

Only 17 shopping days left until Christmas. Have you found the right gift for that special person on your list? Have you searched all the ads to get the best price?... have you been on-line comparing prices, shipping charges?... Have you been to malls and shopping centers to make sure that they don't run out of what you want? I know that I haven't done any of this, and I won't!

If you listen to the advertisements it might lead you to believe that finding the perfect gift is the most important thing about Christmas. This is not to say that finding a nice gift for our spouse or child is not important — but it should really cause us to sit back and think about the real meaning of Christmas if receiving and giving gifts is the focus of Christmas.

At our house, while we exchange gifts, there is never a large amount of gifts, and the gifts are never the focus of the Christmas season. We like to think that there is a balance. And if I remember correctly, that is the way it was when I was growing up.

However, for some, gift giving is THE only meaning of Christmas — nothing more and nothing less. Therefore they have to spend a lot of time finding the right gift — and it is usually something really expensive, or there are lots and lots of gifts. I have been to homes around Christmas — both family and friends where there has been a tremendous amount of gifts around the tree — so much so, that they were stacked very high along the sides of the tree.

This is usually the case for those who don't know the meaning of Christmas, because they are looking for something and think that they will find it in the amount of gifts that they give and receive. We also find that during the Christmas season lots of people are doing lots of things — many of them very important — looking for the real meaning of Christmas — along with gift giving.

There's "Toys for Tots", where people collect toys for underprivileged children. There's the Salvation Army with their Christmas Kettles collecting money. Last week when I was in Syracuse, I was at the local mall and they had what was advertised as the world's largest kettle – and it was big.

Then there's a multitude of places giving Christmas dinners to people who can't afford it... Those that collect Christmas baskets for the poor ... You have area sports and media celebrities involved a variety of charitable endeavors ... we ourselves are helping a young single mother, and I'm sure that you can think of your own – maybe even where you work. All of these are very valuable projects — and very necessary because there are people in need and it is great when others can help.

But many people involved in these projects and lots of gift giving, do so because they are trying to find “the meaning of the season.” And for many, this is what the season is all about.

As I said, all the projects are valuable, and there especially needs to be Christians involved in these projects as a outgrowth or result of our faith. But for us and others, even if they do not realize it, this is NOT the meaning of the season... this is not the reason for Christmas — we know that the focus needs to be on the birth of Christ and the reason for his birth.

But for those without Christ... There is this longing... this thirst... this hunger for something that is not there...

for something that is missing and they do these things to try to fill that hunger... to quench that thirst.

Turn with me to Isaiah 55, our Old Testament lesson for this morning. We know — or should know — that when Adam and Eve sinned, that their sin would affect all of humanity. All of us are sinners because of their sin and therefore we are separated from God. We also know that after Adam's sin God immediately promised a Messiah... He promised that there would be someone who would come that would enable people to be forgiven for their sins.

In the progress of Biblical history throughout the O.T., we know that this Messiah would come through the Jews... that he would be of the line of David... As the progress of O.T. history continues we read more and more about the coming Messiah — about who he is... what he will be like... what he will do, along with where he will be born, etc. One of those many O.T. prophecies is that which we read here in Isaiah 55, part of which we will look at this morning.

The thing that we have to understand is that the period of time covered in the book of Isaiah was about sixty years from 760 to 700 B.C. So we know that it was completed no more than 700 years before the time of Christ — and that is important.

It was written during the time of a divided kingdom of Israel — there was the Northern Kingdom, called Israel and a Southern Kingdom called Judah. Isaiah was from the Southern kingdom and he prophesied during the reign of a number of kings — Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Prior to the time of the writing of our passage before us, they were in captivity in Babylon.

They were in captivity because of their sin against God — Judah had, as a nation, turned their backs on God — and so captivity by the nation of Babylon was God's judgement on them. But even in the midst of judgement, God gave them a message of hope.

There was a message that had relevance to the people's immediate needs — that another King from another nation — we know him as Cyrus — would be God's instrument of returning the people to Judah — and this was prophesied over 100 years before it actually happened.

But there was also an eternal message — that of the promise of a Savior... a Messiah. This message is throughout the book of Isaiah. For example we read in Isaiah 7:14 we read the very familiar verse: *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”* In chapter 42 you can read of the justice that he will bring to the nations. And in chapters 52 & 53 you can read of the suffering Savior... some of the verses that predicted that Jesus would suffer and die for the sins of his people – again, written over 700 years before the time of Christ.

And in chapter 49 we read that this Messiah would not only be for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. In talking about the coming Messiah, we read in Isaiah 49:6: *Indeed He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”*

In other words, the Messiah — while coming from the line of Israel — would be the Messiah or Savior of all people that believe in him. And that is the truth that we see in our passage of Isaiah 55 — we have an invitation to accept what people are looking for... it is, from an O.T. perspective a call to come to Christ, using

the beautiful imagery of the O.T. — 55:1-3 (READ).

We have here a call... an invitation to come to receive something that will satisfy your thirst... satisfy that longing that is within your hearts... it is a call to receive something that they don't have... 55:1 (READ). In essence, it is an invitation to receive that which sustains life — water, bread, wine.

There are multitudes of people looking in all the wrong places to find that which satisfies... that which fulfills the longings of the soul. They look for in money, people, things, illicit relationships. They are looking for it in gift giving... service to others... But, to paraphrase the song, they're looking for love in all the wrong places — even those worthwhile things that we've already mentioned.

Look closer at what verse one says — *“Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.”* Imagine going to the grocery store and filling up your cart with food and getting to the checkout and realize that you don't have any money. What will happen — you won't get any food.

But that is not what we see here: *“Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.”* Now — there are two ways that one can interpret this phrase. First, and this would seem the most obvious going along with the previous phrase — *“And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat”* — that God is inviting us to take what we want for free... that we take that which will satisfy our thirst and hunger — and be filled and have our thirst quenched. This is what the Gospel does for those who thirst and hunger after God.

We know that as we compare scripture with scripture that this is also the promise of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”* Jesus is repeating an O.T. invitation to come and get satisfied.

Jesus said to the woman at the well: *“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”* And Jesus also said: *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”*

We also see an earthly parallel in the feeding of the multitudes on at least two occasions — they all ate until they were filled... until they were satisfied, and they even had leftovers. They heard eternal truth and had their earthly needs met.

But I think of another meaning of this phrase: *“Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.”* Not only is it an invitation to come and buy even if you don't have any money — but, I think that what is also implied here is that even if you had money — even if you had the money of a Bill Gates or a Warren Buffett, or any other really, really rich person — you could not afford what God has offered to satisfy our thirst and hunger for Him. No one can afford to buy salvation.

I grant you that we have the privilege of looking at all of Scripture and seeing the promise of the Messiah fulfilled in Jesus, while the readers in the day of Isaiah could only trust in what God had promised. But we need to see that while our salvation costs us nothing — it cost God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we think about our salvation and that which we have received from God we need to realize that while it did not cost us anything there was much involved on the part of the Godhead — and an incredible sacrifice.

There was the fact that before the foundation of the world it was ordained that Jesus would be born as a little baby, would live on earth, and would suffer and die for the sins of those who believe in him. Think about Jesus — the pre-existent 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity leaving all the glories of heaven to come to earth to die.

So, while for us salvation is a free, it was not to God. The other night we watched the movie The Nativity, which came out a few years ago. It is generally accurate – there are a few things out of sequence. But the main points of the movie is that it showed the beginning of the sacrifice of our Savior – being conceived in the womb of a virgin – and the shame that this brought on her and her family. The fact, that being “great with child” they had to travel over 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, in a time when travel was not easy. And as we know, there was no room to stay, so the baby was born in a stable and wrapped in the rags that they used to clean the stable. Then, as a child, having to flee to Egypt because of Herod’s decree to kill all the children under two years old.

We are reminded of the great sacrifice and humility of our Savior in Philippians 2:5-7: “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.*”

So here we see the meaning of Christmas. The most precious gift of all was born as a little baby over 2000 years ago in Bethlehem... but that little baby came to die for the sins of those who trust in him as Savior and Lord. And as the Scriptures teach — there is no other Savior... there is no other who can take away our sin.

Remember the words of our Savior that we read in Scripture: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*” Or the words of Peter in his Pentecost sermon: “*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*”

Or as Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 1:5: “*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,*”

That is why we see in verse 2, the futility of trying to find salvation in other places... 55:2 (READ) What God offers us through the Lord Jesus Christ is that which cannot be bought... it is that for which no amount of money can obtain... it is that for which no amount of good works can provide for it.

And so we see this invitation repeated in verse... and a tender invitation it is 55:3 (READ). The results of responding to that invitation is clear — “*Hear, and your soul shall live...*”

This is the meaning and purpose of the season — it is not gifts, decorations or parties as important and wonderful as these things are — no, the reason is that for those who have faith we receive the salvation of our souls.

And so the question has to be asked — have you received the gift that God offers?? If you have — know that this is the most important meaning of Christmas — and if you have not and are looking for the real meaning of Christmas — the invitation is there for you. The Scriptures say: “*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*” READ 55:1-3: