

## God's Spiritual Value System

Isaiah 55:1-5  
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“Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” What’s that all about? Isaiah seems to have a strange concept of shopping and economics. Or rather, God does, since Isaiah is God’s prophet. Doesn’t God understand that things cost money, that they have value?

Yes, I’m sure he does. He just doesn’t buy into the type of value we know about, the value systems upon which society is based.

There are four basic types of value in our society: functional value, monetary value, social value and psychological value. Functional solves a problem, monetary value is what something is worth to you, social value enriches your relationship with others, and psychological value provides for self-expression and makes you feel better.

And of course, God understands all this, even if our eyes glaze over hearing about economic theory. The reason I shared that with you is to contrast our understanding of value with God’s.

Of all the value systems imaginable, God challenges us to base our every-day decisions on a Spiritual Value System. Valuing things from a spiritual standpoint doesn’t even make society’s list of value systems, how society values things.

God’s Spiritual Value System isn’t about providing solutions, or setting a price, or making us more attractive to others, or even making us feel better about ourselves. No, as good as all that sounds to us – solving problems, setting a price, being more attractive and feeling good about yourself – as good as all that is, God’s Spiritual Value System offers us something better, something we can get nowhere else in the world.

The hard part about understanding and adopting God’s Spiritual Value System is that it is just plain weird. “You that have no money,” says God, “come, buy and eat.” How in the world can you buy anything without money? It makes no sense.

For us to understand what God is saying we have to understand what he means when he says “come, buy and eat.”

In today’s Old Testament lesson, God is speaking to the Israelites who are being held captive in Babylon. Their life is discouraging and hard, and their future uncertain.

Oh, we know that they go on to be freed from captivity. We know they return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of God. We know they become so important to the health and

prosperity of the nation and the world, uniquely called and equipped by God to lead his people back to him. But they did not know all this.

And quite frankly, we as a society, don't know it about ourselves either. We don't know how important we are to God or even how important God is to the future health and prosperity of this planet and all who live on it, all people across the globe and across the street – our neighbors, our family and friends, our colleagues and classmates. God is central to it all – to all people - whether we and they know it or not.

So, let's take a look at God's Spiritual Value System, which he summarizes with three little words – “come, buy, eat” – three little words that are the key to unlocking the peace, prosperity, love and freedom God wants for us.

When God beckons us, saying, “Come,” God is extending an open invitation. To accept God's invitation, we must stop resisting God, we have to crack open the door a bit, lower our defenses, and acknowledge that we need God, that without God to guide and direct us we get lost, we go in the wrong direction, we get all turned around inside.

With that simple word, “Come,” God is telling us that life doesn't have to be as hard as we make it. I mean, look at what Jesus said in the New Testament scripture that Marvin read for us. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,” and then he goes and plucks grains of wheat with the disciples, because they were hungry, even though it was the Sabbath, even though such “work” was forbidden.

If we as a society would loosen up a bit and see to the basic needs of our neighbors in the world, things would not be so hard. And it all starts with embracing God's invitation to draw near to him, to “come” to him, in how we value people and things.

When God tells us to “come, buy and eat,” he's not talking about buying food. When he said to the Israelites, “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price,” that had to really throw them off, hearing that. There's no wine or milk that can be bought without money. Everything has a price.

And yet, God is inviting us to his banquet table set with the finest wine and purest milk, and the only thing we have to pay to enjoy it is attention. God wants us to pay attention to him.

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,” says God, “and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.”

“Listen,” says God. “Incline your ear...; listen so that you may live.” Three times in just two sentences God calls us to simply listen.

You know what that means? It means we're not listening, folks. We're not hearing and following the Word of God. We're so busy working things out for ourselves we have no time

to discover the path God has already worked out for us, no interest in following his way, if it means really putting God first in our lives.

Take for instance the 1950s film actor George Raft, who was known for his movie roles as a sinister gangster. And in real life, he was notorious for having serious crime-family associations. Throughout his acting career, Raft made and spent over \$10 million dollars; that would be \$125 million today. That's a lot of money for one man to spend.

Criticized by a friend for his extravagant habits, Raft was asked what he did with all that money. "Part of the loot went for gambling," he said. "Part went for horses, and part for women. The rest I spent foolishly."

As the Apostle Paul is known to have said, "God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ... For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." (1 Corinthians 1:20, 25)

God wants us to not rely so heavily on our own wisdom, our own economic and social systems, and instead, rely more on what God teaches us through Jesus Christ. That's what it means to buy wine and milk without money and without price; it means buying into God's Spiritual Value System, and in that, joining the glorious feast he has provided for us and for all people.

Finally, when God says, "Come, buy, and eat," what he means by the word "eat" is to receive. To eat is to lift the fork and knife and dive in. To eat is to "taste and see that the Lord is good," as the Psalmist declares.

Eating is the action step. It's what we do after we've come to God in how to live our lives and bought into God's way over and above our ways. That's when we change our actions, our choices in life. That's when we start to enjoy the spiritual richness that God offers, and all the spiritual and material blessings he longs to bestow upon us.

"Come, buy, and eat!" – come to God open to his guidance and direction, buy into his way of life, and then do all that you can to take it into your life, to eat it up like the finest of food, and enjoy it like that most glorious banquet imaginable.

God calls us freely and eagerly to this spiritual banquet so that we and all people will come to know the blessings of Christ, a life overflowing in abundance, a life of freedom and joy for all people, a life of community and love. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Sovereign God, we call upon your Spirit to equip and enable us to be the hands and feet of Christ to a world in need. There are those who have been displaced who need a safe haven; those who are hungry who need a filling meal and clean drinking water; those who are ill who need medicine and a comforting touch.

There are children who have been left orphaned by violence; teenagers left bereft by hopelessness and despair; adults who long to provide for their families but are stuck in poverty.

There are many who place their lives on the line to speak the name of Jesus or to walk into a church for worship. Into these situations we are called to minister your love and grace – to give generously and sacrificially with no thought of return or thanks; to pray fervently and without ceasing; to go and serve as though we are serving Christ; to love unconditionally, press for justice, and hold the hope of those who have given up.

Grant us, by the power of your Spirit, the desire and the courage to wade into the struggles of our world because it is what Christ would have us do.

We pray, Lord, for those struggling with health issues and recovering from illness and disease. Especially those we know and those who are dear to us. And in the unity of our prayer, and the joy it brings us when we reach out to you and trust in you, we now join in the prayer that you taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**