

The table is set. You're ready to sit down and eat. Imagine your favorite meal. I talked a bit about comfort food last week, what meal would it be for you if you were calling the shots? Steak? Barbecue brisket or ribs? Lobster? Pasta? Pizza? How about a Thanksgiving dinner? That's something most people can agree on. Where the turkey is so juicy and tender. The smell from the oven has filled the house. You also have your mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, cranberries, fresh baked rolls, - all of the traditional fixings. And then to top it off, a glass of special holiday punch sits at the top of the plate for refreshment.

What's your favorite meal? What's on your plate? What's in your glass?

4. Isaiah writes: "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live" (vv 2b-3a).

Isaiah isn't talking about turkey and stuffing here. The table he's inviting us to has the richest of food and the most nourishing of drink. You see, the table we eat at has been set by God's one-and-only Son. Jesus has prepared a meal for us beyond imagination.

And how did He prepare that meal? Well, just before this invitation to come and eat at this table, Isaiah had prophesied what God's Servant would do. Listen to these sentences from Isaiah 53:(3-6) "³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-every one-to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Sound familiar? Of course. Jesus' final few days on this earth. He is rejected and beaten. He is whipped and bloodied. You can picture how the Roman soldiers have despised him. You've seen pictures of His wounds and that He was so crushed He couldn't even carry His cross to His execution. Stricken. Smitten. Afflicted.

Jesus does all this to set the table with the richest of foods. He bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. He has all our sin and iniquity on His shoulders. And by His wounds we are healed. On that cross, He prepares forgiveness for that iniquity. By His suffering, the table is covered with salvation. His death puts eternal life on our plates. Look at the

table—each dish, every glass brings us to the very presence of God to eat and drink of His peace. Yes, His peace. One of the choicest of foods on Jesus' table is peace.

And not just any peace. The Bible's peace is more than absence of war, a stop in fighting. God's peace is safety, health, wholeness, plenty. Food to eat. Wounds healed. Relationships strong. Bodies sound and fit. Purpose in life.

One symbol for peace is the horn of plenty. The horn of plenty is a long basket, small at one end, and at the larger open end, all sorts of food rolls out. In times of peace, people have food and lots of it. It's a time of satisfaction. Another sign of peace is the shaking of hands and saying, "Christ's peace be with you". It's a way of giving a blessing to someone else. The words and hands joined are a prayer for strong relationships in church, in home, in our neighborhoods.

Peace is health and wholeness of body and soul. Peace is freedom from worry. Peace is uninterrupted sleep. Peace is the bounce in your step and the quiet confidence of a day lived with purpose.

What an incredible spread of food on this table: forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, God's love, and peace. It's a meal that satisfies, blesses our relationships, gives wholeness of body and soul, provides purpose to life. And we are invited to this rich feast of blessings.

We're invited because Jesus didn't stay crushed and beaten. He didn't stay in the grave. He rose victoriously on Easter. This meal is a victory celebration, a time to rejoice. It's the most joyous meal you could ever eat because Jesus is there, alive and inviting us to join Him.

Yes, He's inviting us. Now that, too, is incredible. Normally, who gets invited to the best meals in town? Have you ever thought about a dinner at the White House with various heads of state present? In Washington DC, there is a protocol officer. His job is to make sure people sit in the right places when a major event occurs. You have two presidents from two different countries. Who sits closest to the president of the United States? Which senators are invited? Where do they sit?

And it's not just with state dinners. If you've got the money to be served the fanciest meals, you eat them. Do you have a big bank account? You can easily afford \$500 bottles of wine to drink. Are you famous? Then you get invited to the clubs and parties. Celebrities get in; others wait in line outside. Are you good-looking and wear just the right brand-name clothes? Someone will pull up a chair for you to sit on.

But notice what happens with those meals. People are **excluded** because they don't have enough money. No political power? Go home. Not young and beautiful? You're not welcome. Don't have a big social media following? Don't expect anyone to make room for you.

But that's not the case with Jesus. Listen again: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (v 1).

What an amazing invitation! Everyone is invited. No one is excluded from this invitation. You could be old, weak, tired, handicapped, out of shape, wearing secondhand clothes bought at a thrift shop, unemployed, underemployed, unnoticed, uncool. Everyone is invited. Status, power, money, fame, looks, dress don't count at Jesus' table. The feast is for the least, the lost, and the last. It is for us! What's more Jesus paid everything, so it costs us nothing. In fact, you **can't** buy your way to this table. You can only be invited by Jesus. He set the table. The chairs are ready for you and me to sit in. And only the richest of foods are there for us to nourish bodies and souls.

But chairs are empty. Some haven't arrived at the meal yet. They still need to be invited. And who does the inviting? We do. We are the witnesses to the people who aren't yet at the table. I mean, if three hundred extra people suddenly showed up for church, we'd make room for them. But they'd need to be invited for that to happen.

Here are three practical ways for you to help with that invitation.

First, just because you can't buy a way to Jesus' table doesn't mean money isn't important in the church. Lights need to be on. Heat needs to warm the building in the winter and it sure is nice to have air conditioning in the summer, isn't it? Bread and wine need to be bought for the Lord's Supper. Salaries need to be paid. The buildings need to be kept up so that people feel welcome and safe here. Our church needs to be an inviting place to come to, and your contributions make that happen. When you put an envelope or money in the collection plate, it's not to buy your way in, but to help invite others to come and eat at Jesus' wonderful table. Give generously as those inviting others to the table.

Second, actually **invite** someone to come to worship. Ask someone you know to come with you to a service or Bible class. Show that person around. Sit with him and help him follow the service. Most people who don't attend church end up coming because someone invited them. Be the one who speaks an invitation.

Third, live an inviting life. Live a life that shows anyone is welcome to feast on Jesus' forgiveness, life, salvation, and peace. Let people see in your words and your actions a person who shows others respect, someone who has a caring heart, helping hands, and a joyful spirit.

Give generously. Invite freely. Be a living invitation. Because look what happens when we come to Jesus' table. On the altar is His body given on a cross, His blood shed for us. Picture yourself coming up to the Communion rail. You kneel. Then imagine the walls of the church aren't there, nor the stained-glass. Instead, the communion rail extends around the world, filled with all those who eat and drink of Jesus' forgiveness and peace. We are kneeling with everyone who has come to this wonderful meal: male and female, rich and poor, healthy and sick, young and old, from every nationality, disfigured and beautiful, handicapped and star athlete, presidents and everyday citizens, well dressed and homeless. And who else is with us? Jesus is. Our risen Lord has set the table. He invited us. What a meal this is now and for all eternity, including for those who still need to be invited.

Yes, Jesus has set and invited us to a wonderful table of food and drink so that we might invite others. Amen.