable standards.”ⁱ

How many similar stories do we need to hear before we will understand that the more thrills we seek the more we will find that thrills pass away? How many disappointments do we need to experience before we realize that material things do not ultimately satisfy?

How many overrated invitations do we need to accept before we understand that the answer to our problems and the key to our meaning and fulfillment does not come from anything the world invites us to receive but can only come from the “One who created us for himself.”

This is God’s plea to us through Isaiah: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (v. 2). “Why do you eat out of dumpsters when I have prepared for you a free banquet of Ritz Carlton proportions? Isn’t it about time you listened to my invitation? Isn’t it about time you inclined your ear in my direction? Isn’t it about time you allowed the wise words of life I have shared to become flesh within you?”

Some listen; others don’t. For there are those who would agree that more does not make people happier, but they don’t need God to convince them. They can find the

answers on their own. For them, God is a crutch. They agree with Jesse Ventura that “religion is for weak-minded people.”

When God is mentioned, they protest, “I don’t need God. I am the master of my ship, the pilot of my plane. I am smart and resourceful enough to handle whatever comes my way.” This philosophy of life sounds noble in our individualistic culture but nothing could be more foolish, for we are not as strong and resourceful as we would like to believe.

A groom found out how foolish he was when he and his new bride stayed at the Watergate Hotel on their wedding night. The concerned bride asked, “What if this place is still bugged?” The groom said confidently, “Don’t worry, honey; if the rooms been bugged I’ll find it.”

He looked everywhere: behind the drapes, behind the pictures, under the rug. “Aha!” he said, for under the rug was a disc with four screws. He took out his Swiss army knife, unscrewed the screws and threw the screws and the disc out the window. The next morning, the hotel manager asked the newlyweds, “How was your room? How was the service? How was your stay at the Watergate Hotel?”

The groom suspiciously asked, “Why are you asking me all of these questions?” The hotel manager replied, “Well, the couple in the room under you complained that their chandelier fell on them.”

We think we know, but we have no idea. We think we understand, but we don’t. **When we fail to understand the truth, it can have a damaging effect upon us.** And, more importantly, when we fail to sense our true need and understand the real truth about God, it can be a detriment to our very lives. This is why God says to us: “My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts. My ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts” (v. 9).

“I know you better than you know yourself. I created you and know every hair on your head and every intricate line on your fingers. I designed you for the purpose of being in relationship with me. If you only knew, if you only recognized what you are capable of accomplishing if you would allow me to empower you.”

Still some won’t listen. So in desperation God put on skin and came to earth and loved us, taught us, was mocked for us, ridiculed for us, pierced for us, crucified for us, and then rose from the dead for us. Now, with scars on his hands, God reaches out to us and pleads, “Now will you listen to me?”

Perhaps some of you this morning feel like I’m speaking directly to you. Maybe you’ve accepted every invitation the world has to offer and it’s been like salt water to your thirsty soul, making you thirstier than ever. Perhaps some of you have attended church your whole life yet never really come to grips with the love of God. You’ve heard about it but never really experienced it.

Perhaps some of you have accepted The Invitation before but now your relationship with God is stale and you need to taste the fresh bread of Life again. The good news is that God’s banquet of blessings has been prepared, and you are invited! There is a place at God’s table reserved for you. A special engraved invitation written by a pierced hand is yours. Isn’t it time for you to accept it?

Come - receive God’s forgiving grace. Come - quench your thirst for forgiveness and acceptance. Come - feast on God’s wisdom. Come - find nourishment for your soul, strength for your life, and purpose in living. Come - and never be the same again.

ⁱ Bill Hybels in Leadership, Vol. X, no. 3 (Summer, 1989), p. 38.
