



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V26 N43 October 20, 2024

CITY ON A HILL

“The Hills Rejoice”

Isaiah 55:6-13

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Joy

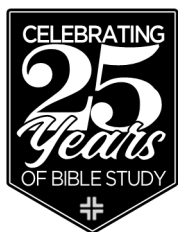
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

John 15:11



Who has joy and peace?



Isaiah 55:12 speaks of “joy” and “peace.” The prophet writes: “you will go out in joy and be led in peace.” But his words raise several questions that cannot be answered from verse 12. For example, about *whom* is he writing? To *whom* does “you” refer? And *when* will they “go out in joy,” and *from* where? To answer these questions the reader must look to the context—the *narrower* context of verses 6-13, and the *broader* context of 52:13-55:13. (Note the *even broader* context of 49:1-57:21, and *still broader* context of 40:1-66:24.)

The author of Isaiah is believed by conservative scholars to be the prophet Isaiah. Liberal scholars are convinced that Isaiah wrote chaps. 1-39, but a second author, whom they call “Deutero-Isaiah,” wrote chaps. 40-66 much later. They believe this in part because these chapters prophesy the exiles’ deliverance from Babylonian captivity a century before Judah was taken into captivity. Some even suggest that a third author was involved, who wrote chaps. 56-66. However, evidence for the unity of the book is more than sufficient to undermine such speculation (see John A. Martin, “Isaiah” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1030-31). It is much more likely that Isaiah, who ministered during the last half of the eighth century B.C.—perhaps from c. 740 B.C. to c. 680 B.C.—wrote chaps. 1-39 earlier in his ministry and 40-66 later in his ministry.

A common outline of Isaiah recognizes its two distinct parts: 1) Judgment from God (1:1-39:8) and 2) Comfort from God (40:1-66:24). John A. Martin offers a succinct description of the structure of the second part in which 55:12 is found. “Whereas the first portion of the book (chaps. 1-39) is filled with messages of judgment, this portion [chaps. 40-66] emphasizes restoration and deliverance. This section divides into three parts of nine chapters each (chaps. 40-48; 49-57; 58-66). The first two parts each conclude with the statement, ‘There is no peace . . . for the wicked’ (48:22; 57:21). These prophecies of deliverance center around three events: (1) Deliverance from captivity in Babylon (already prophesied by Isaiah, 39:7). This is the main subject of chaps. 40-48 and the chief deliverer is Cyrus, mentioned near the middle of the section (44:28-45:1). (2) *The rejection and restoration of the Suffering Servant*. This is discussed in 52:13-53:12,

near the middle of chapters 49-57. (3) The consummation of God’s restoration of Israel and the world. At the heart of this third section (chaps. 58-66) is the coming of the Messiah (chaps. 61-63). When Isaiah wrote these prophecies of restoration Judah still had over 100 years of difficulty ahead of her before she fell to Babylon, and then she faced 70 years of captivity” (Martin, 1091, italics added).

Contextually, the “joy” and “peace” mentioned in 55:12 are found in the second part of Isaiah, following the description of the atoning work of the Servant of the LORD in 52:13-53:12, who is identified as Jesus in the New Testament (cf. Mt 8:14-17; Jn 12:37-41; Lk 22:35-38; 1Pe 2:19-25; Ac 8:26-35; Ro 10:11-21). So generally speaking, all the blessings described in chaps. 54 and 55 are rooted in and flow out of the sacrifice of Jesus. Again Martin observes: “This section of nine chapters (49-57) has as its major theme ‘The Suffering Servant as the Redeemer.’ As has been seen, *the heart of the section is chapter 53*. The chapters following that climactic provision of redemption *show its application*, first to Israel (54:1-17) and then in the appeal going out to all the world (53:1-13)” (Alfred Martin and John A. Martin, *Isaiah: The Glory of the Messiah*, 144, italics added).

In a nutshell, the announcement of the atoning sacrifice of the Servant in 52:13-53:12 acts as a catalyst for the invitation extended to “all who are thirsty” (v. 1) and all who are “wicked” and “unrighteous” (v. 7) in chapter 55, bidding them to receive forgiveness. The imagery used in verse 12, namely, “go out in joy and be led forth in peace,” borrows from the exodus and anticipates the return from the exile. Just as the Israelites went out from Egypt and the exiles will return from Babylon, all those who accept the divine offer of forgiveness will experience spiritual deliverance. And with that redemption from sin the hope of life in a rejuvenated world where thornbushes and briars are replaced by junipers and myrtles—in which one commentator sees an allusion to the kingdom. He writes: “Many interpreters say this imagery (v. 13a) symbolizes what God does in a person’s heart at salvation. True, God does change individuals. But the earth will indeed be unusually fertile during the whole Millennium (cf. 35:1-2; 41:18-19; 44:3a)” (Martin, “Isaiah,” 1111).

Read Isaiah 55:6-13

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found;

call on him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake their ways

and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,

and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

neither are your ways my ways,"

declares the LORD.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 As the rain and the snow

come down from heaven,

and do not return to it

without watering the earth

and making it bud and flourish,

so that it yields seed for the sower

and bread for the eater,

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,

but will accomplish what I desire

and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

12 You will go out in joy

and be led forth in peace;

the mountains and hills

will burst into song before you,

and all the trees of the field

will clap their hands.

13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper,

and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.

This will be for the LORD's renown,

for an everlasting sign,

that will endure forever."

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "seek" and "call" and double underline "found" and "near" in v. 6.
- Underline "wicked" and "unrighteous" and double underline "ways" and "thoughts" in v. 7a.
- Underline "to the Lord" and "to our God" and double underline "have mercy" and "freely pardon" in v. 7b.
- Circle "forsake" and "turn" in v. 7.
- Box "for" indicating *reason* in v. 8.
- Box "as" in vv. 9, 10 and "so" in vv. 9, 11 indicating *comparison*.
- Circle "higher" in v. 9.
- Circle "my word" in v. 11.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 11.
- Circle "You" in v. 12.
- Bracket "burst into song" and "clap their hands" in v. 12.
- Box "instead" indicating *contrast* in v. 13.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Describe the type of poetic *parallelism* found in verses 6-7.
2. Describe the *breadth* of the invitation to receive “mercy” and “pardon” in verse 7. In other words, to *whom* does it extend?
3. *Seeking* and *calling* in verse 6 are defined by two parallel verbs in verse 7. Identify them.
4. God’s “thoughts” and “ways” are not humanity’s “thoughts” and “ways.” How so?
5. God’s “ways” and “thoughts” are “higher.” How much higher?
6. Explain the *comparison* in verses 10-11 (cf. “as” . . . “so”). (*What* is being compared to *what*, and *how* are the two alike?)
7. Explain the *significance* of verse 11 for verse 7.
8. “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace” (v. 12a). To *what* is the prophet referring?
9. Nature will rejoice in future changes to it (vv. 12b-13). *When* will they occur?
10. **Discussion:** What makes you think that the Lord – in the words of the prophet – can be found *now* and is near *now*?

Commentary On The Text

One commentator offers the following helpful summary of Isaiah 55:6-13. “In this section the prophet again presses for an immediate response to the invitation based on the successfully completed work of the Servant (55:6-7) [cf. 52:13-53:12]. This theme is then continued in direct divine speech (55:8-13). Those addressed are not limited to Israel, in that the call is general, continuing the worldwide scope of 55:5. Previously the focus had been on how Yahweh’s [the LORD’s] generous supplies meet the spiritual needs of the thirsty [cf. 55:1]; now there is recognition of the estrangement of sinners from Yahweh and their guilt. They are therefore counselled, as a matter requiring urgent attention, to repent and seek divine pardon, so that they may enjoy the overwhelming provision the Yahweh has graciously made for them” (John L. Mackay, *Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 40-66*, EP Study Commentary, 396). The passage can be divided into four parts. In part 1, sinners are invited to seek the LORD in order to receive mercy and forgiveness (vv. 6-7)—now made available through the promised atoning work of the Suffering Servant (52:13-52:12). In part 2, the LORD declares that his “thoughts” and “ways”—especially with regard to the salvation of sinners—are immeasurably more profound than those of human beings (vv. 8-9). In part 3, the LORD declares that his word is utterly effectual (vv. 10-11). And in part 4, the LORD declares that those who accept his invitation will rejoice to find their place in the future kingdom of God.

In part 1, the “wicked” and the “unrighteous,” i.e., sinners, whose “ways” and “thoughts” are contrary to the “ways” and “thoughts” of God, are urgently invited to “seek” and to “call on” the LORD *now*, while he may be found (v. 2). “In this context the appeal is addressed primarily to Israel, but in its application it is as broad as the human race” (Alfred Martin and John A. Martin, *Isaiah: The Glory of Messiah*, 145). This *seeking* and *calling*, while it may include prayer, is specifically defined as *forsaking* an ungodly lifestyle and an ungodly worldview by *turning to* the LORD. *Turning to* God itself entails *turning away from* one’s “ways” and one’s “thoughts;” put differently, it amounts to *repentance* but not in the sense of making oneself pardonable by God. One commentator puts it this way: “Repentance is not something a person must do before God will accept him or her. It is simply a description of what seeking the LORD looks like” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Isaiah,” 2024 ed., 399, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf).

In part 2, the LORD *contrasts* his “thoughts” and “ways” with those of human beings (v. 8). The fact that an infinite righteous God’s ways of accomplishing his purposes and view of the world are different from that of finite sinful human beings should come as no surprise. God’s “ways” and “thoughts”—note the reversal in order from the previous verse—are “higher” than those of human beings. How much higher? The *comparison* suggests immeasurably higher, namely, as MUCH higher as the heavens are than the earth. “The implication is that just as the heavens are so high above the earth

that by human standards their height cannot be measured, so also are God’s ways and thoughts so above those of man that they cannot be grasped by man in their fullness. In other words, the ways and thoughts of God are incomprehensible to man. Even though God reveals them to man, he cannot fully understand them; to him they are incomprehensible” (Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT, vol. 3, 583). Simply put, they don’t make sense.

In part 3, the LORD uses *comparison* to affirm the efficaciousness of his word. The affirmation is appropriate given his promise to “have mercy” and “pardon” all who turn to him in verse 7. But will he really do this; is he really able to do this? The answer to both questions is a resounding “yes.” Besides being truthful and reliable, God’s word accomplishes his purposes without fail. *Just as* the rain and snow do not fall to the earth without watering it and making its vegetation flourish, *so also* his word does not fall from the LORD’s lips without accomplishing what he desires and without achieving his purpose. As one commentator succinctly puts it: “Since the rain brings fertility to the ground and reliably comes every winter and spring, it serves as a good comparative analogy with God’s words in 55:11” (Smith, 510). And to clarify, in context, the LORD’s desire and purpose is to deliver sinners who come to him (cf. v. 1).

In part 4, the LORD declares that sinners will rejoice at their deliverance from sin and at their eschatological entrance into God’s kingdom. The language of verse 12a is *deliverance* language fitting a spiritual exodus. One commentator explains: “Throughout this section, Isaiah was describing another exodus, a redemption from sin, that the Servant Messiah would make possible. In view of that redemption, sinners need to seek the LORD, namely, to come to Him for it (vv. 6-11). Now the prophet concluded by describing the redeemed, led forth from their ‘Egypt,’ going out on their journey to their ‘Promised Land.’ They would do so with joy and peace because of the redemption that the Lamb of God (53:7) would provide” (Constable, 400). (And while redemption from sin is the focus, such *deliverance* language is fitting the exiles’ future return from Babylonian captivity as well.) However, the *personification* of nature in verse 12b and 13 amounts to more than an expression of the joy that accompanies personal redemption. It is an expression of the joy that accompanies renewal of the earth. Ugly thornbushes and briars are replaced by beautiful junipers and myrtles—Genesis 3:18 in reverse. One commentator writes: “While this description is obviously figurative—hills do not shout for joy, and trees do not clap their hands literally—it represents a real change in nature, not just the joy that will pervade all creation. This is a description of millennial conditions on the earth after Jesus Christ returns to the earth to rule and reign (cf. 35:1-2; 41:18-19; 44:3). If it were not so, there would be no everlasting sign. As the Passover was a sign to the Israelites of God’s first redemption of them from Egyptian bondage, the transformed earth and people will be a sign to all God’s people of His second redemption of them from Satan’s bondage” (Constable, 401).

Word Studies/Notes

vv. 6-7 *seek, call* . . . Verses 6-7 contain clear examples of *synonymous* parallelism, a literary device that expresses the same idea in parallel lines of poetry through the use of synonyms, i.e., “seek” // “call,” “may be found” // “is near,” “their ways” // “their thoughts,” “to the LORD” // “to our God,” “have mercy” // “freely pardon” in these verses.

v. 6 *seek, call on* “There is no reason to restrict this invitation to one particular period in Jewish history nor to the Jews generally; rather, it would seem in the light of the fact that the Gentiles are to be included in the household of faith (vv. 4, 5), that the invitation is universal, addressed to all who are wicked and men of iniquity. *Seek* is not to be restricted to sacrifice nor even to prayer, nor to a combination of both. The basic meaning is ‘to tread,’ and the action of seeking is probably the *stepping to God*, or simply the *coming to Him*” (Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT, vol. 3, 380, italics added); cf. “turn to the LORD” (v. 7). “Seeking and calling on the LORD represent reaching out to Him in faith (cf. Acts 2:21; 15:17; 17:27; 22:16; Rom. 3:11; 10:14; 2 Tim. 2:22)” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Isaiah,” 2024 ed., 398, plano-biblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf).

v. 6 *found, near* Cf. 2Co 6:2. “The time to seek and call is now, while God is available and near . . . These two limitations on God’s availability argue that one should not let the opportunity to seek God and repent pass by without taking advantage of God’s invitation because it soon may be too late and his judgment may come (cf. Ps 32:6)” (Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, NAC, 508).

v. 7 *wicked, unrighteous* I.e., any sinner. “*Wicked* (7) and *evil* [*unrighteous*] are broad, non-specific words. If any difference is to be found, the former points more to character and the latter to the ill effects of sin” (J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, TOTC, 345).

v. 7 *forsake, turn to* The two synonyms have similar traits – to *forsake* is to *turn to* and to *turn to* is to *forsake* in this context. And *forsaking* and *turning to* are entailed in *seeking* and *calling*. “Repentance is not something a person must do before God will accept him or her. It is simply a description of what seeking the LORD looks like. In other words, cleaning up one’s life is not a precondition for acceptance by God. The person who genuinely seeks the LORD and calls on His name has come to grips with his or her sin and is willing to turn it over to the LORD. After all, an unsaved person cannot forsake sin – or even desire to do so – without the LORD’s help” (Constable, 399).

v. 9 *higher* “The contextual reference to God’s compassion and forgiveness of sins in 55:6-7 indicates that the divine plan of redemption is the supreme example of God’s higher thoughts and ways. Some people have a hard time being compassionate toward good people, and most find it hard to be merciful to extremely wicked people. Most people have difficulty truly forgiving those who wrong them, but God is willing to love the most unlovely and ungodly, even forgive those who do unforgivable evil against others and blaspheme the name of God. In fact, he planned to cause the suffering of Servant to die so that many sinful people might live” (Smith, 510).

v. 11 *my word* I.e., the revelation of his thoughts and ways. “The word originates in the mind of God, goes out from His mouth, and comes to man either in spoken or written form through the divinely appointed media of revelation. There is no magical power in this word, nor is it charged with a power akin to mana. The reason why it unfailingly accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent forth is that it is divine . . . The word is God’s; it belongs to Him, and for this reason fulfills its task” (Young, 384). “What God has said about the certainty of pardon being available is absolutely dependable. But even more than that, all that God has said is reliable, whether it is about himself and his love, or about the nature of reality and the foolishness of idolatry, or about the human predicament and the necessity of repentance” (John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, NICOT, 445).

v. 12 *You* I.e., those who accept the prophet’s invitation to seek the LORD (v. 6).

v. 12 *burst, clap* Examples of *personification* – “mountains and hills” are to sing and “trees” are to clap their hands with joy at the transformations in nature to take place in the kingdom age. “While this description is obviously figurative – hills do not shout for joy, and trees do not clap their hands literally – it represents a real change in nature, not just the joy that will pervade all creation. This is a description of millennial conditions on the earth after Jesus Christ returns to the earth to rule and reign (cf. 35:1-2; 41:18-19; 44:3)” (Constable, 401).

4

APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Come to the LORD to receive forgiveness and to experience joy,
knowing you have a place in his kingdom.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



PARENT CONNECTION

Baptism is a celebration! Think about it – there are zero people who are ambivalent the day they’re baptized. Every Sunday that I have the privilege of bringing a child in front of the congregation to share their intent to be baptized, they are bubbling over with excitement. They can hardly sit still in their chair and are typically grinning from ear to ear from the moment they arrive at church. At the same time, they feel the nervousness of standing on a large platform with bright lights shining in their face. They know that hundreds of people will be watching their every move and listening to their confession of faith. That’s enough to make you break out in a cold sweat! Recently, one child got through the entire baptism ceremony with a smile on her face. She walked into the bathroom to change out of her wet clothes and promptly throw up. (Yep, I get you! That’s about how I feel every time I’m on the platform.) When kids come in Sunday morning to practice being in front of the congregation, I get to share with them how special baptism is and how excited everyone is to celebrate with them. When you cheer and clap for these kids and their decision to be baptized, I know they feel it deep in their hearts. Have you ever been baptized? If you’ve never made the decision to step out in obedience to Jesus’ command by getting baptized, please consider doing so this Sunday. Email baptism@wearecentral.org and we’ll walk you through the process. Sundays are for celebrating, and there’s no better celebration than life change!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Isaiah 55:6-13

1. What will God have for those that turn to Him?
2. What does the Bible say about God’s thoughts and ways?
3. What will God’s word accomplish?

What Do You Think?

How does baptism bring glory to God?

What Do You Do?

Go on a family walk this week. Watch the trees or a sunset and see how God is glorified! Draw a picture of what you’ve witnessed. What other things glorify God?

CORE COMPETENCY: Joy

I am happy on the inside no matter what’s happening on the outside.

MEMORY VERSE: Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

KidPIXCOUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week’s verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD’S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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**CENTRAL
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OUR MISSION
Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.