

## Isa 55 and the Resurrection of Christ

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### Introduction

Acts 13 records Paul's first missionary journey, with Barnabas (and, at first, John Mark).

13:14-41 is Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (in south-eastern Turkey, to be distinguished from Antioch on the Orontes, in Syria, from which they set out).

Two themes in this sermon, developed in an alternation (ABAB)

1. God has raised up Jesus of Nazareth as Savior (16-25; 32-33).
2. When the Jews, ignorant of who he was, killed him, God raised him from the dead (26-31, 34-37).

He develops these two "raisings" through puns; *egeirw* in 22 and 30, and *anisthmi* in 33 and 34.

		Verb	
		<i>egeirw</i>	<i>anisthmi</i>
Sense of "Raise Up"	As Ruler	16-25 (22)	32-33 (33)
	From Dead	26-31 (30)	34-37 (34)

In support of the resurrection in 34-37, he cites Isa. 55:3, "I will give you the sure mercies of David." Today, we seek to understand what this text has to do with the resurrection. There are two answers, a short one and a long one.

### The Short Answer (skip)

In Acts 13, Paul associates Isa 55:3 with another OT verse, Ps 16:10. They are linked in both Heb and Greek by common vocabulary, which our translation unfortunately misses.

1. Isa 55:3, God's promise to the people of "the sure mercies of David." LXX and NT, "the faithful holy things of David," "holy things" being a common LXX translation of *xasdim*.
2. Ps 16:10, where David expresses his confidence that the Lord will not allow his *xasid*, LXX "holy one," to see corruption, a promise that must look beyond David, who did see corruption.

God's promises to David were faithful things, *xasdim*. Foremost among them was the promised seed, the *xasid* of Ps 16, who could never see corruption. One way to recognize the Messiah is that he is incorruptible. Even when slain by the Jews, he must rise from the dead.

### The Long Answer

The NT writers do not just play word games with their OT texts. Even when they cite them in a Way that seems offhanded, almost always a careful study of the OT text will show that they are in deep harmony with the underlying sense of the text. Let us study Isa 55 to see this point.

The chapter is a unit, in the form of an alternation:

- Invitation, 1-3
- Explanation, 4-5 (2x “behold”)
- Invitation, 6-8
- Explanation (4x “for”), 8-13

We will concentrate only on the first five verses, the first invitation and explanation.

### **1-3, Invitation**

The prophet begins with a metaphor. He paints a paradoxical picture, then exhibits the reality that it is meant to illustrate.

#### **1-2a, Two Paradoxes**

The prophet calls people to recognize a bargain. Things of value are being offered for free, while the masses labor and impoverish themselves for things of no value.

The first point of the paradox is the vision of a vendor offering his wares for free. We are not accustomed to having vendors hawk their wares at us; here, they advertise in the media, and the actual marketplace is fairly calm. In the middle east, there is no media, and the vendors cry out to attract attention. Isaiah’s imagery is drawn from one particular kind of vendor, one to which we are not accustomed.

*55:1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,*

This is the cry of a water vendor in the marketplace. <<show slides>> So far, there is no paradox. But let us approach closer to the vendor, and hear what he says.

*and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat;*

A paradox; there is no charge; not only for the water, but also for food.

*yea, come, buy ... without money and without price ... wine and milk.*

This clause heightens the paradox. Note the climactic position of “wine and milk.” These are foods of luxury; cf. Joel 3:18 and Cant 5:1. What is offered for free is not just bread and water sufficient to sustain life, but a rich feast to rejoice the soul.

*2 Wherefore do ye spend money for [that which is] not bread?*

*and your labour for [that which] satisfieth not?*

The vendor boasts that the goods he is offering for free are far superior to what his customers are accustomed to paying much more for. “Look at this excellent refreshment I offer you. What would you expect to pay? Indeed, you would pay many shekels for something not half as refreshing, not half as satisfying. Yesterday you bought bread. I offer you wine and milk! And what did you pay yesterday? Half a day’s wages? But I offer you mine for free! Come, take, drink, be satisfied.”

## 2b-3, The Underlying Reality

So far, we might simply think we are viewing a rather eccentric street vendor on the fast track to bankruptcy. The next three commands show us that this picture is in fact a metaphor with a very deep reality. These three commands make a transition between

- A speaker whose words are advertisement but not product, drawing attention to something other than themselves as the object of value, and
- the words themselves *as* the item of value.

*hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye [that which is] good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

Thus far, the metaphor has not been unwrapped. One might still understand the Lord to be speaking of physical food and drink. His words are merely the advertisement, not the product.

*3 Incline your ear, and come unto me:*

For the first time, there is no mention of food. Instead, there is a pointed contrast with v.1. No longer are the hearers invited to “come to the waters,” but rather, “come to me.” The Lord is unpacking the metaphor. He is the spiritual food and drink that will nourish them and delight their souls.

*hear, and your soul shall live;*

Now the imagery of food has passed entirely. The word of God itself will cause their soul to live. It does not merely draw them to some other source of sustenance, but it is itself the sustenance.

These verses emphasize half of the metaphor, the surpassing refreshment available in the Word of God. The other half, the paradox of things for value being offered for free, is not worked out here, but in vv. 10-11. We won’t have time to go there, but we should keep it in mind.

What is this gift that God offers them? It is the promise that they will participate in the faithful covenant that God has made with David:

*and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, [even] the sure mercies of David.*

Here is where we came in. This is the verse that Paul quotes as a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ. We set out to understand the relation. How fortunate that Isaiah follows this statement with an explanation. Perhaps there we will find our answer.

## 4-5, Explanation

The explanation calls the reader to “behold” two things that exemplify “the sure mercies of David.” The two “behold”s differ in three ways

- The first describes actions in the past, the second actions in the future.
- The first describes someone in the third person (“him”), the second someone in the second person singular (“thou”).
- The first concerns “the peoples,” while the second concerns “nations.”

#### 4, *The First Fulfillment: David for the People of Israel*

4 *Behold, I have given him [for] a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples.*

“Him” here most naturally refers to “David” in the previous verse. He lived about 1000 BC; Isaiah writes about 720 BC, 280 years later. Thus the past tense.

The AV misses the plural on “people.” The emphasis here is on David’s ability to spread his rule beyond Israel to other races, who then sent tribute.

<<Skip details in sermon—no time>>

David’s role was threefold: “witness, leader, commander.” These roles represent a progression in the sphere in which he has influence.

- “Witness” is one who bears testimony. This David does repeatedly and eloquently in the Psalms. Unlike Moses’ law or Paul’s epistles, these spring directly from his experience in life. Thus “witness” is particularly appropriate for them. They are the testimony of his experience in trusting the Lord. David could do this even as a private citizen, but his sphere would become much larger. In Ps 18:49; 57:10 (*‘ummim* as in Isa 55:4), he expressly promises to do this before the heathen.
- “Leader” is a characteristic term for Israel’s king, reserved for those who were king by divine appointment. It is used most frequently in the OT of David. Thus it enlarges the sphere of his work to the nation.
- “Commander” *micawweh* is characteristically the word that describes Moses’ work in Deuteronomy. Out of 44 occurrences of this ptc in the OT, 37 are in Deut. One (26:16) has God as subject, but the other 36 all refer to Moses. David’s role as “commander” lies in his extension of Israel’s power over other nations, according to the purpose of Deut 20:10-15. Cf. 2 Sam. 8. By bringing them under Israel’s authority, he communicates Israel’s law to them.

Thus we see him here in his twofold function of prophet and king (not priest, for no one except our Lord can hold all three together).

#### 5, *The Second Fulfillment: Messiah for All Nations*

Who is the one addressed as “thou” in v.5? Some have suggested it is the people of Israel, but they are everywhere addressed in the plural, “you,” throughout this chapter. We are being called to behold evidence of God’s faithful promises to David. The central promise was that David’s offspring would be God’s son, and would reign on David’s throne. This fulfillment must be describing that future one, which accounts for the change in tense.

The move from “peoples” to “nations” is not a shift from Israel to the Gentiles, but from an emphasis on descent to one on nationhood.

5 *Behold, thou shalt call a nation [that] thou knowest not,*

Our Savior is claiming to fulfill this promise in John 7:37. Like Yahwah in Isa 55,

- He calls the thirsty to come drink.
- He presents himself not only as the *purveyor* of living water, but as its *source*.

He makes this statement at the feast of tabernacles, which is the one feast expressly imposed on the Gentiles in the coming age (Zech 14:16). Now we understand the identity of the water-seller more clearly. It is the Lord Jesus, calling not only Israel but all nations to come and drink.

What is it that will draw them? Why should they believe his fantastic offer and come? The Lord now makes this clear.

*and nations [that] knew not thee shall run unto thee*

*because of the LORD thy God,*

*and for the Holy One of Israel;*

*for he hath glorified thee.*

The nations come running to the divine water-seller because God has glorified him. In the NT, this refers to the resurrection and ascension.

- Our Lord prays for it in John 17.
- Chiasm in Acts 3:13-15
- The exaltation is opposed, not to his birth (as though it were limited to the ascension), but to his death (thus emphasizing the resurrection): Phil 2:8,9; Heb 2:9.

We have often noticed that the resurrection of our Lord is an essential component of the presentation of the gospel in the NT. Why? Because Isaiah prophesied that this would attract the Gentiles!

- A renegade Jewish rabbi, martyred by his countrymen, would be only of historical interest.
- But someone who has overcome death and escaped the grave is of universal interest.  
Compare Paul's presentation to the Athenians on Mars Hill, in Acts 17:30-31: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by [that] man whom he hath ordained; [whereof] he hath given assurance unto all [men], in that he hath raised him from the dead."

What does Isa 55 have to do with the resurrection? It presents the divine water-seller, seeking to draw the attention of all nations to his precious product, freely offered. We turn to him, not because of his shiny brass pitcher or the tinkling of his bells, but for a more substantial reason. Here is one who has conquered death, and returned from the grave. Surely he can satisfy our needs—and if we reject him, how fearful must be the judgment that he will bring.

### Translation of *halak* as "come"

This translation is characteristic only of the imperative, where the force of *leku* is not so much directional as hortatory. Cf Gen 19:32,34, for reversal of *hlk* and *bw'*. Conversely, *bw'* sometimes has the sense of "go," Gen 45:17-18, where it is used both for motion away from and toward the speaker. (Often, *bw'* has special sense of movement *into* a domain: the tent, the ark, ...)