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## Introduction

A fellow minister and friend of mine, David Tsai, a couple of years ago was appointed the Presbyterian minister of the Chinese Church at Surry Hills, Sydney. And a while back he was telling me about what it is like to go to a full blown Chinese wedding reception. You see the Chinese love their food and they love their celebrations. And so if the couple's family are fairly well off it, the dinner at the reception can have up 11 courses.

Can you image that? You arrive at the reception and the first dish comes out to the table and its suckling pig. Not a bad way to start. Then the next dish is prawns, then crab, then lobster, then perch, then duck and so on and so on. Just when you think you have had enough, there is another dish that gets those digestive juices going. Just when you think it couldn't get any better, the host serves something even tastier.

Well today's passage from Isaiah 55, is all about an invitation that God makes to you and to me. An extraordinary invitation that just gets better and better the closer you look at it. One that will not just fill our stomachs or satisfy our taste buds, but one that will fill our soul! It will provide our inner being with the richest of fare. One that reverses our alienation with God, which pardons us of all our sin and which brings us great joy and inner peace.

Do you want to know more about this invitation? Well let's look closely at this wonderful passage for it all starts with

### 1. The Request (verses 1 to 3)

A request from God Himself to you and me to come. Come. *"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."*

Wow! This sounds like one of those guys who rings you up on the phone and offers you a free meal or a free holiday. Or maybe it reminds you of that offer that you read in yesterday's junk mail catalogue. Get a whole lounge suite, with no deposit, no repayments for 3 years and what's more its interest free.

And yet the invitation just gets even better, because in the next verse, God seems like he is offering us not only a free feed, but satisfaction guarantee. For he says, *"Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me and hear me, that your soul may live."*

We hear a lot today about job satisfaction, how you need to find a job that not only earns you good money but you actually enjoy doing. We also often hear about customer satisfaction how the local shop wants to please you so much that you come away feeling good about yourself and the service that you have received. So good in fact that you will want to come again. But here God is offering us soul satisfaction. That inside of us there will be that deep seated joy, that fulfilment, that acceptance, that all is well with your life.

But that is such a big promise isn't it? Wasn't it the Rolling Stones who sang, "*I can't get no satisfaction. And I try, and I try and I try and I try (but) I can't get no satisfaction.*" It was the rock band U2 when they were the biggest band in the world that sang "*I still haven't found what I'm looking for.*" And if these people who have fame, money, girls on demand, critical acclaim and so much more, if they are not satisfied, if their souls are telling them that they need something more, well how hard will it be for anyone else to be totally satisfied with our lives?

I don't know how many times I have read articles or seen interviews with people who are at the top of the sporting world, on top of the corporate ladder and no matter what success they have, no matter how much money they have earned, they want more, they desire more. These people who are the A-listers of society, don't seem to be ever able to get satisfaction.

And there is a reason for this, a good reason. God hasn't made us to get satisfaction in money, or fame or status. It isn't true that a husband, a wife, can fulfil all your needs, inside and out. Children, friends, nice cars, good looks, beautiful homes do not ultimately satisfy us. It was the Church father, Augustine who famously said "*Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee*" And it was the Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal who observed that "*There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator made known through Jesus Christ.*"

Just look at life today for an example. We Australians are richer than we have ever been in our history. We live longer. We have bigger homes, faster cars, better health care, more savings, more freedom, more belongings. All the things that you would think would make us happy. Yet we too can't get no satisfaction.

Because we are not responding to God's offer to us to come to Him. To receive from Him. To open ourselves up to what He is offering us. The invitation, the request, the offer is too good to receive. God in 720 BC was offering to the Israelites life to the full and through the ages, the same offer comes to us here again today. Too good to be true? 'Nothing is for nothing!' I here you say. Yes it's TRUE, yes it's FREE, but it doesn't come CHEAP. Because after the request we hear about

## **2. The Representative (verses 4 to 5)**

For the passage starts talking about how God will bring about this invitation and it will be according to verse 3 by making "*an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.*" Oh, he is not speaking to you or me just yet, but a descendent of King David. Someone whom according to verse 4 he "*makes a witness to the people, a leader, and*

*commander of the peoples.” So someone who will have a leadership role not just in Israel but within the whole world. And according to verse 5 “Surely you (this person) will summon nations you know not and nations that do not know will hasten to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has empowered you with splendour.”*

God will make this offer to the nations, to the world, to you and me through his representative. Now we had a good look at him last week, didn't we and the week before. God is talking about the servant of the Lord, the suffering servant. The one who will be pierced for our transgression and bruised for our iniquity. The one who will have God's Spirit upon him and who not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. He's talk about Jesus, isn't he? Jesus is the one who will make this wonderful invitation known to the whole world.

It is through this Jesus that God makes us this FREE offer. But that doesn't mean it comes cheap. For there is no such thing as a free lunch is there? You ask any businessperson, anyone who has been around for a while and they will tell you that no matter how good the deal is, someone always has to pay for it in other ways. Well surely God is different isn't he? He offers us a meal without money and without cost.

Well friends I have bad news for you.....even in the Bible there's no such thing as a free lunch. There is a cost to this meal, this invitation that God is offering, but it is not paid by us. Last week we heard the familiar words of Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant, who took the punishment that bought us peace and that by his wounds we are healed. The offer is free for us but it's costly, very costly for Jesus.

He dies so that we might live. He takes our sin so that we can take his righteousness. He goes to hell, so that we might go to heaven. We are offered a diet that will fill our souls with the richest of fare, while his soul is filled with pain, with suffering, with death, with rejection, Jesus then pays the cost for the heavenly banquet that is being offered to us for free! The Request, the Representative and then thirdly,

### **3. The RSVP. (verses 6 to 7)**

Because the invitation is open to you and me today. As verse 6 says *“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”* Now is the time that the RSVP must be returned. Now is the opportunity to call upon God, to return to our Lord.

So to send our RSVP, what do we actually have to do? Well its starts with us listening to God. Look at verse 3, *“Listen, give ear, hear”* there are so many offers that are too good to be true competing for our attention. We have advertisements attacking us from every single direction. So many of us are suffering from information overload, everywhere we look at home, at school, at work, in the car, on the computer, people want to tell us something or others want our attention.

And if we don't stop to listen to God, if we don't give him our undivided attention, if we don't turn off the other competing voices around our heads and listen, then we will never consider what God has to say. Now I know that is hard. We sit down at home to read the Bible and the phone rings, or that TV show comes on that you want to watch. You come to Church and a siren is heard going past or you are worried about the news that you heard a little while back. But the first part of our RSVP is to listen, really listen.

The next thing is to not put off of the decision, for it will not stand forever. Seek the Lord, *while he may be found*. Call on him *while he is near*. Right now, God can be found. But if you wait until after you die to seek God, He won't be found. That's why you must seek Him and get to know Him on a personal level today. After you die, you will not have a second chance to seek and find God. But it's not just death that will take away that opportunity.

There are times in our life when we hear God's message and there are other times we won't hear God's message. There are times when we will be in Church or have a Christian friend or hear something that will challenge us and there are other times when we are not going to hear God's message at all. Kaylene has a friend, a good friend that has lived on the Tweed 16 or 17 years. She used to go to church, she knows deep inside she needs to do something about God and for 11 years since Kaylene moved up here she has been encouraging her to come back to God. And for 11 years she has shown next to no interest. But one day Kaylene might move away, or her friend might move away. So who knows this might be her last chance. And this might be our last chance, as well.

You see the funny thing about invitations is that one way or another you respond....so you can respond with a yes or a no.....but even if you ignore it, you are making a response – you are saying no....God has given us this invitation....and it demands a response! And if you put it off, you are saying NO to God, yet again.

Listen, don't put it off. Repent, make a U – turn in your life, forsake your old way of life! And don't just think that RSVPing to God's invitation is about adding Christ to your life. It's not! It's about adding Christ to your life and subtracting sin. It is about turning to the Lord and turning away from disobedience. It's about taking up God's offer and rejecting the offer of satisfaction through money, through career, through family, through sport. Those who want to come into God's presence, not only need their sins forgiven but from then on their desire to sin should be lessened & they no longer want to stay in the sin that they currently are in.

This last week I read the story of Al Johnson, a Kansas man who came to faith in Jesus Christ. What made his story remarkable was not his conversion, but the fact that as a result of his new found faith in Christ, he confessed to a bank robbery he had participated in when he was nineteen years old. But because the statute of limitations on the case had run out, Johnson could not be prosecuted for the offense, it was too long ago. But Johnson was not deterred from his repentance, so he decided he would voluntarily repay his share of the stolen money!

Friends, if we are to come back to God that might meant that we might have to leave certain things behind. The way we conduct our relationships will need to change. The way we deal with our husband, our wife, our kids, our grandkids will need to be different. Our

commitment to God's family will strength. Our desire to open up God's word will be renewed. Our service to others will grow, our trust in the Lord will deepen.

If it doesn't, then we are fooling ourselves. If it doesn't we are after cheap grace. If it doesn't, then we don't understand the huge cost that Jesus paid to bring us this free invitation.

A story is told of a shipwrecked crew who had been drifting for days in a small boat off the coast of Brazil. They were suffering the horrors of thirst but they dare not drink the seawater because the salt would make it even worse. Then they saw a vessel coming towards them, and called out, "Water, water!" "Dip your bucket over the side" they were told. They thought they were being mocked. But no, the water was fresh. They had drifted into the flow of the mighty River Amazon bearing fresh water far, far out to sea.

Friends God's invitation of life giving water is available to us right here, right now. It's there, within your grasp. All you need! All your soul desires. Reach out and draw, NOW before you get carried out to sea! Listen, trust, make a U turn, NOW, before it's too late.

#### **4. The request, the representative, the RSVP and then The Result (verses 8 to 12)**

Then you will get to know your GOD. WOW. The one who made you. The one who has saved you. The one who wants to change you. You can get to know the God of this world. Yes, his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Yes, His ways are not our ways. Yes God at times does move in mysterious ways, but the offer that God is making to us, will help us understand, at least in part how God thinks.

What did the hymn writer William Cowper say? *"God moves in mysterious ways/ His wonders to perform. / He plants his footsteps in the sea / And rides upon the storm./ Deep in unfathomable mines/ Of never failing skill/ He treasures up His bright designs / and works his sovereign will./ Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;/ The clouds ye so much dread/ Are big with mercy and shall break/ In blessings on your head."*

I mentioned a couple of weeks the story of Joni Erickson, the young lady who dived into a lake without checking the depth and became a quadriplegic. She once received a letter, an angry letter, from a young man who too had suffered a terrible misfortune, demanding an answer, to the question WHY? Why did God make this happen to me? She wrote back.

*"If God decided to explain all His ways to me, what makes me think I would be able to understand them? It would be like pouring million-gallon truths into my one-ounce brain. Didn't one Old Testament author write, "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things" (Ecclesiastes 11:5)? In fact, the whole book of Ecclesiastes was written to convince people like me that only God holds the keys to unlocking the mysteries of life and that He's not loaning them all out! If God's mind was small enough for me to understand, He wouldn't be God! Yet, in spite of this, He has chosen to have a personal relationship with me—that's the greatest mystery of all! (A Step Further, p. 173)*

His ways and his word. God's word is so powerful that it always achieves what it set out to achieve. Just as the rain and the snow water the earth, make plants grow and become fruitful, so God's word always, always achieves what it sets out to accomplish. God wants us to live productive lives, lives that are full of life and growth. And to that end he gives us his word. It doesn't accomplish what we want it to accomplish. No it is not for us to achieve our own selfish desires, it achieves what God wants it to accomplish. It is powerful, it will convince us, convict us, change us as we come Sunday by Sunday and listen to it. As we open it up day by day and place it deep into our hearts, our minds, our souls.

And it will bring joy and peace and prosperity. It will effect not just us but the whole of creation. The trees of the field will clap their hands, the myrtle will grow where once there was a thorn bush. The life and growth all around you is a sign, an everlasting sign, that God's invitation is bearing fruit. God's offer is too good to receive. God's request through his representative Jesus, is worth the RSVP because it brings to us great reward.

The problem is that so often we are content with what we already have. Better the devil we know we say to ourselves. The problem is we put up with the second best because we fail to turn to God, repent of our sins and enjoy the marvellous things that he is offering to us today. We are a bit like the couple I heard about recently on their honeymoon.

You see for their first night as a married couple, the groom reserved the bridal suite in an expensive hotel. The reception ran late, so it was after midnight when they arrived at the hotel. Entering the bridal suite, they were surprised to find only a sofa, some chairs and a table—there was no bed in the room. But they discovered that the sofa was a sleeper sofa, so they put the sheets on it—only to discover that it had a lumpy mattress. They were too tired to protest or to ask for another room, so they just endured the disappointment.

The next morning, as they were packing to check out, the husband marched down to the lobby and accosted the manager with his complaints. After listening for several minutes to the groom's complaints, the manager asked him, "Did you open the door in the room?" The groom went back up the room and he opened what he thought had been a closet door: It was the entrance to a beautifully furnished bedroom, where they also found a basket of fruit and chocolates. The management had provided everything to please them; they just didn't take full advantage of what was available.

So often we don't take advantage of what God is making available to us. We endure disappointment, alienation from God, troubles all on our own, when if we were just to open the door, if we were just to accept God's invitation, everything would change. Have we come? Are we listening? Are we really seeking Him? Will we turn from our wicked ways? Or will we continue to sleep on the lumpy sofa of life?