

The Gospel Primer

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if you've ever wanted to learn about a new topic or a new subject. Often you'll buy or get a little introduction to it so you can find out what it is you're learning about.

And that's referred to as a primer. According to the internet, the definition of a primer is a small introductory book on a subject.

Maybe you can think of some that you've read in the past. Maybe you've started a maths course and you've read a little primer on maths or a particular hobby that you're picking up.

I recently got some wood carving knives and I thought, well, let me see what Amazon has in terms of wood carving primers. At least searching for wood carving primers, the only thing I came up with was Santa carving, which isn't particularly helpful to me, though it did have four and a half out of five stars.

But children, maybe you can think of something you want to learn to do. Maybe it's a new sport or a new hobby or a video game or something that you want to get into. And you may not call it a primer, but you might watch a video that explains and introduces the subject to you, how to go about it.

[1 : 19] Watch an overview of it. That's a primer. Well, I wonder what do you think should be included in what we might call a gospel primer?

If you were tasked with writing a primer about the Christian message about Jesus Christ, not everything but an introduction to that message, a little gospel primer, what would you include in it? This message about salvation in Jesus. How would you, to someone who wants to know more, introduce and give them an overview of what God has done for us in Christ?

Maybe you're sat here this morning and you think, I don't know what the gospel is. I've not, I've not been a part of a church. How can I write a primer on it? Well, that's wonderful you're here, because hopefully by the time we finish, not just that you would be able to say, I understand it.

I can sort of tell you the information of it, but I hope that you would go away, not just being able to say it, but having received and believed that good news that God gives us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

[2 : 40] Now, there's more that you can say or you'll find in any primer. It doesn't cover everything. And in some sense, if you've been a Christian just for a little bit of time or a long time, the Christian life is just going deeper and deeper into the gospel.

It's not necessarily new things, it's just going deeper into what we've already received. And so if you are a Christian here this morning, I just hope that your hearts and souls are thrilled as we hear again the old, old story of Jesus and His love for us.

And if you're not yet a Christian, I hope you hear that story and you come to find life. As we thought earlier of this invitation that Jesus gives, that your burdens are released and that you find comfort in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if I was to turn to a chapter in the Bible and say, is there a single chapter that is sort of gives me an overview of the gospel? Well, I think Isaiah 55 does that for us. It is a single chapter that gives us a primer on the gospel that tells us not everything about it, but everything that we need to know about it to introduce it to us.

And so we're going to look through Isaiah 55 and you have your order of service there. There's, if this was a book, there's six chapters to this little gospel primer that Isaiah gives to us.

[4 : 07] And so we'll look at each of these chapters, as it were, as we think and just watch and see this overview of this message of God's love to us in His Son, Jesus.

So the first chapter is called the gospel offer. And this is how the chapter begins in Isaiah 55. Come. And it's interesting, most all English translations don't include it, but there's a word there that that if we were to put it in English says, hey, when you're trying to get someone's attention.

One of our kids has these little earbuds that are noise canceling. So often we'll talk to him and if he has them in, he can't hear us.

And so we sort of need to raise our voice and say, hey, we need to ask you something. And Isaiah, at the beginning of this chapter, he wants to sort of get your attention, turn your face to him.

Hey, come, come, come, he says. It is an invitation. When we think of what the gospel offer is, fundamentally, it is an invitation. And it's not an invitation to an event per se, but it's an invitation to a person.

[5 : 17] We see this in verse three. He says, come to me, the Lord speaking through his servant Isaiah, come to me. In verse six, he says it again, seek the Lord.

The gospel is an invitation to come to Jesus Christ. It's not about everything that necessarily will be given to you or you can do, but it is an invitation to this person.

And this is the invitation we heard read for us earlier in Matthew's gospel. What did Jesus say?

Come to me. If you're weary or heavy laden or burdened down with life, come, he says to me.

And what is it that we find in this one that we come to? What does Isaiah tell us about him? Well, this invitation to come to him says that we will have our thirst quenched.

If you're thirsty, come to the waters. So we find satisfaction in this person. It's not just water, but it's food.

[6 : 29] Come, buy and eat. So we find contentment and filling in this person. Verse three, he says, come to me that you may live.

We find life in him. So satisfaction, contentment, life. Verse five, we find relationship with the living God in him.

These people that don't know you are going to come running to you. And then in verse seven, we find mercy and pardon. This is the person we need to come to.

Who satisfies, who fills, who gives life, who brings forgiveness and pardon, who brings relationship with the living God who has made us. This is the person we need to come to.

It was last October. Our oldest daughters just finished school and we went to a uni open day. And we walked into sort of a big conference room and there were tables dotted all around the walls.

[7 : 40] And we were there to find out about the uni. And when we walked in, the question faced with us, which table do we need to go to? What information do we need about this uni?

Who's the right person that we need to talk to? Well, as we think about life, Jesus is the one we need to go to. Because he offers us what everyone's wanting.

Satisfaction, contentment, purpose and meaning in life. A healed relationship with the living God. All the deepest longings that humanity has.

Jesus says, come to me and I can give those to you. This is the gospel offer.

Come to this person and find all of these things in him. But who is the audience? Who is this invitation for? Chapter two of our little gospel primer is the gospel audience.

[8 : 48] You might sit there and think, well, all sorts of invitations go out all the time. I wasn't invited to the coronation, but invitations went out to it. So is this invitation, who is it given to?

Who gets it? Are some people excluded? Is it only for a certain group? I wonder if we were to ask people, maybe yourself or maybe friends or family, colleagues, neighbors.

If you're to say, who do you think the Christian message is for? I wonder what answers you might get back. Well, it's for good people.

It's for really moral people. It's for those who get life right. I would expect we'd hear some of those answers. It's for those who are religious and holy.

That's who this message is for. But who does Isaiah tell us it's for? Well, he begins initially, it's for the thirsty.

[9 : 58] Now, if you were to sort of think of your life experience in terms of thirst. Can we, you probably heard people, what are you thirsting for?

Not a drink as such, but just in life. How have these last couple few years, maybe just last few months, how have they left you in terms of thirst for life?

Do you feel well hydrated? Do you feel satisfied? I would expect that for most of us, this last year hasn't gone in all the ways we anticipated.

That if we're to view life in terms of thirst, that we would say, yeah, some things this last year have certainly left me thirsty. Well, then this invitation's for you.

He moves on from the thirsty to the poor. If you don't have any money. Again, if we think of our life experience in monetary terms, do we feel like we have money to spare?

[11 : 06] Right, in this last week, have you felt in control or out of control? Have you, do you feel like you've made all the right decisions this last week?

Haven't made any mistakes? You've gotten everything just the way it ought to be. You don't have a single regret from this last week.

Not one. Nothing you would want to take back and do again. You're rich, as it were. Free from struggles. No battles. Or do you actually feel poor and battered after this last week?

That you're here, but only just. Isaiah says this offers for you. Even if you've been a Christian for decades and decades.

Jesus today invites you to himself again. Come, you who are weary and burdened. You who are thirsty and poor, come to me.

[12 : 15] Have the longings of life, the cravings of your soul met in me, he says. Have your lack and your need met by me, he says.

Do you qualify? Is this invitation for you? It is. It's for each and every one of us. But that's more about what we lack.

Sort of the things that we, not so things we've done, but just things that we don't quite measure up to. But what about, what if we're just bad? Is it for those people?

So, maybe not people that just need a bit of help. But what about for those who are just not good people? Well, what does Isaiah say in verse 7?

Speaking of this same invitation, he's inviting the wicked and the unrighteous to turn to the Lord. So, not just those who don't quite get life right, but those who are dead set on getting it wrong and doing things that are wicked and evil.

[13 : 25] And maybe you're sat there and there's something that you, maybe you've not spoken to anyone in this room about it before. And you said, I know what I've done and I know this isn't for me.

This is for other people, this invitation. Not for people like me. If you only knew what I've done. We may not know what you've done.

But the living God does. He knows exactly what you've done. And he says to you, come. To you, he invites you to come.

There is not a single person on this planet that is excluded from this invitation. Right? It is our lack and our failures that qualify us for the invitation.

Every single person is the audience of this gospel invitation. So, there is the gospel offer of coming to Jesus. There is the audience that includes the whole of our world and everyone in this room.

[14 : 42] And third, there is the gospel cost. The gospel cost. And we read about this, again, at the beginning of the chapter. He says, right? Buy without money.

Right? It's free. It is free. You don't have money. Come. Buy and eat. Without money and without cost. Drink and eat. But we need to understand, it isn't free in and of itself.

It is free to those to whom it comes. And we won't go there. But maybe this afternoon, if you want to read a couple chapters before Isaiah 55. Isaiah in the end of 52, end of 53.

He shows us the cost of this gospel offer. Right? That the servant of God, the son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ would come and suffer and die.

And be buried. For the failures and sins and transgressions of his people. So in that sense, the cost is infinite. Right?

[15 : 46] The son of God came and gave himself. But to those to whom the invitation is given, the cost is free. And yet, at the same time, in some sense, I would say, but it does cost you everything.

You might think, what is this sort of a bait and switch? Well, think about this. I, a little while ago, had an invitation from Joe, your pastor, to come and preach.

And the invitation was to come to Aberdeen. Now, if I am to accept his invitation, what does that mean about all the other cities in the United Kingdom?

If I say yes to coming to Aberdeen, it means that I'm saying no to Edinburgh. I'm saying no to Glasgow. I'm saying no to Leeds.

I'm saying no to London. Right? It is exclusive. The invitation is come here. And by implication, don't go to any of those other places.

[16:50] It is exclusive. I forsake all other cities to come to Aberdeen. And do you see when Jesus invites him to himself, what that means about all other places that we might go to find these things.

Look again at verse 2. He's using the imagery of bread and water, but he's talking about, we might call them false gospels.

Why spend money on what is not bread? You pursue something that says, I'm bread and will satisfy you, and you spend your money on it. But that's not what it is. It can't do what Jesus can do.

And your labor, your work on what doesn't satisfy. So as the invitation is come to Jesus, bound up within that is, and don't go to these other false saviors.

Our world will make plenty of promises of contentment, of fulfillment and satisfaction. Maybe it's in work. Be fulfilled and satisfied through your career.

[18:13] But jobs end, salaries cease, our work abilities weaken. The promise doesn't last.

Ultimately, it disappoints us. So maybe you think, well, it's the next step after that retirement. That's where it is. I've known a lot of people who have been in the later years of life.

And it's just not really very fun. Your body's just slowly wearing out. Just normal activities of the day are hard.

Now, those things aren't in and of themselves bad. But if we say, this is why I'm living. I'm living for retirement. I'm living for this career.

If that is where I am finding who I am in those things, Jesus says you need to leave it. Don't spend money on what is not bread.

[19:12] So the offer is free, but it is exclusive. We can't look for the promises of Jesus in other places. Contentment, fulfillment, life.

Relationship with the living God. We see this again in verse 7.

What does he say to the wicked and the unrighteous? He says, forsake your ways and your thoughts. We leave these things and come to Jesus.

There is a way of living that leads to death. And the gospel offer calls us to forsake it and to turn our back on that way. And the words the Bible uses for this are faith and repentance.

In faith, we turn to Jesus. In repentance, we turn from our sin. We leave it behind. And so in repentance, we forsake all other idols.

[20:14] We turn from them to Jesus. We live for him and not for these other things. So the gospel costs the glories of the gospel. All that Jesus offers you and himself are free to you.

You don't need to buy them. But you can't get them anywhere but Jesus. They are found only in him. So the offer, the audience, the cost.

And chapter 4 of our gospel primer is the gospel God. And this is one of, for me at least, one of the happiest bits of the chapter. And it's in verses 8 and 9 where we see how God is so different from how we might imagine him.

Certainly how our world would imagine him. What do we read? He says, My thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are my ways your ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than yours.

And my thoughts than yours. Now, does this just mean that when life takes a turn, I wasn't expecting? I can have confidence that God's ways are not like mine and he's in control and doing what's right.

[21:25] Yes, that is a, I think, a right application of this and a real comfort to us in certain times in life. But in the context of the passage, I don't think that's the focus that we're being given.

In what specific ways are God's thoughts and ways not like ours? Well, what has come just before verses 8 and 9? Well, it's that God will take the wicked and the unrighteous and be merciful to them and pardon them.

People, I think I could say that we wouldn't want to do that with. That we wouldn't want to treat that way with forgiveness and mercy and pardon. That we wouldn't want to do that with the wickedness and the living God does.

It's the scandal of the free salvation that he gives even to the most wicked in the world. And whether intentionally or not, we often think of God like ourselves.

He's like us, but just sort of a bit better. And Isaiah here shakes us from that delusion and says, he's nothing like us.

[22:50] And I think we live in a day and age where we see this very easily in our culture and society. We live in a world that has no second chances. People call it a cancel culture.

People's livelihoods are lost because they've done one thing. I remember this was a little while ago reading about a cricket player. Does cricket get this far north?

I'm not quite sure. I don't really follow cricket. I know the ashes are happening, but actually in Leeds right now. But this cricket player, I think he was in his 20s. And someone had uncovered a tweet he did in his teens that was, I don't know what it was, racist or something.

And his career was destroyed. Did it matter that he was sorry about it? That he was a teenager and teenagers do stupid things? One and done.

He was out. He was out. Children, maybe you've experienced this. Maybe you've done something in your friend group and they just exclude you because of one thing you've done.

[23 : 57] Or maybe you've had a friend that that's happened to. And they really, they didn't mean to do what they did or they're really sorry that they had done what they did. But it's over.

It's done. No second chance. Isaiah says, God is not like that. God, this invitation goes out to the wicked and the evil.

At infinite cost, God sends his son to suffer in the place of wicked and evil people. To save those who left to themselves are hell-bent on fighting him and seeking to get rid of him.

And it's not that he just tolerates us. It's not that he sort of sits there and says, well, I'll put up with you. He makes us a part of his family. Maybe you think, well, this person's done this and I've forgiven them and I'll just tolerate them.

God goes further than that. He brings us in the house. Who would act like that? Who would do that? Isaiah says the gospel God will do that.

[25 : 18] There is only one gospel God and he invites you to feast to find life, joy and satisfaction in his son. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done. He delights to forgive and pardon.

It isn't that his arms being twisted to do it. He delights to do it. If you're the most evil person who has ever lived, he says, come to me and find life.

Forgiveness. If you're the weakest or poorest or person who just seems my life is only filled with failure. He says, come to me and find life and fulfillment and satisfaction and contentment.

I've paid the bill, he says. It's free. Come. Come. This is the gospel God.

And then two more quick chapters here. The fifth of our gospel primer is the gospel word. And we read about this in verses 10 and following. He compares it to the rain and snow that come and water the earth, making it flourish and be fruitful.

[26 : 35] And God says, the instrument that I use to accomplish my work is the word that goes out from my mouth. And as we think of this whole invitation, we heard it again and again.

He said, listen to me. Verses two and three. Listen. Listen. Listen. Right? There is a message, a word that is being sent out to invite us to him. And this word is effective.

And just a couple things. If you're a Christian to encourage us that as we share, want to share the gospel with our friends, that we make God's word a part of that pursuit.

Why not invite someone to read the Bible with you? Right? Let God's spirit take his word and go to work.

Maybe you write a little note to someone and you think, well, they aren't yet a Christian, but I'm going to put a verse here to let them know I'm praying for them. Right? That we trust the spirit of God to do what Isaiah says he'll do here.

[27 : 43] That his word won't return to him empty. He'll be void without accomplishing that for which he sends it. And if you're here this morning and you're not yet a Christian and you think, okay, I'm hearing bits and pieces from the preacher today, but I want to know more.

I would encourage you in what we call the New Testament. Later on in the Bible, there are four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. We call them gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Pick one and read it. Say, okay, God, you say your word works. I'm going to read it. And let's see what you do.

As we come and meet the Lord Jesus in God's word. So that is the gospel word. It is effective and brings fruit. And then finally, the last chapter of any good book, right, is the happy ending.

The gospel future. I love the way this is described. Verse 12. You will go out in joy. Just think of our current life experience. This is the future of those who receive the invitation to come to Jesus.

[28 : 53] You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. And then there's these pictures of the whole of creation. We're having a party. The mountains and hills will burst into song before you.

The trees or the field will clap their hands. And these aspects of the curse upon our world that came all the way back in the garden.

Right? The thorns are going to go away. The briars are going to go. So, it's a beautiful picture. We live in a creation. I think we could say it this way.

That curses us. As it were. Right? The creation is under a curse because of the sin of our parents, Adam and Eve. And it's like it's unhappy with us.

And we read in Romans. The creation is waiting for our redemption. It's sort of looking over, waiting for it to happen. And we get a little glimpse of what it will look like for the creation when this does happen.

[29 : 55] So, right now, the creation isn't cheering us. It's not clapping us. But we're told there's a day that it will. That as we go out in joy and are led forth in peace, the mountains, the hills, the trees, they're going to clap us.

And it's a beautiful picture. There is, for a number of years, I would sort of once a year preach at an African congregation that met in Leeds.

I don't know if you've ever been in African service. Very different to what we're doing this morning. More movements, sort of more of all that. And so, I'm sort of the only white guy in there.

And they're just going for it. And I remember this one time that I was there. I suppose if you think of the windows at the back, they were clear windows. And across the road from the windows were probably 100-foot tall trees.

And it was a really windy day. So, as I'm watching this church family inside swaying and sort of enjoying their singing, I look outside and I see the trees.

[31 : 01] And they're doing just the same thing. And it's a beautiful picture. The trees were joining with the church clapping the Lord that morning. And Isaiah says, the gospel future for those who have accepted the invitation will be this picture of the creation clapping and bursting into song.

But the best part of it is the last bit of the last verse. He finishes this chapter by saying, And this will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign that will endure forever.

An everlasting monument that will be put there forever. Maybe you've heard the phrase, oh, he's really made a name for himself. Or she's made a name for herself.

Often in sports, you'll have that. It's Wimbledon right now. Whether you like him or not, Novak Djokovic is sort of trying to continue to, right, make a name for himself in the history of men's tennis. How is it the Lord makes a name for himself? Well, it's this, it's what we fill in with that word this.

[32 : 21] This will be for the Lord's renown. What will be for the Lord's renown? What is this monument by which the Lord makes a name for himself? Well, what have we been reading about?

It's that he will take weak people. He will take poor people. He will take wicked people. He will take evil people. And he will lead them into this future.

This monument, this everlasting monument to the Lord's renown, how he makes a name for himself, will be all the rotten, failed people that he has saved.

He will point to us, and that is how he has made a name for himself. Not because of anything in us. Not in the least.

But because of what he has done for us in Christ. And I want to be there. I want to be a part of that monument. I want to see creation clapping.

[33 : 33] But I want to be a part of this monument for the Lord's renown. That we, as it were, as this monument, point back to him and say, there is no one like him.

No one does what he does. And this invitation is to each and every one of us to be a part of that future. So this is Isaiah's gospel primer.

What an offer. What an offer made to each and every one of you that Jesus says, come. Hear his word.

Meet the gospel God who saves and delights to freely give his salvation to people who don't deserve it. And book your place in the future that he's promised.

And so whether for the first time, this is the first time you've heard this offer, or whether it's the thousandth time, you think, I know this. Let your heart rejoice as you come to Christ.

[34 : 45] And again, find joy in him. Let me pray for us and then we'll close together with a final song. Our Father, we come to you this morning as those who are poor, as those who are thirsty, as those who are wicked and evil, as those who fail at life, as those who pursue finding things outside of Jesus.

And yet this morning you invite us again to come to Jesus. And so we come now. We come to him to find life.

We come to him to have our souls made content and satisfied. We come to him to know you as our Father.

We come to him to look forward to the future that he has promised. And we rejoice that you are a God who delights to receive sinners.

And so we come. We come now. Pray that you would fill our hearts with joy in Christ. That we would see him as he truly is.

[36 : 20] That he would be beautiful to us. And that we would long to go to no other place but to him. So we pray for your spirit to do this work in each of our hearts.

And it's in his name we pray. Amen.