

ISAIAH

Chapter 55

The Compassion of the LORD

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. 3 Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. 4 Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. 5 Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. 6 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. 12 “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

55:1-5 The battle that led to the victory of Isaiah 55 reaches back to the previous chapters, particularly ch 53. This great Suffering Servant passage does two tasks for this sermon. First, it identifies what comprises the meal of ch 55, but especially what the Suffering Servant did to set the table. Second, it provides the jump to Jesus and his work on Good Friday as the fulfillment of that prophecy. With Isaiah 53 providing the basis for the proclamation of the suffering and death of Christ, Isaiah 55 then follows up by opening the door for the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection and his presence at the celebratory victory meal. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Reed Lessing (*Isaiah 40–55, Concordia Commentary* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011], 665) summarizes this passage: Yahweh has prepared a victory feast (55:1–2) and has invited all to be incorporated into David’s everlasting covenant (55:3). The result is that the guests become his witnesses to the world (55:4–5). Deportees dare not drag their feet into this new life. “Seek Yahweh while he allows himself to be found!” (55:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

55:1† The summons to salvation’s banquet, prepared by the servant, is issued to all people (see Lk 14:17). (CSB)

In the OT, longing for God and His wisdom is often associated with longing for water and food (cf Ps 36:8; Pr 18:4; Jer 2:13; for more on wisdom). (TLSB)

come – HO (KJV) – A cry arousing attention or expressing pity. It is like saying “attention everyone.” In Jerusalem the shopkeepers cry to the passer-by, “Ho, everyone that hath money, let him come and buy!” They indeed expect to get full value, though they offer for nothing. God intends a free and sovereign gift. This verse is a most urgent plea to accept freely all the good gifts that God has now in readiness for his own. (PC)

This is almost an imperative but also a kind invitation. This as such shows us the nature of God, which is in itself a healing and satisfying nature, finding expression in the incarnation and redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is love – all things are now ready – come the banquet is open to us all.

Much like Lady Wisdom’s invitation (Prov. 9:1-6), Is.55:1-2 sounds like a merchant’s appeal to customers. The cry “come,” three times in this verse mimics the sounds of a marketplace, where the staples of life – water, bread, milk, wine – are purchased for a price. This Vendor, however, offers food and drink at no cost. The Israelites had become thirsty and penniless through idolatry. Why stay in poverty when abundance is offered free of charge. (CC)

Repeated cry to come mimics the sounds of the marketplace, where the staples of life—water, bread, milk, wine—could be bought. Attendance at salvation’s banquet, prepared by the Servant, is not restricted to the socially and financially elite. As a town crier, God broadcasts the invitation: “Come, for everything is now ready” (Lk 14:17). No one is forced to obey the summons. However, those who disregard it must reckon with the possibility that they have heard it for the last time (Is 49:8; Jn 12:35; 2Co 6:2). (TLSB)

Isaiah 64:6 “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

Matthew 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

1 Timothy 2:4 “who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

thirsts. Spiritual thirst is primary (see 41:17; 44:3; Ps 42:1–2; 63:1). (CSB)

The Holy Spirit poured out like water (32:15; 44:3; (see Jn. 7:37-39), and water is freely given by Yahweh to those in the wilderness (e.g., Is. 48:21; 49:10). He also likens his Word to life-giving rain (55:10-11). Similarly, Jesus offers the Samaritan woman “living water” (Jn. 4:10-15). Through faith in our triune God, our cups overflow. And it costs us nothing.

This is spiritual thirst. Thirsting differs from hungering in this – the hungering man will quietly lie down and die; the thirsting man will spend himself in mad striving. This invitation goes out to all who are spiritually dehydrated and starving. In every generation life apart from God proves unsatisfying. Luther says “This is an exhortation for Christians in the midst of their trials, lest disgust take control of all of them. For life-long Christians this exhortation is especially necessary lest they fall into contempt and loathing of the Word.”

waters. Figurative for spiritual refreshment. Cf. Wisdom’s invitation in Pr 9:5. Christ similarly invited people to drink the water of life (Jn 4:14; 7:37). (CSB)

Though readily available in many parts of the world, water was most precious in dry Israel. (TLSB)

Christ does not destroy the thirsting, but sets us down close beside the living spring. When the soul is quickened and feels new life, then is conscious of need – need of God – thirst for love and friendship – intellectual nature (Bible study to know more about power and love of God) The soul that has Christ has an up-springing well beside him; he lives near to the waters of life. What can better represent salvation than water – the well springs up into everlasting life? Waters, floods, overflowing streams or copious showers, are often used to denote abundant blessing from God. (PC)

Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Luke 14:17 “At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’”

no money. In hard times even water had to be purchased (see La 5:4). (CSB)

It is especially addressed to the poor. No man can excuse himself for not being a Christian because he is poor; no man who is rich can boast that he has bought salvation. We frankly confess that we have nothing to pay, and he frankly forgives all. The reception of grace gifts are dependent upon nothing but a sense of need, and a readiness to accept the blessings offered.

This merchant offers staples at no cost, because the Suffering Servant has already paid the price (cf Is 53:11–12). (TLSB)

come buy – In this world you get what you pay for. Everything in the world costs something, must be paid for in money or labor, or in some act representing compensation for value received. The price here is the suffering and death of Jesus.

wine and milk. Symbols of abundance, enjoyment and nourishment. (CSB)

Wine and milk are figurative representatives of spiritual revival, re-creation and nourishment. These terms stand as symbols of impending salvation. This salvation is primarily thought of in terms of restoration from the prevailing exile. Luther says “Milk belongs to the children (young or new in faith), wine to adults (old or mature in faith.) In Scripture each person will find his appropriate remedies. As we grow in our faith the same text will have different application.

1 Peter 2:2 “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

without money. The death of the servant (53:5–9) paid for the free gift of life (see Ro 6:23). (CSB)

Who would ever “sell” anything so precious for free? This is revolutionary. Yahweh is no ordinary shopkeeper. His submissive Servant paid everything (“he poured out to death his life,” 53:12; see Rom. 6:23), so it costs us nothing. Ambrose writes: “For he who paid for us with the price of his blood did not ask a price from us, because he redeemed us not with gold or silver but

with his precious blood (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The feast is for the least, the lost, and the last (Lk. 14:21). It is for us! (CC)

55:2 *which is not bread.* Perhaps the husks of pagan religious practices. Cf. Dt 8:3. (CSB)

Describes false teaching. Also, mere bread, and water drawn even from Jacob's well, cannot satisfy our spiritual needs (Dt 8:3; Ps 42:1-2; 63:1; Pr 9:4-6; Jn 4:10-14; 1Pt 2:2). (TLSB)

Idol makers are described in 44:12 in terms strikingly similar to those used in the summons in 55:1-2b: they get hungry, lose their strength, do not drink water, and wear out. Thus, when the second part of Yahweh's question exposes the senselessness of spending "your toil" on what is not bread, it calls people to turn away from idolatry and toward Yahweh's gifts. In contrast to Babylonian "junk food" (cf. 44:20), the true staples of life come through God's Word (see 40:8; 55:10-11). "Man does not live by bread alone, but on every Word that comes from Yahweh's mouth" (Deut. 8:3, quoted in Mt. 4:4). This Word is the agent of life, and it is digested through the ear. Either we block our ears to God's Word and remain dead in idolatry, or the Spirit opens our ears so that we listen and live (Cf. Is. 35:5; 50:4; Ps. 40:6; Mt. 11:15; Mk. 7:35). (CC)

The nation with its many talented people is devoting much effort to the acquisition of the lesser values. The Jew in Babylon had made themselves quite comfortable in the possession of material comforts. The affections of the great mass of Israelites were set on worldly things, on enriching themselves – adding field to field and hose to house. (The good life – the more things change, the more they are the same.) This could not sustain them and spiritually will do them no good. Many people are overweight physically but underweight spiritually.

John 6:27 "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

which does not satisfy – Men labor, as a general rule, during the greater part of their lives for that which that doesn't satisfy. Only a fortunate few learn early to set their affections on spiritual things. (greener pastures on other side of fence) A strange plant, called the nardoo, grows in the deserts of Lento, Australia. Its seeds formed for months almost the sole food of a party of explorers who crossed the continent. It is lacking in certain nutritious elements. These men starved even while eating fully every day. Luther says "We must constantly remain pupils of the Word, because practice and custom are always fighting us."

Listen. By listening, people receive the Lord's good, life-giving gifts (cf Is 6:9; 50:4-5). (TLSB)

richest of fare. Great spiritual blessings are compared to a banquet (see 25:6 and note; Ps 22:26; 34:8; Jer 31:14). (CSB)

Jesus reiterates this invitation: "Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life" (Jn. 6:27). He goes on to promise: I am the bread of life. The one of who comes to me will never hunger, and the one who believes in me will never thirst" (Jn. 6:35). Hannah's Song (1 Sam. 2:1-10), echoed in the call for the barren woman to rejoice (Is. 54:1), states "Those who are full have hired themselves out for bread, but the hungry hunger no more" (1 Sam. 2:5; cf. Lk. 1:53). If the deportees fail to embrace the Gospel and instead remain in Babylon, they will spend their "toil for that which does not satisfy" (Is. 55:2). (CC)

Deuteronomy 8:3 “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

55:3 *your ear*. Plural; includes Israel and the Gentiles. (TLSB)

everlasting covenant. † Cf. Jer 31:31–34. David had been promised an unending dynasty, one that would culminate in the Messiah (see 9:7; 54:10; 61:8; 2Sa 7:14–16 and notes). (CSB)

The promises regarding David include the Lord’s sworn oath that the Davidic house will endure forever (cf 2Sm 7:13–16; 1Ch 17; Ps 89:1–4; 110; 132). (TLSB)

The center of the reading is God’s everlasting covenant. This covenant is one of total grace, initiated and fulfilled by God alone. Hence, whatever is offered is done so free of charge. Despite the buying and spending language, the paradoxical completion of those sentences reflects this covenant of grace—without money or price (v 1). What is offered is in abundance as it fully satisfies, and the phrase “that your soul may live” (v 3) moves this from mere physical eating and drinking in the Promised Land to the fullness of God’s salvation. From our post-Easter view, we see that the soul lives fully in the final resurrection on the day of Jesus’ return. The wine and milk indicate joy and richness of this meal of blessings. The many imperatives are inviting, and everyone is included because everything is free and such things as status, wealth, power, and fame do not matter. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

That everlasting covenant once made between God and man had been broken by man and by Israel. It would naturally follow from this that unless God gave up man altogether, he would enter into a new covenant with him. The mediatorship of Christ promised to David.

Isaiah 54:10 “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.”

everlasting covenant. † Assuring the continuation of God’s direction of history. Christ’s resurrection was further proof of God’s faithfulness to David (see Ac 13:34, which quotes from this verse). (CSB)

love for David – David is probably to be understood in a representative sense; he is radiant with the reflected light and the spirituality of the messianic age.

The illustrious reign God graciously granted David was in turn a prophetic guarantee of the eternal Kingdom that the Son of David would establish, as Paul proclaimed in Ac 13:34 (cf Ps 21:7; 89:34–37; Ezk 34:23–24). The prophet does not spell out the full implications of this new understanding of the Davidic covenant. But in the NT, the baptized reign with Christ forever (cf 2Tm 2:12; Rv 22:5). (TLSB)

The exiles are not to slavishly recall Yahweh’s earlier covenant with David to the extent that it excludes them from the future. On the other hand, as they recall Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness to the house of David, they will, in turn, understand God’s love for them. (CC)

55:4-5 Attention turns toward how those who have received this good food are to respond. David is a witness, and so also the people are to call those who do not know the Lord to come to him. This reflects Is 42:6, where Israel is to be a light to the Gentiles; Jesus then reiterates (Mt 5:14)

that all those who feast with him at this celebration meal are to be “the light of the world” (cf. Lessing, 663). (*These notes draw heavily from Lessing’s commentary.*) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

55:4 *Him*. David’s Son, the Messiah. (TLSB)

witness to the peoples.† A reference to David’s Son, the Messiah, who was a light to the nations. (CSB)

God’s testimony to “the peoples” through Israel’s king reached full clarity in “Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth” (Rv 1:5; cf Jn 18:37). (TLSB)

The righteous Servant (53:11) imputes divine “righteousness” to the “servants” (54:17), the new Israel consisting of all in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike. Just so, David’s call to witness is also given to the whole people. The democratization of the Davidic covenant renews the original vocational intent of the Sinaitic covenant. Israel once again will be “a kingdom of priest and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:9). They will be a light to the Gentiles (Is. 44:6; cf. 49:6), indeed, “the light of the world” (Mt. 5:14). This extension is highlighted by the twofold use of “peoples,” Is. 55:4). When the prophet makes God’s covenant with David a model for God’s commitment to Jacob-Israel, in contrast there is an implication that this is significant for the whole human race. (CC)

leader ... of the peoples.† Similar titles are used of the Messiah in Da 9:25; Rev 1:5. (CSB)

55:5 *you shall call a nation*. The attraction of nations to Zion and to the God of Israel is a major Biblical theme. (CSB)

Many nations, esp those thus far unknown, will stream to Israel because of the deeds of the Lord (cf 2:1–5; chs 13–23). This envisioned worldwide outreach begins with the Lord’s summons to Abram (Gn 12:1–3), who will be the source of blessing to all the families of the earth (Gn 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). The election of Israel is the very means of salvation for the nations (cf Ex 19:5–6). At Sinai, Israel is distinctly marked and empowered to be an evangelist. (TLSB)

God chose them to witness and so he does with us. This was a type of reverse exile. Today people from many nations are coming to America, to us as it were.

Isaiah 49:6 “he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

that do not know you. The reverse of the exile, when Israel was sent to a nation unknown to them (see Dt 28:36). Ruth left Moab to live with a people she “did not know before” (Ru 2:11). (CSB)

The Parallel use, “behold,” that begins both 55:4 and 55:5 compares David’s past in 55:4 to what Yahweh’s renews servants will now become. Is. 55:3-5 transfers David’s covenant and his role as a witness to Yahweh’s reinstated servants. Their witness will be effective, drawing the unknown and unknowing nations to the one and only God. His has “glorified” his redeemed servants, even as he was “glorified” by the Suffering Servant (49:3). (CC)

55:6 *Seek the LORD.* See Jer 29:13–14; Hos 3:5; Am 5:4, 6, 14 (contrast the hypocritical seeking of 58:2). (CSB)

The Servant reconciles the sinner to the Lord. (TLSB)

seek. Translates two terms: Hbr *baqash*, “look for”; Hbr *darash*, “care about, examine, inquire.” The Lord is sought in three ways: (1) through calling on His name in prayer, (2) by consulting Him through Urim and Thummim administered by the high priest, and (3) through the study of His Word. A visit to the tabernacle or temple is frequently implied. Unbelievers do not seek God. Believers seek Him in an attitude of repentance, not selfishness. (TLSB – 843)

Yahweh has prepared a victory feast (55:1-2) and has invited all to be incorporated into David’s everlasting feast (55:3). The result is that the guests become his witnesses to the world (55:4-5). Deportees dare not drag their feet into this new life. “Seek Yahweh while he allows himself to be found!” (55:6). (CC)

This exhortation does not imply that hearers are able, on their own, to find Yahweh. Nothing could be further from the truth! Caught in the sin of idolatry, the deportees are blind and deaf (42:19), stubborn rebels from birth (48:8), and they have no righteousness of their own (48:1). The Suffering Servant alone is righteous (53:11), and his death and resurrection declare captives reconciled to Yahweh and righteous (53:5, 11; 54:17). All people are sheep who have gone astray; each has turned to his own way (53:6). The Servant is the Good Shepherd who has come to seek and save the lost, laying down his life for the sheep (Lk. 15:4-7; 19:10; Jn. 10:11-18; 1 Peter 2:25). (CC)

Where is God to be found? Those who “seek” Yahweh can rest assured that they will find him where he promises to be. The Jerusalem temple was the place where he caused his name to dwell (e.g., Deut. 12:5). However, after it was destroyed, where was he located? In light of Yahweh’s advent as Shepherd (40:11) and his return to Zion (52:8), he invites people to seek him where he dwells forever: in Jesus, the Servant, the Son and Heir of David (Is. 9:6-7). He is present in his enduring and efficacious Word (Is. 40:8; 55:10-11). Those who search the Scriptures will find that they testify to Christ (Jn. 5:39). He is the Word incarnate and the new temple. Those who seek him in Scripture, Holy Baptism, and his Supper do find him. The opposite is to lust after idols (cf. 1 Jn. 5:21). He alone gives life, while false gods bring only death. (CC)

When can God be found? The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that “the day of salvation” (Is. 49:8; cf. 52:6) is “today” (Heb. 3:7-4:7), so do not procrastinate. Gregory of Nyssa asks: “Do you want to know the opportune time to seek the Lord? The simple answer is: all your life.” (CC)

This is proclaimed in the context of the invitation to all who thirst for God (v 1). The call is urgent, for salvation is available now. It is saying “Now, at this present moment, you Israel, are given the offer of salvation, God is turning toward you, the return home, and the new life. He can be found now, now he is near. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

He is near. The Lord has come near through His Word. The kind of “seeking” this chapter calls for is “listening” to the Lord’s Word (cf Jer 29:13–14; Hos 3:5; Am 5:6, 14). (TLSB)

55:7 *wicked forsake.* Though all are invited, there is no room in the kingdom of grace for those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways or for those who think only of their own righteousness and feel insulted by God’s offer to “abundantly pardon” their sins. Let no one presume to come

on his or her own terms, because none can comprehend God's ways and thoughts to save fallen mankind. (TLSB)

The "wicked one/unbeliever" (48:22) can refer to any unrepentant sinner, but the context focuses on an Israelite in exile who is conformed to the way of life in Babylon that he ignores Yahweh's transforming promises. This person is very comfortable in the pagan empire and does not want to be a part of Yahweh's homecoming to Zion. He stubbornly insists on following his own way and trusting in own thoughts (55:8-9; see also Prov. 3:5-6; 16:1-3; 21:2). But Yahweh does not give up on such people! The "wicked ones/unbelievers" forfeit peace (48:22), but the suffering of the Servant earn "peace" with God for them (53:5). Thus they are still invited to partake of the divine gifts. (CC)

If they do not, it will not be because Yahweh lacks forgiveness. His absolution is abundant! It is promised (e.g., 40:2; 43:25; 44:22) and delivered (53:11; 54:17). Nehemiah (Neh. 9:17) and Daniel (Dan. 9:9) claim this mercy, as does Paul: "but where sin abounded, grace super-abounded" (Rom. 5:20). (CC)

Genuine repentance means "turning" from "wicked" ways and "evil" thoughts, and turning to God for mercy and pardon. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

return to the LORD. Done only by the Lord's Word, which accomplishes that which He purposes (cf v 11). (TLSB)

It is time to "turn" to Yahweh. Moses had predicted that Israel would apostatize and suffer God's Sinaitic curses but finally "turn/repent" (Deut.4:30; 30:1-2) for "Yahweh your God will restore your fortunes" (Deut. 30:3). The multivalence of the verb covers Israel's repentance from sin and return to Yahweh when he restores their fortunes and allows them to come home to Jerusalem. (CC)

he will abundantly pardon – God's mercy and pardon are given "freely" as gifts, not based on human repentance, but on God's mercy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

He will pardon and have mercy on every penitent sinner, no matter how much sin is "increased" (Rm 5:20). All others remain wicked and unrighteous in His sight. (TLSB)

55:8–9 Seeking to understand all things about the ways of the Lord is futile. His plans and reasons are beyond our understanding (Jb 38:1–40:2; Rm 11:33–36). (TLSB)

These verses apply to exiles who will be at odds with Yahweh's plan to use Cyrus (45:9-13) and the Servant (53:1-3). Seeking to understand God's way is futile. Commenting on 55:8, Luther writes:

The thoughts of God are far above all our thoughts. In our heart we would never have gotten the idea of a free forgiveness of sins. Reason does not admit that righteousness is free without merits. (CC)

God calls us to live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). His plans and reasons are beyond the comprehension of mortal man (e.g., Ps. 103:11; Job 38:1 40:2; Rom. 11:33-36). He settles accounts in such a strange way. We seek revenge to get even, but the Servant, despised and reviled (Is. 53:2-5), offers forgiveness and love. We hold grudges and withhold grace (see Gen.

27:41), but God takes no pleasure in being vindictive and delights when the wicked repent and live (see Ezek. 18:23). (CC)

These Gospel gifts are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter states: “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23 ESV; cf. 1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8). If it was senseless to oppose God’s restoring work through Cyrus, how much more foolish is it to disagree with God’s plan of salvation now fully revealed in Jesus Christ. (CC)

55:8 *my thoughts are not your thoughts* – Human thoughts and thinking are dominated by the old nature and inevitably turn not to God, but to self and the satisfaction of human needs and wants. The answers to the problems of human life are not found in human reasoning, but in God’s ways and thoughts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

The ways and thoughts of humans are wicked and evil by nature. All thoughts that flow from us are nothing like God’s thoughts. The deepest thinkers of the ages cannot achieve the high and lofty ways of God or understand God. Left alone and without God’s Word no human can imagine that God would send a Savior to die for unworthy sinners. God’s grace remains a mystery to human intelligence and research. Yet God does make it known to us in his Word. (PBC)

55:9 *my ways higher*. See Ps 145:3. (CSB)

55:10-11 Whether or not we understand the ways of the Lord, we can trust that His Word is true and will do what it says. Luther: “He is speaking of ways and thoughts which have to do with the Word.... Rain and snow are not useless, but they *water* the earth, *giving seed to the sower*. The rain can achieve everything for the earth.... When we experience the absence of rain, we see what the earth produces. So He takes away the glory of the earth and shows that it is not the earth that does it but that it is accomplished by the rain. So our building and promotion of the church is not the result of our works but of the Word of God which we preach” (AE 17:257–58). “This is all because of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word, which no one can praise enough. For it has, and is able to do, all that God is and can do” (LC IV 17). (TLSB)

55:10 *rain and snow* – They water the earth in order to replenish it. These elements can sometimes be the cause of great destruction and flooding, but here they are considered blessings. Rain is life giving, and snow is occasionally used in the OT as a symbol of purity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

God’s Word comes from Him like the rain and snow from heaven. (PBC)

come down from heaven – In the context of weather, this simply refers to the sky. Here it may also serve as a parallel to heaven the place where God reside, from which his Word comes down. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Yahweh’s transcendence is accented in 55:8-9; here he announces his immanence. Yahweh’s Word comes down from heaven and goes forth into the world to accomplish his gracious plan. This is true of Scripture, and preeminently pertain to the Word incarnate Jesus Christ. He is the eternal Word and God, the agent of creation (Jn. 1:1-3), who became flesh (Jn. 1:14) to reveal the unseen God: “the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known” (Jn. 1:18). Jesus is the Word sent down from heaven to be the bread of life for the world (Jn. 6:32-35). (CC)

do not return there. Before the rain and the snow are again drawn up into the sky as mist (Jb 36:27), they achieve the purpose for which they were sent. (TLSB)

water the earth – This carries with it the sense of saturation and being abundantly satisfied. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

making it bring forth and sprout – It begins the growth process. Note that it is a process. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

When rain and snow come down, they water the ground and make it bud and flourish. When God's Word comes to sinners, it too works. (PBC)

There is a tangible point of contact between God, the merciful one and the sinner, the penitent one. That point of contact is the word of God. Here God deigns to explain how His word is as though it had built-in quality of "self-fulfilling energy." That divine word is dynamic. It is sent forth by the Lord as a sort of messenger, who has specific commission. In a strikingly simple and telling comparison the Lord shows how He operates. His Word is like the rain and the snow that come down and stay in the earth on which they fell; and they moisten and fructify the earth, making things to stir with hidden energy and to sprout, so that the eternal cycle of seed-time and harvest fulfills itself, and new seed is provided for the man that sows and for the man who needs bread to eat. (Leupold)

55:11 *my word.*† Such as the promises of vv. 3, 5, 12. The word is viewed as a messenger also in 9:8; Ps 107:20. Cf. Jn 1:1. (CSB)

The Word is no echo devoid of results. The Word always brings about what God wants done (45:23; 46:10–11; Ps 33:9; Jer 1:9–10; Mt 13:3–8, 18–23; Heb 4:12). (TLSB)

God's Word is more powerful than armies, treaties, chariots, horses, as well as every other human might. Only his Word directs history, and this proves that he alone is the true God. The centurions confession echoes this same confidence in God's Word made flesh in Jesus: "only say the word and my servant will be healed" (Mt. 8:8). (CC)

Whether or not the Israelites understand the ways of Yahweh (Is. 55:8-9) They can trust that his Word is true and will do what it says (e.g., 1 Sam 9:6; 1 Ki. 13:1-3; 2 Ki. 10:10; 14:25; 23:15-20). And whether or not they trust it, God will still bring it to pass in the person of his Son. He who came once in humility and weakness will come again in glory as the victorious rider called "the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). (CC)

God makes contact with sinners through His Word. The Word comes from God, who authors it and sends it across time and space to the sinner. It will accomplish what God desire and that is the salvation of his people. God assures us in these verses that His Word is effective. It is His Word because it goes out of His mouth and returns to Him. As His Word, it is powerful. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (4:12) (PBC)

God has promised to work through the external Word. God has simply chosen the Word as the means through which He has promised to work. These verses emphasize the encouragement of verse 2 and 3. There God invited sinners to listen – listen, give ear, and hear. The phrase "give ear" means to stretch out the ears, to strain them to catch the words. None of this should surprise

us when we realize what God's Word can do. Whenever anyone thinks that he or she can do without hearing the Word, such a person discards the way God works within us. (PBC)

We also say that His Word is true because it comes from God. God gave His Word by inspiration, and His Word cannot lie because God cannot lie. As we read the words written by Isaiah, we can be confident that they are the very words of God. Throughout the prophecy, Isaiah noted that what he wrote had been revealed to him and that he had received his revelation from God (for example, 1:1; 2:1; 5:9; 6:1; 8:11). Jeremiah and the others prophets made the same claim. The apostle Paul wrote, "This what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13). And Peter summarized the centuries of God's proclamation by reminding us, "Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). (PBC)

shall not return to empty – It will not come back empty-handed or without fulfilling expectations.

Succeed – It will accomplish what God desire and that is the salvation of his people. (CSB)

Hebrew 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

"Get er done" – "Just do it" – Change agent – Life changing encounter

Notes from Isaiah 40:12, 26 are found below:

40:12 *measured the waters*. See Job 28:25; 38:8. In Job 38–41 the Lord overwhelms Job with a description of his greatness. (CSB)

marked off the heavens. See 48:13. (CSB)

Someone has estimated that the world's oceans contain 340 quintillion gallons of water. Scientists now "mark off the heavens," measuring the universe at 30 billion light years, a figure almost certain to be revised – doubtless, upward. These answers to only two of Isaiah's questions fill us with the kind of awe appropriate for finite creatures who encounter the incredible majesty of our infinite Creator! (LL)

For God, who has again been speaking since verse 8, now spells out in detail exactly how the word that comes forth from his own mouth, and also after that from the mouth of His prophet – how this word, we say, operates. It comes forth like God's mighty creation word, omnipotent and irresistible. Then it does its assigned task. At this point the figure of a messenger enters upon the scene: the word of God is such a messenger. He does not return with a mission unaccomplished. When he reappears he has finished what it pleased God to send him for. The task laid upon it has been successfully accomplished. Though this description always applies to the saving word of the gospel wherever it is sent forth, in this particular case the return from Babylon Captivity seems to be specifically thought of. But the efficacy of the word of forgiveness as outline in verses 8-10, is also not to be lost sight of. (Leupold)

40:26 *created*. See vv. 21–22 and notes. (CSB)

brings out. The Hebrew for this expression is used for bringing forth the constellations in Job 38:32. (CSB)

starry host. Also worshiped by the people (see 47:13; Jer 19:13). (CSB)

each by name. See Ps 147:4. (CSB)

Amazing, isn't it! According to the *World Book Encyclopedia*, "with large telescopes astronomers can photograph over thirty billion stars. And we think there must be billions more beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes." Not only is He able to name each one but also brings out each one every night.

One of the realms that is under His control is "the host of heaven." What makes this comparison all the more meaningful is the fact that especially in the land of the Babylonians, where the children Israel had been in bondage, the heavenly bodies were regarded astrologically, as controlling the affairs of men, that transpired down here on earth. Their control of these affairs was absolute, far beyond that of the gods themselves. Not so in the religion of Israel. There they appeared first of all merely as a part of the creation of God. "Who created these?" allows for only one answer: the God whom Israel worshipped. And as they once originated with Him, so they forever remain under His control, His, "who brings forth their host by number." The spectacle of the starry skies, night after night, is, frequently speaking, nothing other than a case where the Almighty Maker of the universe brings them out as a shepherd brings forth his flock. Besides, the count is made, as it were, night after night, and the sum-total remains the same invariably. The figure may be regarded as blending into another one at this point: the Lord of this heavenly host is a shepherd, who calls forth these sheep of His, night for night, as the shepherd, who calls forth His sheep one by one out of the fold. As it were, in His astronomy He has them all named from the time when they were created and He may be thought of as remembering their name. It is not due to the laws of nature and their normal operation that the stars all appear nightly. It is rather the "result of the greatness of His might and the abundance of His strength" that "not one of them is ever missing." The utmost simplicity of argument is blended with the greatest of insight in this illustration. (Leupold)

not one ... missing. See 34:16 and note. (CSB)

55:12 *go out in joy*.† As the Israelites did at their departure from Babylon. (CSB)

Picture of captives returning to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Isaiah 52:9-12, ⁹Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. ¹¹Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the LORD. ¹²But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard."

Isaiah 52:9-12 Notes: **52:10** *holy arm*. See 51:9 and note. God's arm is often associated with redemption and salvation."

Numbers 11:21-23, “²¹ But Moses said, “Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’ ²² Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?” ²³ The LORD answered Moses, “Is the LORD’s arm too short?” You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.” The note 23 says, “The human impossibility is an occasion for demonstrating the Lord’s power.”

Isaiah 52:9-12 Notes: **52:12** *go before you ... be your rear guard.* As he did for the Israelites when they were freed from Egypt. (CSB)

The joy is the bliss of Eden restored. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 3)

Now look at what the Word promises. The gospel holds out joy for sinners and brings peace. God wishes to fill the heart of every sinner with joy and peace, and both come from the Word – peace with God through Christ and joy in the redemption Christ has accomplished. As this Word of promise comes from God and enters the human heart, it accomplished God’s purpose and imparts joy and peace. When Isaiah writes that God’s people will go out in joy, his promise is nothing else than gospel. At first he may have in mind the exodus of God’s people from Egypt, and certainly he also points to the return of the remnant from the Babylonian captivity. But those exoduses, as joyful and exciting as they were for the people of God, are nothing compared with the final exodus. All God’s saints will leave the bondage of sin and death. They will be led to the Jerusalem above. In a single picture, the prophet unites both the return from Babylon and the final deliverance. (PBC)

mountains ... break forth into singing. Nature is called on to join in praise. (CSB)

This celebration is a dangerous witness to Babylon, which would not look fondly on such praise. Indeed, the rulers of this age seek to stop the singing. And if they cannot stop it, they try to pollute it with idolatrous ideology and syncretistic slogan. But Israel will not stop singing, and Yahweh will not stop restoring. He is enthroned on the praise of his people (Ps. 22:3). (CC)

All creation joins in the celebration of God’s redemption. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 3)

hands. Branches. The language is figurative (cf. 1Ch 16:33; Ps 98:8; 114:3–6). (CSB)

Anyone hearing the gospel longs for the eternal mansions of heaven. The overwhelming joy of God’s people as they experience God’s deliverance will spread to the trees and transform the wilderness from thorns and briars to pine trees and myrtles. These words do not refer to literal and physical events. Instead, they paint poetic pictures of the final deliverance of God’s people from this bleak world of sorrow, pain, sin and death. (PBC)

The language descriptive of this great event is borrowed from the account of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. As there was joy then, there shall be joy again. So also this Exodus shall be “in peace,” not in panic or in haste but in the full assurance of faith in the God who has often redeemed His people. That figure of a band of men released and coming back free is replaced by the language of a festal procession, where men keep a feast and mark the occasion by jubilant shouts. To catch the exuberance of the festival spirit, we must note that the expressions of joy are so overwhelming that even “the tree of the field” are swept along into it and clap their hands for joy as a king rhythmic accompaniment to the swelling chorus of joy. “The trees of the field” are

the wild trees that grow promiscuously here and there; even they feel that they must join this happy chorus. (Leupold)

55:13 *thorn... cypress... briars ... myrtle*. The reverse of the desolation Isaiah had prophesied about earlier (5:6; 32:13). These trees will beautify the desert (cf. 35:1–2). Several are named in 60:13 in connection with adorning the place of God’s sanctuary. Acacia wood was used for the tabernacle (Ex 25:5, 10, 13). The pine tree and myrtle replace thorns and briars in 55:13. (CSB)

A picture of paradise restored. In Gn 3:18, the Lord tells Adam that “thorns and thistles” will inhabit the land. Now, because of the Lord’s salvation, the plants of Eden will spring up again, and the Lord’s people will be invited back into the lush garden. (TLSB)

Luther: “In the church there should not be thorns and brambles, but fruit-bearing, splendid and noble trees, that is, the best kind of Christians.” His Word has made us objects of beauty and will lead us to eternal glorification in which even all the nature will participate. (LL)

The thorny curse of Genesis 3:18 is reversed through Him who wore the crown of thorns. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 3)

name for the LORD. Similar to God’s fame in the exodus (see 63:12, 14). (CSB)

everlasting sign. God’s deliverance would never be forgotten. Cf. 19:20; 56:5. (CSB)

Just as creation became corrupt in Adam’s fall (cf Rm 8:19–21), in Christ it will be restored to its pristine beauty, a sign of God’s redemption. (TLSB)

The final section of this verse may have in mind the way ancient kings erected monuments to commemorate their victories and accomplishments. But later kings established different empires and often destroyed or defaced the monuments of their predecessors. Even if those monuments were not destroyed by later kings and emperors, time and weather would turn them into ruins. The deliverance of God’s saints is the great accomplishment of the Lord of grace. No king will ever erase that accomplishment; no number of years or force of nature will turn it into ruins. All that God did to deliver sinners from sin and death stands forever as God’s greatest honor. (PBC)

In highly figurative language that prophet now describes a marvelous transformation even of the vegetation along the road of the Return. Common, worthless desert plants, like the thornbush and the nettle, will along the road of the Return be changed into trees of distinction and beauty, like the cypress and the myrtle. But all this shall serve not for the glorification of Israel, but for the enhancement of the glory of Israel’s God. He shall thereby, as it were erect a memorial (Hebrew: “name”) for Himself, and establish an everlasting sign for Himself, which can never be effaced. The memory of God’s salvation-acts can never be destroyed. (Leupold)

Ch 55 The Lord invites all to seek Him in His Word and to receive His good and satisfying gifts. Though the Lord invites us to listen diligently to His Word, we often listen carelessly or not at all. When we shut out God’s life-giving Word, we are left to labor for that which does not satisfy. Jesus has accomplished the purpose for which He was sent: the pardon for sin, which He won at the cross. He gives abundantly to those from every nation who turn to Him. • Lord God, may Your Word continue to accomplish Your purposes among us and around the world. Teach us to hold Your Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Amen. (TLSB)