

## The Book of Isaiah Chapters 56-57

**Introduction:** We now move to the final movement of Isaiah, chapters 56-66

- A. Based on the content, chapter 55 could have been the conclusion of Isaiah
- B. What more is needed than promises of God's grace being freely available to ALL who accept the urgent invitation?

*"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. <sup>2</sup> "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. <sup>3</sup> "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David. — Isaiah 55:1-3, NASB*

*Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. <sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. — Isaiah 55:6-7, NASB*

(ILL) — Resembles an evangelistic altar call

- C. The end also carries a benedictory tone regarding the climax of the human-divine relationship

*"For you will go out with joy And be led forth with peace; The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, And all the trees of the field will clap their hands. <sup>13</sup> "Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up, And instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up, And it will be a memorial to the Lord, For an everlasting sign which will not be cut off." — Isaiah 55:12-13, NASB*

- D. Due to the contrast between 40-55 and 56-66, many liberal scholars argue for or propose for a multiple author work, yet this is not our conviction
- E. The theological web that unifies the entire book speaks to a single author communicating the message of God
  - 1. Chapters 1-39 — "righteousness" is used exclusively for behavior in keeping with the statutes of God
  - 2. Chapters 40-55 — "righteousness" (except for two places) refers to God's righteousness in faithfully delivering His people despite their sin

*"My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait for Me, And for My arm they will wait expectantly. — Isaiah 51:5, NASB*

3. If chapter 55 were the end, the reader would assume righteousness is basically impossible for humanity and we are delivered into a “position” of righteousness by God’s grace through His Servant and the stress on righteous living (1-39) is not incumbent on those living in grace

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called — Ephesians 4:1, NASB*

4. Chapters 56-66 synthesize the previous two sections (1-39 and 40-55)
  - a. Righteous living IS a requirement for servants of the Lord (1-39)
  - b. Righteousness is ONLY possible through the grace of God and His righteousness (40-55)
  - c. These chapters reveal the expected characteristics of the life of servants of the Lord
  - d. Focus is on obedience (not pedigree) in order to attain the promise of a future hope

“We can only do righteousness because of God’s righteousness made available to us” (John Oswalt).

*Thus says the Lord, “Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come And My righteousness to be revealed. — Isaiah 56:1, NASB*

### **I. Righteous Living is the Necessary Expression of God’s Righteous Salvation (56:1-8)**

A. Our “right conduct” is only possible through God’s saving work (56:1)

1. Total depravity of humanity (Calvin & Wesley)
2. Nothing in me that can respond to God
3. Given a measure of grace — prevenient grace (John Wesley)

*<sup>3</sup> For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. — Romans 12:3, NASB*

4. Christ’s righteous living, His redemptive work, allows and demands our righteous living

Read Ephesians 2:1-10; 4:20-5:2

- B. Right living is not an unrealistic ideal, it is a desired outcome of servants of the Lord (56:2)
- C. Membership in this covenant community is not a matter of INHERITANCE but of OBEDIENCE (56:3-8)

1. Error of concluding that one's birthright brings salvation (promise given to Abraham)
2. This error would lead one to nullify "right living" and depend on "right heritage"
3. The one pleasing to God is not the purebred Israelite who continues the physical line of Abraham
4. Foreigner — not a part of that line — and the eunuch — who is physically unable to pass the line on choose obedience to God's covenant and are granted entrance into the community (56:4, 6)
5. Eunuch's obedience brings forth a greater inheritance than children — "everlasting name" (56:5)
6. Righteous living is more than legalistic law-keeping, it's relational communion with the Righteous One (56:6)
7. This obedience makes possible entry into this eternal place of worship (56:7-8)

## TRUTH

- A. As redeemed servants of the Lord, we are not blessed with this salvation for special privilege but for significant responsibility (56:7) to be a light (four lepers in 2 Kings 7)

(ILL) — Intertestamental Period: Syncretism (blending of cultures and religions) — Stubbs in South Africa — but under Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi restricted influence of surrounding nations (syncretism is not light shining)

Nehemiah 13:1-3

Ezra 9:1-2

(ILL) — Intertestamental Period: Isolationism (cut off from the world)

- Impacted the early church (Peter's vision, Acts 10:9-16; Paul confronts Peter, Gal 2:11-14)
- Plan was to "gather still others" (56:8)

B. Loving obedience not status, position, or appearance is of most importance to God

C. Adoption into the family of God should change our ethical behavior

"It is not the proof of your pedigree that counts; it is your life of glad obedience to me that demonstrates your real pedigree" (John Oswalt).

D. We have been saved for good works (Ephesians 2:10); ethical behavior DOES matter

E. Righteous living is proof of our Kingdom transfer

***For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son — Colossians 1:13 NASB***

## II. Judgment Pronounced on God's People for a Failure to Repent (Change) and Live Obedient Lives (56:9-57:13)

### A. Words of judgment to the leaders (56:9-57:2)

1. The attack is on Israel's watchman (56:10)
2. Israel's religious leadership is compared to dogs and stupid shepherds (56:10-11)
3. The nation is in a desperate spiritual condition, but the leaders don't care (reason for their comparison above)

*Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. — Amos 6:6, NASB*

4. Isaiah is implying that a return from captivity will not guarantee a new set of behaviors unless there is a radical change in the attitude and behavior of the leaders

(ILL) — The higher you climb the leadership ladder, the more responsibility you have and less room for mistake — people watch you and follow you (set a good example, repent, change)

5. If leadership remains power hungry and self-centered, the flock will be overtaken by enemies (56:9)
6. The lack of spiritual perception leads to the “righteous” disappearing unnoticed (57:1-2)

(ILL) — As a church, if I only cared about myself, it's easy for others to fall through the cracks

### B. Words of judgment to the people (57:3-13)

1. Note the change in audience with “now you” (57:3)
2. Speaking to those who believe they are the “elect” and all that is required of them is cultic righteousness
3. Accused of being idolaters at heart because their only desire is to manipulate divine power to their own advantage, compared to ...
  - a. Those who worship rocks and trees (57:5-7)
  - b. Those who engage in ritual prostitution (57:8)
  - c. Those who sacrifice their children (57:5, 9)

**NOTE:** Those who practice the aforementioned ways do so to manipulate God and get Him to do what they want — a desire for control

4. Accused of mocking those who are passionate about obeying God's covenant (57:3-4)

*This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.*

5. The attempt to manipulate/control God is hard work (57:10)
6. God asks, “how have you not remembered me?” (57:11) see also Judges 2:10
  - a. Delivered from Egypt
  - b. Kept them in years of apostasy
  - c. Delivered again from Bablyon

“How could you not remember and turn to religions of your own making?”

- d. Ironically, God asked if it was because He hasn’t spoken to them, though He clearly had
7. The answer to their question lies in the depravity of the human heart
  - a. God has revealed ALL
  - b. He asked too much (from their perspective)
  - c. He asked them to give up control of their lives and abandon themselves in glad obedience (57:13b)
  - d. They would rather construct a religion that gives them control
  - e. This religion is worthless and will collapse (57:13a)

(ILL) — Jesus is LORD (master) — complete rule, reign, and I submit to His “master-ship” — I’ll give you this, but this I want to hold on to (control-rich young ruler) — not complete submission

TRUTH:

- A. We must guard against the desire to utilize specific acts of worship — devotion, prayer, fasting, service — for personal gain or accomplishing “my” agenda, we worship to make His name famous, to accomplish His will
- B. Spiritual Leaders (small group, kids, etc.) must be faithful in caring for the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4)
- C. We must lay down our agenda, desires, and will on the altar of God and embrace His plans