

A Call to the Thirsty

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[0:00] Good morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Eric, and I'm one of the guys here on staff at Watermark Church. It's such a privilege to be sharing with you guys today.

I want to start out telling you a little story about myself. If you don't know me, one of the things you may not know about me is that I really enjoy hiking. I like to just get out in nature, go for a walk, climb up mountains.

It's great. During my first year in Hong Kong, I was going on this hike. I was really excited for it. It was a long hike. I knew that along the hike, there would be vending machines where I could restock on my water.

So I packed some water for the day, but not too much, because you don't want to have to carry extra weight, and I knew that I could restock halfway through. I went out on my hike with a friend. We start walking. The hike is going really well. We come to the vending machines, and they are sold out. Uh-oh. My water supply is very low. We still have a long ways left to hike, and I don't know where I am going to be able to get more water now.

[1:07] And so we are hiking. If you know anything about hiking in Hong Kong, the next hill we had to go up was Needle Hill, which is named after its shape because it goes up so steep. It is basically a staircase, bottom to top.

And by the top, my water was gone. We walked down Needle Hill. We walked up the next hill, grassy hill. And I was thirsty.

And I was a little bit nervous, because I don't remember a time in my life where I have been that thirsty before. And I started having these thoughts of, I don't know if I am going to be able to finish the hike.

I think I might pass out and get dehydrated if I keep going for too long without more water. I thought about, you know, finding the next place where I could leave the trail and just find a bus stop or a 7-Eleven to get back.

But I didn't really know the way back to the bus stop. And I was afraid that if I left the guy that I was hiking with and then passed out, then I would be in real trouble. Because then there would be no one to call a helicopter to come in and lift me out or anything.

[2:13] And my throat was in pain from how thirsty I was. And we start walking down the hill, and I am just not sure what to do. And we get to the bottom of the hill, and there is a sink there.

And the sink has a sign up that says, Unfiltered Stream Water, Do Not Drink. And I weighed the options in my mind. I said, alright, I can keep hiking, and I will get dehydrated.

I will be in immense pain. I may pass out and need to be medevaced. Or I can drink the water, be okay for now, and maybe get sick in a day or two.

But by then I will have access to medicine, so it will be okay. And so I did what I thought was the logical choice, and I filled up my water bottle, and I took a drink, and to this day that was the most refreshing drink of water I have ever had in my life.

I drank as much as I could, and then I filled up my water bottle all the way to the top so that I would have water to keep going, and I had the energy to keep going the rest of the hike. I did not get sick, which is great news.

[3:19] In fact, I was satisfied by that water, and I was so satisfied that the next time I hiked past that point, I drank all the water in my water bottle so that I could refill my water bottle from that unfiltered stream water sink again, because the water was just so satisfying to me.

And as we come here today, I want us to go away from here today understanding that level of satisfaction, but finding it not from a sink out in the middle of the forest, but from God's Word and from God Himself.

If you've been around here at Watermark for the past few months, you may have noticed that we sort of had this theme running throughout our sermon series. We started back in late February, early March, with a series on union with Christ, and we basically looked at who we are in Jesus. And we moved on from there to a series on exodus and idolatry, and we said, okay, now that we know who we are in Jesus, let's look at the things that keep us from living like who we are. So we saw who we are, we saw what keeps us from living that way, and then we just wrapped up last week a series on the things that keep us from living like who we are. And we looked at having gracious words, and gracious accounting, and gracious timekeeping.

[4 : 52] And today we're going to start a new series on mission, where we say, okay, we understand who we are. We see and hopefully can avoid the things that keep us from living that way. We know how we should be living, but now God wants us to go out, and He wants us to invite others into this life.

He wants us to go out and show others that they are invited to join us in this life with Christ. And we're starting in the book of Isaiah, chapter 55, and seeing this call to mission that God has for each and every one of us, if we are His people.

So in Isaiah 55 today, I want us to see three things. First, I want us to see an invitation to all. Then, I want us to see a call to live.

And finally, we'll look at the Messiah's call. But we're starting out with an invitation to all. It says, God starts out in this passage by saying, Those who are thirsty, come to me.

What does it mean to be thirsty? It means that we're longing for something. You know, sort of like me on that hiking trail. I knew that there was this water that would satisfy me.

[6 : 22] I just didn't know where to find it. And I think so many of us in life feel a similar way, that there's something we're looking for that we hope will satisfy us. But we have no idea where to find it.

And we've reached the point where we realize there's nothing we can do to satisfy that thirst on our own. And we don't know where to look anymore. And if that's you today, God is saying, Come to me.

Not just the thirsty, but those who are unworthy. It says, He who has no money, come buy and eat. God is saying, If you are thirsty, come to me. If you have nothing of your own that you can bring to me and present to me and say, Here you go, God.

This is my payment for what you're going to offer me. If you've reached the end of your rope and you're just like, I don't know how to come before God. I feel so broken.

I feel so empty. God says, That is who I want. I want you to come to me. He says, It's not about you getting yourself together so that you can come.

[7 : 34] No, just come as you are. Like the song we just sang, Come to me and I will satisfy you.

You know, I've had so many conversations with people over the years where I talk with them about God and they're like, Well, you know, Eric, if you knew the type of person that I am, if you knew what I've done in the past, and if God knew those things, then you and God would know that there's definitely no place for me before God.

God's not interested in people like me because I am so messed up. There's no way that he could accept me. And what God is saying right here is that if that is you and that's the way that you think, he wants you to come to him.

He's saying those who are thirsty, those who have no money, those who have absolutely nothing to bring, are the ones that he wants to come to him.

But he also calls out to another group. If we look at verse 2, he says, Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? So in verse 1, we have the people with no money.

In verse 2, we have the people who have money but are spending it in all the wrong places and still haven't found that thing that satisfies them. It's like Bono and you too.

[8 : 54] You still haven't found what you're looking for. You know, we go around, we're chasing something. We're looking for something. We move to a new city, we start a new job, we hope that that will satisfy.

When it doesn't, we find a new girlfriend or boyfriend and buy a new car and hope that that will satisfy. When it doesn't, we buy the newest iPhone. When that disappoints us, we join a new country club.

When that disappoints us, we go on a great vacation. When that disappoints us, we find another new boyfriend or girlfriend, because the last one still isn't working. We settle down and we get married.

When that doesn't satisfy us, we find a mistress. When that doesn't satisfy us, we buy another new home, a little bit bigger than the old one, and we start a new job, and still we haven't found what we're looking for.

We're spending our money, spending our lives chasing these things that don't ever satisfy and can't ever satisfy.

[9 : 52] And although we've chased so long and so hard, we still haven't found what we're looking for. And God says, if that is you, I want you to come to me today.

And so God gives an invitation to everyone. Those who have something that they feel like they can offer, and those who don't, he wants you to come.

Those who are just giving up hope on finding something, and those who are still going, still hoping that one day they might find it. It doesn't matter where you are.

God is calling to you today to come. To come and find your satisfaction in him.

And what is this thing that he's calling us to? The second thing we need to see is that it is a call to life. God says, come to me. If you look at the commands in these verses, it's an amazing list of commands.

[10 : 57] He says, come, buy, eat, delight, live. Things that I think most of us enjoy doing generally. He says, come, come to the waters.

If we think about what water does. Water gives life. Water refreshes. Water satisfies. Water gives us contentment. Just like I was satisfied by the water on my hike.

God wants us to be satisfied with him. And he invites each and every one of us today to come to him and find our satisfaction in him. He says, come and buy.

Buy wine and milk without money and not without price. If we think about what wine and milk do. They're special beverages. We'll start with milk.

Milk makes you strong. Milk gives you life in a way that pretty much no other food or beverage does. Think about this. If you eat nothing but meat for two months, you're going to get sick.

[12 : 05] You're going to get very sick. And you're probably going to have a hard time going to the bathroom. If you drink nothing but water for two months and don't eat anything or drink anything else, your body will start eating itself from the inside.

But, if you drink nothing but milk and eat nothing else for two months, you will turn from a newborn baby into a child who's two or three times the size of that newborn baby and is fairly healthy.

If a newborn cow drinks nothing but milk for months on end, it grows into an adult cow. Milk is probably the only beverage or food that we can survive off of for months on end simply with that and nothing else being our diet.

And God says, come to me. I've got this milk for you. This milk that gives you life. This milk that makes you strong. I'm offering it to you today. And not just milk, but wine.

Wine is a drink of excitement and celebration. I was at a birthday party last night and there was wine there. I was at an engagement party the night before and there was wine there.

[13 : 20] Wine is a drink that we drink when we are celebrating in life. And we live in a culture that longs for and sometimes even lives for celebrations.

If you don't believe me, just think about how packed LKF is most nights of the week. Think about how many different parties are happening at different restaurants around Soho and the rest of the city.

We live in a restaurant in the restaurant in the restaurant in the restaurant in the restaurant. And in the same restaurant at the same time, there were two other birthday parties going on. We love celebrating as a culture.

And God, our creator, understands that desire to celebrate. And he says, I want you to come to me and I want to be the one who fulfills that desire in your hearts.

I understand who you are. I understand how you operate. Come to me and you will find your satisfaction. But it's a different type of celebration than so many of the celebrations that happen in Hong Kong.

[14 : 27] You know, I think a lot of times in Hong Kong when people celebrate, the celebration is more a way of avoiding life than of celebrating it. We know that we are stressed out by work.

We know that we are overwhelmed with everything that we have going on and financial woes and worries. And we think if I just go out with my friends to the bar, I have a couple of drinks more than I should, then I can forget about it for a little while.

And maybe it won't be as bad when I wake up in the morning. That's not the type of celebration that God is inviting us into. He's inviting us into a celebration of life. Abundant, wonderful, amazing life that he provides for us.

He says, come to me. Buy wine and milk without cost and without price. How can he offer us these things without any cost to ourselves?

If you look back two chapters from this passage here in Isaiah 53, which is a very famous passage, prophecy of Jesus, who he would be, what he would do, how he would rescue and save us.

[15:38] And Isaiah 53 talks about how Jesus bears our guilt, how by his wounds we are healed. And what God wants us to see is that the way that he is able to offer us these things without cost to us is because they have come at a great cost to Jesus.

He offers us these things as a gift because the price has already been paid by Jesus, which is why he is able to call to the thirsty and say, come.

And those who have no money, come. You don't need to pay. The price has been paid for you to have this satisfaction, have this abundant life that I offer you.

The price has been paid by Jesus, so you can come, you can enjoy. He then says, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

He says, you're spending your life chasing these things that will never, ever make you whole. I want you to come to me. I want you to find this life in me, but you're not.

[16:51] When I was a kid, my church sent a missions trip team to Haiti. And they came back and they shared this story. It was one of the most heartbreaking stories I've ever heard.

They said that in the nation of Haiti, the people are incredibly poor, so poor that they can't afford to go to the store and buy food like milk, vegetables, rice, meat, bread, anything.

But obviously they hunger just like us. And so what they do to satisfy their hunger is they go out in the wild somewhere, and they take dirt and they filter out the dirt so that it's very, very fine.

And they take the fine dirt and they mix in vegetable oil and salt, and they make these crackers, they dry them out in the sun. And so when the poor people need food to eat, they go, they give a little bit of money, and they get these sand crackers, and they eat them.

And that's what the people do when they're hungry, because they can't afford the real food that will satisfy them. And although it may make them feel a little less hungry temporarily, it's something that if it continues long-term as a pattern, it's going to kill them from malnourishment.

[18:18] And God says that when we chase our spiritual satisfaction in anything other than Him, we're eating dirt cookies, hoping to be filled.

But we're putting ourselves on a path that's going to kill us of spiritual malnourishment. What are these things that we chase, that we seek our satisfaction in, that can never fill us, that aren't bread? I mean, it's the same list we always have here. Things like money, things like success and power, things like sex. What does it look like to live our lives chasing these things, seeking our satisfaction in them?

We'll just pick one of them and pull on the thread and see what it looks like. Let's pick sex. We live in a culture that tells us, sex is where you find the greatest satisfaction and meaning in life.

You need to be totally free to express yourself sexually any way that you want. And so many of us in the church have believed that lie and chased after it.

[19:30] So for some people, that means, you know, you just go to the bar, find someone to hook up with every weekend, every night, I don't know. For some people, it means, you know, look for a more solid, committed relationship.

But once you're dating, you need to be free to express yourself sexually any way that you want in that relationship. It doesn't matter what God's Word says.

What matters is what you think will make you happy. And so, as long as there's a boyfriend or girlfriend in the picture, we feel like, that's okay, I can do what I want.

Because what God really wants is for me to be happy, and what it's going to take for me to be happy is for me to be able to have sex with this person right now. And in reality, an unwillingness to follow God's commands in any area of our lives shows that we are not satisfied in Him yet.

And for others of us, we look at it and we say, like, you know, God's Word says, no sex outside of marriage, except, you know, no sex with anyone except your partner, your spouse.

[20 : 43] And so there are people in the church who will get married and then think, you know, they still believe the lie that sex is what will satisfy ultimately.

And so they get married, but then once they're married, they'll manipulate or abuse their spouse to give them that fulfillment that they want, because they believe the lie that this is what will make me happy in life.

And if I can't get what I want out of my spouse, then they don't deserve to have a good life. They deserve to be made miserable by me, because I need my satisfaction.

We're chasing the bread that will not satisfy. One more way that this works out in our lives is pornography.

So many people inside the church believe that, hey, you know, it's not really sex, so it's not that bad if I do it right. If I'm just fantasizing about it, then that can't really be that bad.

[21 : 54] And so many people in the church spend huge amounts of time watching online these images of all of their fantasies being fulfilled, because they believe that that will satisfy.

And honestly, if I'm being totally honest, I think this area of pornography is probably one of the biggest ways that we as a church have failed the church body. Because the statistics say that pornography use, even among Christians, is massive.

I have some stats here. Among guys aged 13 to 24, non-practicing Christians, 72% say that they access pornography frequently.

Among practicing Christians in that age group, the number is 41%. And if you're a parent here thinking, like, there's no way my kid falls into that category, 71% of teens hide their online behavior from their parents.

But pornography isn't just something that's confined to that age group and that gender. It's ubiquitous in our culture. One out of every three downloads from the internet is pornography related.

[23 : 16] One out of every four search engine searches on the internet is pornography related. And it's not just a men's problem. About one out of every four users of pornography is also a woman.

And so this is a major, major way that our culture tells us you can find satisfaction here. Here is something that will satisfy your spiritual hunger.

And we as a church have so often and so frequently believed that lie and chased it. But what we're chasing is things that are not bread, things that will not satisfy.

We're eating the spiritual equivalent of a sand cracker. It makes our stomach be full of food. But in the end, it's going to kill us.

And yes, sex is a good gift from God, but when we take it and make it ultimate, it's something that can't ever satisfy us. And you know how I know that it can't ever satisfy us?

[24 : 23] Because there has been literally no one ever in history who's had such an amazing sexual experience that they've been like, that's it. I'm done. I never need to have sex anymore because that was so amazing.

No, it always leaves you hungry for more. It holds out this promise that it can satisfy, but it doesn't. It just gives you a hunger for needing it again and again and again.

Constantly holding out this promise that it can satisfy and never following through on that promise. And God here is saying, I can satisfy.

In ways that no amount of money, no amount of success, no amount of power, no amount of sex can ever satisfy you. I can satisfy you. I can satisfy you. And I'm offering you this satisfaction for free.

I don't care who you are. I don't care where you've been. I don't care what you've done. I want you to come to me. I want you to come. I want you to buy and eat this wine and this milk without price.

[25 : 36] I want you to eat this bread that satisfies you and delight in it. Because I know the cravings and desires of your heart and I want to satisfy them.

I want you to come and live. Because all these things that you're chasing other than me cannot give you life. And I can. God says, come to me.

Buy, eat, delight, live. And that's an invitation that he gives to each and every one of us here today.

The third thing that I want us to see from this passage is the Messiah's call. If you look at verses one through three, it starts out talking to everyone. And the pronoun used is you.

So the you's here are all referring to everyone. When you jump down to verse four, the pronoun switches to him. And verse five goes back to you. But the you in verse five, you don't see it in English because it's very confusing in English.

[26 : 47] But if you could read it in the original Hebrew, the you in verse five is referring to the him from verse four, not the everyone from verse one. A little grammar lesson. But what's happening is that there's this transition from talking to everyone about everyone to talking specifically about this him, which is referring, the him is referring to Jesus.

He's talking in the end of verse three about the promise that he made with David. And then he starts talking about these things that never actually happened in David's life.

And so generally what people think is that he's referring not specifically to David himself, but to David's descendant, Jesus, as the heir of the promises that God made to David.

Specifically, that David would never lack someone reigning on the throne of Israel. And so God says that this, this heir of David, this Messiah or Jesus, is going to be a witness to the peoples, a commander and leader for the peoples, that he will call a nation you do not know, and a nation that did not know you will run to you because of the Lord your God and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Now, if you know anything about Old Testament Israel and their beliefs about God and salvation, one thing you would know is that their beliefs about salvation were very ethnocentric.

[28 : 20] They believed that God's work of salvation centered around Israel as a nation, and that anyone else who wanted in basically had to come to Israel, and salvation came through being an Israelite.

And what God's saying here is that through this Messiah, through Jesus, he's going to send out a call to the nations, to everyone, to come and join in this salvation that he is offering.

If you look back in Isaiah chapter 54, God basically tells Israel, enlarge your tents, I'm bringing new people in, you don't have space for everyone that I'm going to include in this family right now, you need more space.

And now in chapter 55, he tells them how he's going to do that. He's going to send the Messiah, Jesus, the Savior, out into the nations with this message of salvation, and he's going to call people in and welcome people from all over the earth to come and join.

So it's not just something for the Jews anymore, it's something for the Americans and the Chinese and the Australians and the British and even the South Africans and Texans.

[29 : 32] Jesus loves you, babe. And he says that the Messiah will call to the nations and they will come running to him.

The story of the Bible is the story of God creating humanity, humanity rebelling against God, humanity being separated from God, and Jesus coming down as the Savior to die for our sin and rebellion, to give us a new relationship with God, to restore us to the relationship with God that we were originally created for, and to lead us as his people.

And right here, it says that when he spreads that message, when he sends out that call to come join in that story and follow him, that results will happen.

People will come running to him. It's not based on the ability and skill of the people sharing the message, it's based on the faithfulness and promise of God to keep his word.

And so if you're here today and you're not a Christian, my challenge to you today is to come running to him. You've been spending your life chasing things that at the end of the day, hold out lots of promise but always, always, always leave you empty.

[31 : 03] And Jesus is offering salvation and life. He's calling you to come running to him. Will you run to him? Will you run to him?

If you're here today and you're a Christian, I want you to see how God is inviting you to join in on this call. See the fact is, Jesus came historically to the earth.

He lived for about 33 years. He spread His message around. He died for our sins. He rose again. And then He ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the Father's right hand.

Father's right hand. But right before he ascended back into heaven, he gave this little speech to his followers in Matthew chapter 28, and he said, go into all the world and make disciples. He said, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Now what this means is that Jesus has invited us to join him in spreading this call. He has appointed us as his messengers to carry this call to the nations for him. He's appointed us as the people that are going out and inviting everyone to join in on this amazing offer to come, buy, eat, delight, live, experience satisfaction in him alone. And he says that he will be with us always as we do this, which means that as we go out and as we make this proclamation and invitation, that he is alongside us, making that call through us to the world. And just as it says that people will respond when Jesus calls to them, God promises that people will respond when we call to them and Jesus calls to them through us. That it's not dependent on our skill as messengers, but it's dependent on God's faithfulness as our Father and our provider. God doesn't just save us and rescue us so that we can sit down and become fat and content and satisfied. He saves us and rescues us so that we can join him, so we can go into the world, so that we can be his messengers and call people to come running to him and experience the same delight and satisfaction in him that we have experienced.

[33 : 40] And so what does this look like on a practical basis? I know that like when we say the word mission, it can bring like pictures of big overseas trips or big organized activities with teams of people, but it doesn't have to be that complicated.

The passage today starts with a call to the thirsty. My question for you today is who in your life do you know that is thirsty? Who in your life around you do you see who is dissatisfied?

Maybe as coworkers, maybe friends, maybe a spouse, maybe children. You know, a lot of people are really good at hiding their thirst, but the more we get to know them, the more we'll see where that true thirst lies.

The good news about being God's messengers is that we don't have to be experts. We are the ones who were thirsty and came to the waters.

We are the ones who had no money but have been allowed to come and buy and eat. We are not experts going to them to convince them with every perfect argument. No, we're beggars who have found a place to find bread that satisfies and are inviting others to join in finding that same satisfaction that we have found.

[34 : 59] And so it may mean going and sharing the gospel with someone. Earlier this week, it could look like this. Earlier this week, I was having a conversation with a guy at lunch.

He spent an hour and a half telling me everything that's going on in life. Basically, I want this. I think it'll be happy. These people are getting in my way. I want this. I want that. I think this will make me happy. I think these people are getting in my way.

An hour and a half of that conversation. I sat there and listened for an hour and a half. And finally, at the end of our time, I just said, Hey, I think you're looking for something.

I don't think you quite know necessarily what it is that you're looking for, but I definitely think you're looking for something. He just sort of nodded his head like, Yep, you're right. I said, You know, you know this is coming from me.

I work at a church. But I would recommend that you check out Jesus. Because when I was at the point in my life where I was really looking for something and didn't know what would satisfy, he was the one who satisfied me.

[36 : 00] And the guy was like, Okay, maybe I'll do that. I have to follow up with him and see how he's doing. But, you know, simple, small things where we pay attention, see where people's thirsts are, and see how we can point them to the water, milk, wine, and bread that bring true satisfaction in life.

And again, the good news is we don't have to be experts. God is the one who takes care of results. God is the one who promises to make us successful as we go.

You know, going back to my story from hiking and drinking the unfiltered stream water, the next time I went out on that trail and I hiked past there, I wasn't the only one who filled up his water bottle at that sink.

No, I shared my story from the previous hike with the other hikers that were with me and told them how amazing and satisfying this unfiltered stream water was. And at least one of the people in that group filled up his water bottle there as well because he knew the true satisfaction lied in that faucet.

And I know it's silly, but if it works on a hiking trail with questionable water, how much more should it work in everyday life with a faithful and sure God who keeps his promises to us?

[37 : 26] He wants us to go and just point others and say, look, I found satisfaction. Come join me in being satisfied in him. But the thing is, we will never joyfully go and invite others to find their satisfaction in Christ until we ourselves have first come to the waters, bought and eaten this wine and milk without price, tasted of the bread that truly satisfies and gives life in Christ.

But when we do, it empowers us to go share and bring others into this life as well. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you are good. We thank you that you give the true life that satisfies. We thank you that you provide for us in the ways that nothing else can, that all these other things that hold out their promises to us in life, when they fall empty, you are there with open arms to embrace us.

That you don't make us wait until we get our lives together to come to you, but you call us as we're thirsting, as we have nothing to bring before you. And you tell us to come because you love us, because you want to offer us a satisfaction that we can find nowhere else.

God, I pray that this week we would be satisfied in you, and that as we find our satisfaction in you, that we would invite others to find their satisfaction in you as well.

[39 : 04] God, we love you. In Jesus' name, amen.