

“Come, all you who are thirsty,
 come to the waters;
 and you who have no money,
 come, buy and eat!
 Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread,
 and your labor on what does not satisfy?
 Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
 and you will delight in the richest of fare.

³ Give ear and come to me;
 listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
 my faithful love promised to David.

⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
 a ruler and commander of the peoples.

⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not,
 and nations you do not know will come running to you,
 because of the LORD your God,
 the Holy One of Israel,
 for he has endowed you with splendor.”

Free Lunch

During my formative years I learned about a thing or two about free lunch. Lunch, dinner, breakfast, and even snacks between were free. It was an all you can eat buffet open at all hours and the best part was that it was completely free. After all of those years I've learned that home is where food is always free and sometimes you can still go shopping in the pantry.

But it's said, “There's no such thing as a free lunch.” That means lunch may sound like it's free, but it really isn't. There are some strings attached such as higher taxes or long term obligations through some cryptically worded contract. Someone somewhere is paying for it. Lunch may have been free at home but that's not how it works in the world. If it doesn't work that way in the world then what about before God or in his church?

Isaiah writes to those who are being removed from home. They're being kicked out and cut off from the Promised Land. But God wants them to know the fridge is still open. Even in the midst of exile there is food free for all because life isn't always fun or good but God is there. In the difficult and deadly world in which we live living water is available for us as well. For those who are hot and tired because their electricity has been turned off there is cold water and refreshing food. It's the spiritual food of his Word.

The treasures of this life are not found in food, pleasure, or possessions but in the Word of God. It's a free lunch.

The previous chapters spoke of the servant of the Lord. Isaiah describes what he will do and what he will accomplish and even what he will look like. These chapters deal with a description of the coming Servant of the Lord. But what can they do? Isaiah answers with an invitation, “*Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the water; and you without silver, come, buy, and eat!*” He starts with water and in an arid community water is always welcome and inviting. But unlike the usual bait and switch he removes the water and offers wine and milk. Nowadays we take wine and milk for granted but these were luxuries and here they are offered without cost!

But Israel doesn't seem to be flocking to the food. Isaiah asks, “*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*” They gave everything they had to the false gods around them. Early

in Isaiah, Ahaz is checking on his water supply making preparations for a long siege, forming alliances with other kings because the nations to the North were about to attack Judah. These were all logical steps but Isaiah came with a promise that brought peace and Ahaz refused to hear it. They would rather feed on dust and ashes than hear the Word of the Lord. When the nations came they bought security with the Assyrians. The mouse invited the cat over for dinner, even bribing him. They thought they could buy their way out of their problems and it consumed them. All of these things only satisfied for a time. It was temporary and soon they'll find even the basic necessities taken from them. But lunch is still free.

We do the same things. We may not be looking to fortify ourselves for a siege but I do know the comfort of trying to find security in another tool, another investment, a more comfortable lifestyle. We may even fool ourselves into thinking, "If we could just vote in the right people we'll find safety and security." Some look to politics left or right to provide answers to our problems. Christians can turn government or the abolishment of government into another idol to be served at a cost. Ahaz did the same with his alliances. But there is no such thing as a free lunch. There are strings attached through higher taxes, your sons or daughters drafted for war, and yet the world still serves the same bland food as always.

It's the same food that says adultery will be fun, but then it leads to divorce and child support. Abortion promises freedom but then no one talks about the bitter depression later in life. Drugs promise to help you forget your problems but only for a while. Still more seek escape through food. They may bring momentary pleasure but life still ends with death and the food of this world cannot deal with death.

Even good gifts from God, cannot satisfy. They cannot forgive our sins or save from death and hell. But when we poke and prod these idols we find that they often fail us. Food spoils, animals die, and disaster strikes and famines come. Looking for satisfaction in this world is like eating fast food for every meal. Thanks to movie documentaries we've seen what happens when you eat McDonald's day in and out. The food can kill you. It leaves you broken and wanting more, addicted to sugar and salt. And we'll spend our money and selling ourselves into slavery, hard labor to cover the cost but it still isn't enough.

Isaiah sees our struggle and asks, "*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*" These things cannot forgive your sins. They can't take care of your greatest need.

What does God require? Listen! Listening happens when we hear what is said and then take it to heart. It doesn't make a difference if you hear the Word and then go on as if you have not. Who we listen to is as important as listening. The merchants still cry out, "Come and buy." Life will be better if you just had... But nothing lasts. Death still calls too, "Come, labor in vain."

But only God invites, Come and eat freely. Don't miss the meal prepared for you. Eat what is good. Incline your ear. Listen.

This invitation came to people who are being taken over by an empire. Their land is taken. Their sources of food and water are gone, no longer free or affordable. But God will provide for them. It's the meal God has prepared. Who is invited? All who thirst? Everyone. The Land of Israel was parched by sin and disobedience and yet God promises "*wine and milk, rich food for your soul,*" freely giving without money and without cost. This is an invitation to those who have no resources – to freely receive the things they desperately need.

That sounds too good to be true but it is nothing new. The LORD says, "*I will make an everlasting covenant with you on the basis of the faithful acts of kindness shown to David.*" (CSB footnote) He makes a covenant with us and we do nothing. He tells us that this covenant reaches back to God's promise to David and looks forward to the fulfillment that one of David's Sons will retain the throne forever. There is no free lunch. There is no cost at all but it does come at a tremendous price, it's just that you're not the one who pays it. Because you never could!

But one has. Isaiah writes, *“Since I have made him a witness to the peoples.”* And Jesus’ voice rises about the merchants hawking food that doesn’t satisfy and he invites all who are thirsty to come to me (John 7:37). He holds out living water to a Samaritan woman coming in the heat of the day to draw water. Jesus is the living water come down from heaven he is the bread of life crying out, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”*

But what is this meal? It’s the free forgiveness freely won for you. Because Jesus never trusted in the idols of this world. With a storm raging around him he slept knowing he was safe in his Father’s arms. When soldier’s came to arrest him he was confident that God would glorify him. Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die for the sins of the world and there find glory. This is the greatest food and drink you can imagine. The forgiveness of sins and everlasting life are yours. You cannot pay for this priceless gift that God has given you.

But you can Come, listen, hear, eat the life giving word. It’s free. You don’t owe God a certain amount of good works in order to prove you’re sincere. You don’t have to work yourself up into an emotional sobbing wreck in order to prove repentance. It’s free. That means every sin of idolatry or doubt is paid for. Listen and receive God’s wonderful promise in the New Covenant. Hear the Lord’s gracious invitation, and come and eat and drink. Receive Christ’s very body and blood here in this Supper. This bread is his body, given for you. This cup is his blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

This news is for you. It’s not limited to just the Jews, God’s chosen people. In verse four he says that the offer is for all who thirst later we’re told *“a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you will run to you. For the Lord your God, even the Holy One of Israel, has glorified you.”* Nations in addition to Israel, who they don’t know will heed this invitation. Gentiles and foreigners will come. Jesus provides security, unity and peace. He gathers together all nations and there are no restrictions. This offer is for everyone. No one is excluded based on nationality, race or residency.

When does the offer expire? It doesn’t. The Lord says, *“I will make an everlasting covenant with you.”* Everlasting means just that; it will last forever. There’s no “while supplies last” disclaimer thrown onto the end of this offer either. The offer wasn’t just for Isaiah’s audience, there’s no “limited time only,” and there’s no expiration date to the offer of God’s grace. The offer is for all people of all time. No one is excluded.

So come and listen. Hear the Word of the Lord on a regular basis. Trust him that he will provide all that we need to support our body and life and then plant a garden, a tree, use the gifts that God has given you for life a means to an end and not the end itself. And as you sit back eating ice cream or smoking a cigar – give thanks to God.

Because lunch is free in God’s house, and it used to be free in my house but now it’s free for our kids and I hope they enjoy it. Just as I want my children to return home on a regular basis so also God wants us to return to church. Here, lunch is free. God still provides all that we need. God alone is glorified. Amen.