

Text: Isaiah Chapter 58

*You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.
Isaiah 58:11 (NLT)*

This verse was a prophecy spoken over B4 more than 40 years ago. God gave it to Tom Thompson, a founding leader who was filling the pulpit before Pastor Ron Mehl came.

“This church will be a well-watered Garden”

- A place that is sincerely blessed by God.
- A place of nourishment and refuge.
- A place of life and abundance
- A place of genuine worship for a lot of people.
 - People came here to let their soul rest.
 - People came here to meet God.
 - People came here to be loved on and accepted.
 - They came here because it felt like family

While 58:11 is a promise of God, it almost comes across like an invitation. Invitation is a powerful theme throughout Scripture

- God invites us to Himself and His ideas.
- And He awaits invitation into our lives.
- And when we exchange invitation and welcome with Jesus— that’s where the life happens.

I think God invites us to this blessing:

- It’s worth looking at the bigger message of the chapter
- Even the “why” of the promise.
- You don’t have to look far beyond verse 11 to see what is involved with this blessing:
- **He tells us to:**
 - Free those who are wrongly imprisoned
 - Lighten the burden of those who work for you
 - Let the oppressed go free
 - Remove the chains that bind people
 - Share your food with the hungry
 - Give shelter to the homeless
 - Give clothes to those who need them
 - ...and do not hide from relatives who need your help

And then goes on to talk about the kind of blessing

o ...and do not hide from relatives who need your help

And then goes on to talk about the kind of blessing that is almost too good to describe.

- Then your light will shine out from the darkness
- The darkness around you will be as bright as noon
- The lord will guide you continually,
- He'll give you water when you are dry
- He'll restore your strength
- You will be like a well-watered garden...**like an ever-flowing spring**
- Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities
- Then you will be known as a rebuilders of walls
- ...and a restorer of homes.

You will be a well-watered Garden; Like and ever-flowing spring.

- Some translations call it a wellspring.
- A wellspring **is a well that you didn't have to dig.**

Consider what we're invited to.

1. We're Invited to an Actual Intimacy with God. 58:1-5

“Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast.
Shout aloud! Don't be timid.
Tell my people Israel of their sins!
Yet they act so pious!
They come to the Temple every day
and seem delighted to learn all about me.
They act like a righteous nation
that would never abandon the laws of its God.
They ask me to take action on their behalf,
pretending they want to be near me.
'We have fasted before you!' they say.
'Why aren't you impressed?
We have been very hard on ourselves,
and you don't even notice it!'
“I will tell you why!” I respond.
“It's because you are fasting to please yourselves.
Even while you fast,
you keep oppressing your workers.
What good is fasting
when you keep on fighting and quarreling?
This kind of fasting
will never get you anywhere with me.
You humble yourselves
by going through the motions of penance,
bowing your heads
like reeds bending in the wind.
You dress in burlap
and cover yourselves with ashes.
Is this what you call fasting?”

and cover yourselves with ashes.
Is this what you call fasting?
Do you really think this will please the Lord?

He is saying, “I’m tired of your pageantry”

- I’m tired of your religious exercises
- I’m weary of the idea that you’re good with me while being terrible to other people that I also love.
- I grieve that you try to work for my love when you have my love.

Often pastors talk about the pitfalls of religion

- God always invited us into an intimacy that can’t be born out of works or self-righteous acts.
- That God actually calls us to Himself
 - He calls us on His terms
 - **The fact is: His terms are that He called us when we were in pretty bad shape.**
 - Many of us turned to Him when we hit bottom.
 - Or turn back to Him when we do.
 - We trade life for life; He calls that a good deal.

The idea that a wellspring is a well that you don’t have to dig is a picture that is counter to religion.

- A source of life that never ends
- That you have a sacred privilege to that just keeps flowing.
- Brings life and health and vitality—
It brings more life to life.

Religion is the idea that you need to dig to get to water.

- And you may or may not hit it.
- **Illustration: Abraham & Isaac (Gen 26)**
 - A significant part of their wealth was just in their ability to dig for water.
 - They had wells everywhere.
 - Here’s the problem - Someone came along and buried all of them.
 - Isaac owned Abraham’s wells, Isaac enjoys enormous success. Makes the Philistines mad. They buried his wells.
 - He moves, re-digs other wells his dad built, someone buried.
 - Dig wells, and have a land dispute.
 - Digs more wells, and have a land dispute.
 - Repeats several times.

• You can’t bury a wellspring.

- You can try
 - When the Philistines were burying Isaac’s wells, they were an attack on what Isaac

- When the Philistines were burying Isaac's wells, they were an attack on what Isaac had worked for.
- He built them properly and they were still vulnerable.
- When you attack a construct of God, I just don't think He's that threatened.
- And you can't dispute the life that comes from a wellspring.
- That is self-evident.

God calls us into an intimacy that He provides for.

- He calls us to come as we are.
- The progress, health, healing that comes about in our lives is a matter of living water.
- Our participation in that is our privilege
- But understanding that it is Him and about being near Him that has a life-giving result.
- Religion won't produce that.
 - The laws of marriage are not what keep us together.
 - The love of marriage is.
 - We know fully that we can be legally married, but not together at all.
 - The religion of our union is in tact; the life that God would intend is lost.
- God INVITES US to something that religious exercise won't provide for.

Malachi 1 is startling.

- God speaking to this exclusive relationship that He's entered into with Israel.
- "You know, I've always loved you."
- Apparently not feeling the love from Israel anymore.
- "There are other nations interested in me, you know? I've got options."
 - I didn't get into this to be roommates.
 - Or an underappreciated provider.
 - I got into this for love.
 - "I have always loved you."

Sometimes these warnings make us stand up straight.

- But His mercy is what is prominent.
- Otherwise He wouldn't give the message, the reminder, the warning, and extend the invitation to come back.

2. He Invites us to a Transformed Heart. 58:6-7

- **Transformation is supposed to be a powerful description of what God does. Transformation is a powerful change.**
 - If it is in the natural, it is so profound that it's hard to explain

- If it is in the natural, it is so profound that it's hard to explain.
 - If it's strictly supernatural— I couldn't explain the natural, so I'm not going to even try on the supernatural.
- **Why do I say it here?**
 - The idea that my heart can change and become like God's heart.
 - That we could know Him.
 - To know Him is to know what He loves. To love what He loves.
 - To know His heart.

There's a reason why those addressed here weren't caring for the poor.

- They didn't want to.
- **But God wants to.**

You know how we talk about what we love.

- It's actually Biblical
- Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.
- The things you are interested in and excited about are the things that you talk about.
- **He doesn't stop talking about them.**
- **It must be some special love He has for the poor because He goes on and on and on.**

Does God talk about anything more than he talks about the poor and oppressed?

- The If/Then proposition of Isaiah 58
- He's so leveraged in his affection for the poor that he wants to recruit our involvement.
- And He wants us to live in the blessing that He has and knows.

The words of the pastor who directs Compassion First's Cemetery Outreach:

*"We believe you know how we feel."
 That's what she said to me in her tidy
 tiny cement room among the graves.
 Her nine-year-old boy, the size of a toddler,
 lay motionless on the bed.
 He cannot walk or eat or speak.
 She's asked me in to pray.
 "You know how we feel"
 I leave my flip flops at the door.
 This is holy ground.
 A place religion cannot go,
 this is Love's domain.
 Looking into the boy's bulging eyes,
 startled at what I see.
 The very face of God staring back at me.
 God, you know how we feel*

*started at what I see.
The very face of God staring back at me.
God, you know how we feel.
Taking her hand to say goodbye.
I kiss her wet cheek and taste the salty tears of God.
You know how we feel*

Yellow Flower is a sprawling 17-acre cemetery in Surabaya Indonesia where women sell themselves between gigantic cement tombstones at night in order to feed their hungry children in the morning.

Desperate.

Dark.

Surrounded by Death.

And undeniably... Divine.

From first steps on cemetery grounds we have sensed the sacredness of this place. A confusing clash of broken humanity and the dripping compassionate presence of God. It drew us in completely and we have not been the same since.

I am fully convinced this is the place where God lives.

For, who is more poised for resurrection than those who live among the graves? What better backdrop for brilliant light than the darkest night? And Hope...who can embrace it more fully than those closely acquainted with deep despair?

Getting invited to pray in people's little homes in the cemetery:

- I've learned that this is the most privileged meeting that I will ever be invited to.
- I don't like the set-up
- The thought that because I'm a pastor, my prayers will be effective.

When we talk about invitation - Do you know that Jesus comes where He's invited?

- It's why the whole thing happened with the wine at the wedding in Cana - John 2
- "Jesus and His disciples were also invited."
- He also leaves when He's asked to leave - Matthew 8:34
- It begs the question, does He feel invited.
- And do the people He loves feel invited.

I think a healthy church is marked by several things.

- There are a lot of things
- Good theology, good teaching, Spirit led, good worship, good looking pastor.
- Three indicators of health:
 - Multi-Generational
 - Multi-Cultural
 - Socio-Economic Diversity

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- o Socio-Economic Diversity

**Could it be as simple as we need everyone to make us whole
—the rejected included?**

*“Remove the heavy yoke of oppression.
Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!
Feed the hungry,
and help those in trouble.
—Isaiah 58:9-10*

And what He describes is almost too good

*“Then your salvation will come like the dawn,
and your wounds will quickly heal.
Your godliness will lead you forward,
and the glory of the lord will protect you from behind.
Then when you call, the lord will answer.
‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.*

*Then your light will shine out from the darkness,
and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.
The lord will guide you continually,
giving you water when you are dry
and restoring your strength.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like an ever-flowing spring.
Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities.
Then you will be known as a builder of walls
and a restorer of homes.
—Isaiah 58:8, 11-12*

3. He Invites us to His Abundance and Blessing. 58:8-11

I want to zero in on one word here.

- I realize the headings are very vanilla.
- Transformation, Abundance, Blessing.
- Did we have to come to church to hear this.

I want to look at one word in verse 11 - Reading in the NASB (Kind of a clunky but very literal translation):

*“And the LORD will continually guide you,
And satisfy your **desire in scorched places**,
And give strength to your bones;
And you will be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.*

Desire is a word gets used a lot on the Old Testament

- The thing that you want.
- The thing that is just beyond the thing that you want.
- The thing that you hope for but know not to ask for...
 - o It would mean the potential management of disappointment

- It would mean the potential management of disappointment
- Or the thing that God has beyond the thing you hope for—
You don't know about it or to know to ask for it.

He'll satisfy your desire in the scorched places?

- Those places of pain and disappointment
- Places where we've truly lost hope
- We become cynical when we've been hurt too many times.
- The places where we think God has truly forgotten us

Closing/Application

When something in life gets so scorched over and deadened, we look for ways to survive.

- It's called coping.
- It's scorched over and deadened because it's a long way removed from a life source.
- And the thing is, coping becomes our normal.
- It's driven by whatever we need in the moment to survive.

A Picture of Coping - When the Nile turned to blood in Egypt.

- The Egyptians had to dig holes next to the river to get water.
- Next to the river.
- This is normal - We need water, you know.
- **It's not normal.**
 - When a surrender to God turns the river back to water.
 - And everything you need is right there.
 - The Heart of God and His Heart for us is the normal that we want.

Accepting an Invitation to Intimacy Changes the Way we Talk to God.

- I don't mean to sound inauthentic, but I might pray a little different in private than I do in public.
- When we pray in private; God gets the stuff we can't talk to anyone about.
- Because we see pray as an invitation to a conversation.
- To hear Him talk like He does in Is 59 should affect how we pray
- And He is encouraging us to trust Him, not please Him through religious construct.

Accepting an invitation to Intimacy Changes what we Ask for From God.

- There's is a lot of power in asking for His heart on things.
- The change of our hearts to the place where they're like His.
- In the abundance of the well-watered garden that He makes us, we realize we have more than we ever knew to ask for.

I just want to say, it is for me too.

- But I find myself praying:

I just want to say, it is for me too.

- But I find myself praying:
- **Give me your heart for this, God**
- **Change my heart**

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