

GOD'S GRACIOUS INVITATION

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Isaiah 55:1.

Seeking a hearing from those who are going down to despair without Him, God calls from the skies saying, "Ho!" It is as if He were saying, "Stop, Look, Listen! Heaven is speaking!" What a challenge! "Ho" is a word which compels attention. It indicates that something is at hand which is worth your consideration. It calls you to pause and to give heed to something of paramount importance. Since it is the great God of heaven and earth Who is speaking in this verse, let us listen with profound awe to what He is saying.

To whom is God speaking? He is speaking to those who are at a distance from Him. How do we know this? We know it because of the use of the word, "Ho!" We never cry "Ho" to a person who is near us, but to those who are distant, and whose attention we wish to secure. He is speaking to people who have not yet found enough to meet their needs. Of course, there are many of such people.

About what is God speaking? He is inviting all to come to Him and receive salvation. The figure by which it is expressed is that of water, one which is used frequently in the Scriptures, and that with a beautiful propriety. On one occasion Christ said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." It is to thirsty ones that our text is addressed. What more powerful figure can there be for the pain of unsatisfied desire? It is especially Oriental. In a country like this we hardly know what thirst means. One must live or travel in other countries to understand this verse fully. It brings up the image of the hot, sandy waste. Thirst symbolizes the ardent desire for salvation.

Isaiah certainly wrote to a thirsty age. Prosperity prevailed much of the time. The more prosperous the times, the less contented were the people. Covetousness and greed grow in prosperity like weeds in wet weather. Amos, Micah, and Isaiah spoke earnestly against luxury and oppression, and tried to get the people to live in conformity to the will of God. But there was no inward peace. Men were drunk on wine and wealth. Their women were luxurious, lewd and lazy. The poor were made frantic by the display of wealth which they could not share. The luxury of others made them seem poorer by stirring wants which they could not satisfy. It was an age of intoxication, a debauch of materialism and false religion. The rich were riotously unhappy, and the poor were miserably so.

In this longing for life there came through the prophet of God a clear, confident and comprehensive cry to come to the one spring that could slake the thirst. This call was intense, but it also was calm.

Not since the days when Christ was here in the flesh has there been an age of more marked thirst than our own. We have the prosperity and passion, the luxury and the restlessness, the possessions and the lack

of peace that mark an age as critical. We are full of desires. Fast as are our facilities, our wants are faster still. Where can one find peace?

When people thirst as badly as they do in our age, something must happen. Its thirst must be met with reality or the most serious consequences will ensue. This age is literally desperate about some things. It wants life, power, pleasure, knowledge and material security. Mad rush characterizes our day. Pleasure rather than work has become the goal of the masses. Work is tolerated or endured only that it may lead to recreation. Work hours are shortened that those of play may be increased. Serenity and meditation are almost unknown. Crimes of every description simply mark the innate craze to have and to have quickly. Self-destruction increases annually because many feel that they cannot endure longer the realities of life. But only in the life which is from God through Christ can men find peace.

Men are seeking soul-satisfaction in place and preferment among their fellows. They long for the dazzling glory of place and power. It is not in human glory that men find soul-peace, but in the glory of the Lord. Isaiah points out the fact that the greatest values in life are the free gifts of God. The thirsty multitudes would find satisfaction in the things that money can buy, when, in reality, the great values of life are free. God does not charge for His services. Grace and mercy are free. There are some things of so much more value than money. In comparison with the soul, money is valueless. Friendship, love, peace of soul and the assurance of heaven are all beyond the value of money.

We have the picture of a famished multitude who are spending their energies upon things which do not supply their wants or meet their deepest needs. Multitudes do not know it, but they are thirsting for the water of life. They want something that will satisfy their souls. They long for pardon, for freedom from sin, for the peace that passeth understanding, and for the glad joy that hath no ending.

I. The Invitation.

The reason for man's acceptance of God's gracious invitation is based upon man's own felt sense of need. This figure of "thirst" is used to represent the actual felt need of the human heart for peace of soul as he faces the certain destiny of the future. Physical thirst is the most ceaseless torture to which the human body can be subjected. Every other pain is forgotten when thirst lays its grip upon the body. There is nothing that can satiate the thirst of the soul except the peace of God's pardon.

To what are we invited? "Come ye to the waters." We are invited to drink the water of life. There is nothing else that can satisfy the guilty conscience, the longing heart or the yearning soul. This invitation is earnest. "Come" is the most familiar word in the Bible. It occurs 642 times in the Word of God. Knowing the condition of those who are not saved, God is eager for them to turn to Him and receive salvation.

And God is not class-minded. That is why He has invited everyone. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, bond and free are all pressed by the urgency of inviting love to come.

Water is the simplest, purest, and best drink for all persons of all ages and temperaments. And there is a thirst in man's body which makes him require water. When he drinks that thirst is removed. There is a similar thirst in man's spiritual nature. He wants something, and he feels uneasy until he gets it. The grace of God, as proclaimed to us in Christ, is that which meets the longing of man. That is the spiritual water for man's spiritual thirst. In the text the word is in the plural, "Come ye to the waters," as if it meant the abundance thereof. Or the word may be in the plural to signify variety. The soul needs manifold and multitudinous mercies. There is an infinite variety in God's grace. If you need the pardon of sin, guidance in perplexity, or comfort in distress, you need not fear but what you shall find it if you will come to the God of all grace.

It is customary for those who have anything to sell, to exhibit the article, to describe its character, and to speak of its excellencies. Until people know that you have something, they will not be interested in trying to buy it. Then, the one who has something to sell endeavors to bring the prospective buyers up to the price at which he desires to sell. But, my business now is to attempt to bring you down to the price. Listen, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." If you are to have eternal life, no terms but those of grace will meet your case. I am so glad that salvation is provided and offered in such a way that no creature can be too poor, too wicked, or too vile to receive it, for it is "without money and without price." This fact has the salutary effect of excluding all pride, for God is no respecter of persons. It also forbids despair. Something, yea everything, for nothing, and Christ Himself to be had by receiving. From man's standpoint, salvation is absolutely free. You cannot buy anything from God. You cannot earn anything of God's. All of His blessings are free for the taking. You do not pay for breathing; you do not pay for seeing the sunlight; nor can you ever pay for the pardon of your sins through Christ's blood. And the pardon of a sinner is not something which is done when he is dying, but it is done while he is living.

II. The Expostulation.

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" The way of the transgressor is hard. Satan has no bargains. Sin is costly, more costly than any and every other pursuit, more expensive than any and every other engagement of life. It costs everything -- character, reputation, time, health, money, love, home, time, and influence. Finally it costs the soul and heaven itself. And sin is extremely unsatisfying. There is nothing in sin that makes us content for any length of time. It is bitter, biting, and blighting. It brings pain to the body, pangs to the heart, and punishment to the soul.

III. The Solicitation.

"Hearken diligently unto Me," is certainly an urgent appeal to those who are in imminent danger. You are on the road to destruction. You are heading for perdition. Here is the way out. "Incline your ear, and come unto Me." There can be no doubt about God's concern for the salvation and welfare of His creatures.

IV. The Compensation.

"Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live." The result of coming to Christ and accepting Him is eternal life. You, as a lost person, may have this life if you will accept this wondrous invitation of God, if you will step out on the mercies and promises of God as outlined in these brief verses of scripture. Here is life simply for the taking. Here is life right here on earth, the fulness of God's grace, life that is everlasting. Here is life throughout an endless eternity of reigning and rejoicing with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this matchless life, which neither the world, nor the flesh, nor the devil can give, there is the forgiveness of your sins. In this offer is included the blotting out of every transgression, the removing of every iniquity, the washing away in Christ's blood of every blot from your soul and record. It is God's prerogative to forgive sin. And God alone forgives sin.

There is also the constant fellowship of the Holy Spirit. He will never lead you astray. He will comfort you, sustain you, support you, supply your needs, teach you, encourage you, inspire you, and lead you in the way of righteousness for God's sake. You need His friendship and fellowship. God offers Him to you in this invitation.

He also offers you future glory. In no other way, in no other place, under no condition, can you escape the torments of hell and enjoy the bliss of heaven.

The question then is this: "What will you do with this great invitation?" God writes it across the horizon of your lives. You cannot leave this place without making a decision for or against Him.