
How we view & how we do evangelism

Isaiah 55:1-13

Introduction

In his commentary on Isaiah 2:1-4, John Calvin said something amazing. “By these words he first declares that the godly will be filled with such *an ardent desire to spread* the doctrines of religion, that every one *not satisfied with* his own calling and his personal knowledge will *desire to draw* others along with him. And nothing could be more inconsistent with *the nature of faith* than that deadness which would lead a man to disregard his brethren, and to keep the light of knowledge choked up within his own breast” (emphasis mine).

To talk on how we at Clearcreek Chapel view and do evangelism, I want us to see a key thought on Calvin’s evangelistic vision. He saw something more powerful, more beautiful, and more biblical than a technique-oriented, method-motivated, manipulative evangelism. He saw something I desire us all to see. Notice three phrases.

1. “An ardent desire to spread the doctrines of religion”
2. “not satisfied with his own calling and his personal knowledge”
3. “will desire to draw others along with him”

Notice that these thoughts on the affections of the church and its mission for evangelism are tied to the nature of faith. What I think Calvin was seeing (and certainly what we are trying to communicate through this message) was the fact that saving faith BY NECESSITY cannot stay to itself. It must be expressive. It must be expansive. Faith is gregarious. It is sociable. It cares for people. It must include others in what it is enjoying. It was inconceivable to Calvin to think that a Christian could enjoy the treasure and banquet of God’s grace found in Jesus alone without sharing it.

As I thought over the passage for this morning and how Calvin read Isa.2:1-4 it occurred to me that :

- + We will gladly provide others what we gladly possess ourselves.
- We cannot give what we do not have.

Calvin's thought that genuine faith is restless until others rest in Jesus will be, I think, instructive as we move into this morning's message.

How we view evangelism

This morning's message will be broken down into two sections. The first section (Isa.55:1-5) will be dedicated to making clear how we view evangelism. The second section (Isa.55:6-12) is designed to make clear how we do evangelism. The first section – A perspective on evangelism. The second section – A practice of evangelism.

So let's get started with a look at how we view evangelism by noticing Isaiah 55:1-5. (Read)

A Vision of God

Vv.1-3

Isaiah 53-55 are stimulating chapters. This is Isaiah's celebration of the work of the Servant. In Chapter 53 he prophetically paints a picture of the suffering servant; Jesus Christ. This chapter tells us how all the benefits of the gospel can be free to us. You see in v.4 the doctrine of propitiation. You see in v.6 how God-hating sin cannot be ignored. You see in v.8 Christ's unjust trial. You see in v.9 Christ's perfect purity. You see in v.10 Christ's death. You see in vv.10b-12 Christ's resurrection. You see in v.11 the doctrine of forensic righteousness. You see in v.12 Christ's priestly work. He paid for all blessings on the cross!

In Chapter 54, he rehearsed the benefits of that work and how joy is the fitting expression of receiving these benefits. Now, in chapter 55, he moves from the descriptive mode to the prescriptive mode calling Israel to receive what is now hers to enjoy. This is the great invitation.

As an inviting God

To make clear how we view evangelism here at the Chapel notice how the Lord evangelized His people. The first thing we observe in vv.1-3 is stunning. To reach the hearts of His people, the Lord exhibits Himself as an Inviting God. This is made apparent by the use of metaphors. The LORD is using figurative language to communicate to the whole person something about His appealing quality.

Seen as Water

He sets before the thirsty three beverages. The first one is water. When the tongue is pasty; cleaving to the roof of the mouth, what sounds life-giving? Is it not refreshing water? In Palestine, this imagery was used regularly due to the fact that the threatening desert was just next door. And so

when poets and prophets desired to communicate something of the soul-quenching benefits of the Lord's glory and grace they would resort to the picture of water. For example, in one of our popular chorus' we hear Ps. 42, "As the deer pants for streams of water so my soul longs after Thee". This is the point the Lord is making by using water. There is something God is offering that is quenching for the thirsty.

Seen as Milk

Not only is the Lord offering water, He also talks about milk. Milk is a beverage for nourishment for babies. The Lord is offering something here which is represented as a drink for sustenance and growth. (For New Testament examples of this metaphor see 1Cor.3:2; Heb.5:12,13; 1Pet.2:2).

Seen as Wine

We have water, we have milk and now the Lord extends another beverage called wine. Wine was used in Bible times as a drink of celebration. It brought cheer to the heart. This wine parallels the thought of Eph.5:18. This is not a drink which impairs judgment and vision. This is a drink which repairs judgment and vision. It does not leave someone slow of speech. On the contrary, it quickens the tongue in order to express genuine joy.

God, in other words, is water, milk and wine to the desperate person in view. He is refreshing to the dehydrated. He is nourishing to the weak. He is exhilarating to the downhearted. Such quickening, appealing, yes pleasurable language informs us that ***God is an inviting God.***

Seen in the interpretation of the metaphor

The metaphors we've briefly looked at are to suggest something about the Lord. We are to see that *God is an inviting God.* And we know we are on to this when we continue reading and find that the Lord interprets the beverages for us. In vv.1-3 he is telling the thirsty to come to the beverages for refreshment, for nourishment, for pleasure. And now in v.3 He says, "Come to me". This is utterly significant; for it tells us that all these lavish descriptions are not talking about God's gifts. Evangelism isn't the offer of hand-outs to help someone cope with dysfunctions. God is the all-satisfying gift of God's love. The beverages are pointing to God Himself. He is not telling the thirsty to come to 12 steps to successful living.

Jesus in John 7:37 cries out saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink”!

A View of Man

This first discovery assists us in how we are to view evangelism. In developing our philosophy of evangelism, we must start with a vision of what God is like. And we see that *Our God is an inviting God*.

As a dissatisfied soul

Now we move toward man. What is man like? Watch the Great Evangelist at work as the LORD exposes *man as a dissatisfied soul*.

In v.1 the invitation is extended to everyone who thirsts. The description is designed to expose the fact that man is poor. Man is needy. Man does not have in himself what he needs to be satisfied.

And not only is he by nature thirsty, he cannot quench himself no matter what he does. Augustine said of humans, “*Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee*”. The quest is plain in v.2. The Lord is appealing to the desire of man by saying, “Why do you spend money for what is not bread and your wages for what does not satisfy”. All the toil, all the plans, all the dreams and hopes and aspirations of man amount to v.2. “Does not satisfy”. Over every effort, outside of God, that man makes to quench the soul-thirst could be written “Dissatisfaction Guaranteed”. The haves or the have nots; the rich or the poor; the well-adjusted or the misfits; they have one thing in common = dissatisfied. This is what the Lord is telling us in v.2. And this is what my evangelistic efforts told me on an unusual day.

I have a question for you. What do an unstable drunkard and a stable business man have in common? On this unusual day sometime back I interacted with a drunkard over Jesus Christ. I tried to help him shift his allegiance from the king of beers to the King of Kings. He was approximately my age. He was distraught living in a two room apartment without family without hope. He looked skeletal. His set backed eyes stared into nothing. I plead with him to flee this rebellion and turn to the water and milk and wine of Jesus Christ. He looked at the Scriptures, he looked at the refrigerator; two containers of hope. One is genuine and the other is deceptive. His unregenerate, rebellious and dissatisfied soul reasoned for a moment and chose Budweiser over the inviting God; King Jesus.

That was the drunkard. What about the business man. He looked nothing like the man making love with his beer. He was dressed nicely. He carried himself with confidence. His skin was shiny. His disposition pleasing. We met at Barns and Noble. I was at one table and he was at another. My eyes were in Isaiah. His eyes were in Playboy. Initially, I wanted to ignore him and feast upon the banquet we are looking at this morning. I did not have permission to do so. I was unable to exegete v. 2 without interacting with the people of v.2.

Here was a man whose soul was dissatisfied; lusty, restless, thirsty. I got up from my table and engaged him in conversation over the All-satisfying Object of the Universe. He reminded me of the drunkard though his outer appearance would not have suggested this. He glanced at the biblical offer and then gazed at Playboy's offer. The similarity of the two men is described well by C.S. Lewis. *"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world"*.

Our philosophy of evangelism here at the Chapel, the way we view evangelism, is shaped by the vision of God (God is an inviting / appealing / utterly desirable God = holy) and our view of man (Man is a dissatisfied / mutinous / utterly depraved soul = sinful)

Our inviting God invites

Left here, evangelism lacks power. There is one thing remaining that we need to notice about the Great Evangelist. God, in Isaiah 55, not only exhibits his desirability, he not only exposes man's depravity, God does something about it.

To close with the heart ***God who is an inviting God invites***. Hardly could one read this passage well without coming away with the cadence and tone of the writing. God is inviting the thirsty to drink of Him. He is appealing to their reasoning. He is luring their hearts to find their satisfaction in Him. Our great God and Savior is not merely inviting in the sense of pleasing. He is inviting in the sense of pleading.

Passionately & Persuasively

He does this pleading passionately (cf. Jer.32:41). He does this pleading persuasively. 5 times He uses "come". 4 times He says, "listen". He calls out to the dissatisfied soul to come and enjoy everlasting life found only in Jesus Christ.

❖ come, buy without money, eat, enjoy

Our starting point in understanding evangelism has been the nature of God. The desirability of God must be in our hearts and on our lips. We need to see clearly that God is not glum. He is not dull or deadpan. He is glorious! He is exuberant! He captures hearts not by raw power but by ravishing pleasure. He is appealing in His holiness. The intrinsic worth of the LORD must grip our imaginations. It must arrest our affections. Our great and glorious God is breathtaking!

Second, what we are to notice and remember from this message concerning man is that yes he is depraved. He is sinful to the core and unable to change apart from the intervening work of the Spirit to awaken the heart to repent and believe. Yes, this is basic. But we also are to remember that sin is not merely described in doing bad. It is to be understood as a loss of sight to the inviting nature of God seen ultimately in Jesus Christ. We are to sense that sin is deadness to premium and permanent joy. And that the human soul will crave and ache and yearn for that which it believes will provide happiness. And until the quest for joy terminates in the work and worth of God, dissatisfaction or indifference will be the hallmark of man. And this will lead him to hell.

So where do we fit in with respect to evangelism? How does our inviting God invite the dissatisfied soul to come to Him so as to drink of eternal life? If we have tasted to see that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, how do we move from a receiver of this good news to a deliverer of this good news?

Conclusion

I'm interested now in closing the message with practical ways of how we do evangelism. This concluding exhortation will be simply an outline. It is not designed to answer all your questions over how we do evangelism. Tonight please come back. It will be there that we begin to flesh out a strategy to increase outreach and assimilation. But for now, here is an outline on how we do evangelism. Two things we must do.

1. WHEN THIRSTY YOU MUST DRINK

Whenever we are experiencing thirst (v.1), whenever we are losing contentment (v.2) (like fretting over finances or health or the future of loved ones; restless over our status; desiring a TV program more than the glories of God in Christ, chatty over trivialities; worried over political uncertainties and international terror etc.) we need to come to God for the 3 figurative and spiritual beverages found in vv.1-2. When we are dry, weak, despondent, according to this passage God through Christ offers himself; the refreshing water, nourishing milk, exhilarating wine. We must come to Christ and drink! What this means is spelled out for us in vv.6-13.

Request

V.6

All this figurative language of O thirsty come, buy, eat, drink, enjoy, etc. are commands to be satisfied in the beverages. And this figurative language is fleshed out for us in vv.6,7. The rhythm of life is ups and downs. We move from need to nourishment; from thirst to quench, from mourning to dancing, from danger to deliverance. We must understand that to make headway in evangelism each and every day we must be evangelized by God in His word. When we feel distant, when we begin to lose earnest desire for Jesus and its consequent contentment, we must not think it to be normal or natural or acceptable. We must **seek the Lord**, call upon Him while He is near. In other words, we must be people of prayer; earnest, genuine prayer.

Repent

V.7

Next we need to be **people of repentance**. Notice v.7. When we are thinking wrongly and acting rebelliously, we need to repent. When our thoughts are, "I would rather be at Kings Island than at Wednesday night Flock" or "I would rather be in front of the TV watching the winter Olympics rather than in front of the Lord's Table enjoying communion"... whatever our struggles are we must come to terms with what we are thinking and what we are wanting. If our thinking does not line up with Scripture and our desires are not in cadence with the Bible we must repent; turn from our wicked ways and return to the Lord!

Remember

Vv.8-9

We also need to **remember that His resources are not restricted** (vv.8-9). Unlike humans who parcel out forgiveness and measure out compassion, God's ways as seen in verse 7 are infinitely higher than our way of responding to the guilty. We must never forget that to drink of God is to humbly believe that He will abundantly pardon. And when we have sinned, we can believe that His wealth of compassion is limitless and at liberty. He will lavish grace upon the repentant seeker.

Rest

Vv.10-11

We too need to **rest in His sovereign Word** that what He promises He will do (vv.10-11). Notice how these verses function. The logical connector "For" introduces the reader to an irresistible reason for the preceding requirements we looked at in vv.6-7. There is hope to continue drinking because He is the one whose word works out in us what His word requires of us. He commands us to drink deeply of Him in a certain way. And our desire and ability to delight ourselves in Him is made possible by Him and His Word. Trust Him!

Rejoice

Vv.12-13

Lastly, the way to drink God (vv.1-2) is to **rejoice over God's plan** for our future as seen in vv. 12-13. This joy, or transformation of a desert life, is here and now and also there and then. These verses are addressing a transformation which happens through the eternal covenant (v.3) but also is the ultimate transformation of a new heaven and new earth (i.e. a total reversal of the curse found in the garden). Rejoice over such a happy future!

How does a personal and all-church quest for satisfaction in God through Jesus Christ relate to evangelism? Here is the answer. By delighting in His abundance (v.2) found in Jesus (vv.3-4) our lives change and become "beautified" (v.5b). By grace flowing from the Messiah; Christ Jesus our Lord, He transforms our lives to make us different.

We become like vv.12-13. We start like a desert and come away looking like the Garden of Eden. Now notice what happens due to this transformation. Verse.5 says that they will "run to you". This is conversion language. This text is pointing to the same reality that we looked at from Isaiah 2:1-4 at the beginning of this message.

V.5 tells us that "you will call" and they will "run to you". The reason people are running to God's people is due to this transformation. God's people here are calling people to come to this inviting God. And vv.6ff is to be understood as the content of that invitation.

So, how do we do evangelism here at the Chapel?

2. DO THE SAME FOR OTHERS WHAT YOU ARE DOING FOR YOURSELF.

That is, help others come to God like you are coming to God on a daily basis. If we are drinking deeply of God through Christ as seen in vv.6-13, we will know experientially what the gospel is all about. We, in other words, will invite the thirsty to God in Christ passionately and persuasively due to the fact that we have a personal knowledge of this "banquet".

Could it be that a primary reason for weakness in evangelism is as obvious as what John Calvin mentioned? We look for solutions to deficiencies in outreach and assimilation in Church Growth seminars and the latest books while all along we see little change. And all along the simple answer just might be what this message is meant to convey: *We cannot give what we do not have.*

Beloved, daily & diligently drink deeply of God through Jesus Christ. And then give gladly what you have personally.