

A Just and Merciful God

Book of Isaiah

By Ken Wimer

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Isaiah 57:15-21

Preached on: Sunday, October 21, 2012

Shreveport Grace Church

2970 Baird Road

Shreveport, LA 71118

Website: www.shrevegrace.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/shreveportgracech

I would like to invite you to look with in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 57. Lord willing, we will conclude our study in this chapter and move on to 58 next time.

I want to speak with you on this subject, a just and merciful God. Here in Isaiah 57 beginning with verse 15:

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.¹

I don't know if it struck you as it did me, but verse 15 almost sounds like a contradiction. How is it that God who is holy and who inhabits eternity and, as he says, dwells in the high and holy place can also dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit. In other words, a sinner. This begs the question which is the subject of this message, that is, how can God be just and holy and yet at the same time be merciful to sinners of whom this room is completely full. There is not a one of us here that can absent ourselves from that charge of being a sinner. We are all sinners before a holy God. God is just and his justice is an absolute justice. And yet at the same time he is merciful and his mercy is an absolute mercy. Men typically when they try to think of these things they think, ok, God's holiness and justice here, mercy here. No. We are talking about an attribute of

¹ Isaiah 57:15-21.

God that is of equal character. He would not be God were not he not just and he would not be God were he not merciful.

I know and I have been accused of saying it at some point. You know, God could have just cast everybody into hell. Well, as I have studied the Scriptures over the years I find that he wouldn't have, because from eternity that aspect, that attribute of his mercy determined that he would save sinners. The question is whether he has purposed to save every sinner, or whether there are those, as the Scriptures say, that are objects of his mercy. But either way we see God being a God of justice and of mercy.

If you will look back in Exodus chapter 34 and we are going to be looking at a couple of verses. I would like to have you look at them and see them for yourself in the Scriptures, but Exodus 34. This was when Moses was on Mount Sinai and the Lord had hewed out two tables of stone and this is the second time. The first time, you remember, when the Lord brought him down from the mountain with those tables of stone he saw the children of Israel down in the valley dancing around a golden calf. And Moses took and cast down the stones and broke them. I believe that is a picture of God's broken law. That is what we all are by nature, by our sin in Adam. We are idolaters. And the law has been broken. But in order to save sinners God didn't tell Moses, "Ok, then, I can see now that the law is too tough, too high a standard," especially when the very first law says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before you, no graven images."

But, no. He brought him back up on the mountain and hewed out two more tables of stone, because it says in verse four, like unto the first. The only difference this time is that when Moses came down from the mountain with the law this time he.... that table, those tablets were put into the ark of the covenant, under the mercy seat to wait, if you will, until there was one who would come and fulfill that law, that broken law, that mercy seat representing the work of Christ, the person of Christ where once a year the blood was put. All of that was forward looking to Christ.

But as verse five says:

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.²

So in two verses are described numerous attributes of God, grace, mercy, goodness, but also what? Truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, but what? By no means clearing the guilty.

² Exodus 34:5-7.

Now for philosophers and religious natural minded preachers they look at this and they have a dilemma, but is an age old dilemma. It was a question that was posed back even by Job's Bildad if you want to look very there in Job chapter 25. And that is this question we are looking at. How can God be just and yet declare righteous or acquitted sinners? How can he be just and show mercy? I don't know if you have ever taken the time to consider this, but you ought to. See, there are some today that preach the love of God and diminish the justice of God. They preach as if God is like an old grandfather in a rocking chair and the kids are acting up all around him and he is looking the other way thinking, ok, they are just kids. Now that is how men reason, but that is not how God can reason. God is just. He is holy. We just read him. He can in no wise clear the guilty.

And here in Job 25 Bildad, one of Job's friends posed this question. They say Job is one of the oldest books written. Job lived before Abraham. And the question is asked:

"How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon..."³

And we have seen some bright harvest moons at night, how brightly it shines. But it says:

Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?⁴

I know that people don't like that term, even that hymn that John Newton wrote, *Amazing Grace*. I have heard some popular singers change the words. They don't like the word wretch. I heard it sung not too long ago, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved someone like me." Well, no, a wretch, a worm. This is what the Scripture says. That is who we are before a holy God. And I have to tell you honestly. I did not see my state as that before God until it pleased God to reveal Christ in me, open my eyes. I was raised in a home where the Bible was encouraged to be read where we learned Scripture verses, went to a religious school and, you know, I was taught that just to answer this question. How God can be just? Well, you just get down on your knees and pray back to God John 3:16. And if you do it sincerely then all will be well. So I was taught to put that prayer up to God and that God in hearing it would then overlook our sin and declare me righteous. It wasn't until years later that the Lord brought me low and showed me that had he let me go on in that lie, I would have perished forever.

No, it takes something far greater, dear friends, to take worms such as we are and to make us holy, to make us just before him. That is what this whole Bible is about. What we are reading here in Isaiah 57 really is a microcosm of the entire Word of God and that is that this is a history of redemption of how God has purposed to save sinners. But to do it he has to be just. He cannot lower his standard and yet still to save sinners he must be merciful. Absolute justice, absolute mercy.

³ Job 25:4-5.

⁴ Job 24:5-6.

Well, if you go to Romans chapter three and if you don't hear any other part of this message here is the answer to that question. What is to men a dilemma, philosophers and religionists continue to debate it and argue it, but if God would just grant a heart to receive and ears to hear, here in Romans chapter three in verse 19 and following is the answer. And if the Lord would deal in your heart and mine to teach us of this, we would know that the truth as to how God can be just and justify. And verse 19 of Romans three it says:

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”⁵

Let me just stop right there and ask you a question. How many of you neighbors and friends view the law in that manner to where their mouths are stopped and they see themselves as guilty and lost sinners before a holy God? I have got a neighbor across the street and down the way that likes to put the 10 Commandments on a little sign out in front of his house. And I know what he is saying. I have talked to him before when I have been out walking. And his view is that if we could just promote the 10 Commandments and get people to follow them that somehow our society would be better. We would be better for it and the society would be better for it. And I have had to tell him that is not why God gave the 10 Commandments. It wasn't to make us better. That goes contrary to what we see here. Those 10 Commandments, the Scriptures say, is that every mouth may be stopped. Every time I read those 10 Commandments, if the Lord has so taught my heart, I would have to find myself guilty from the start. Even now.

You know, when it says, “Thou shalt have no other God before you and thou shalt have no graven images.” You know your number one God is yourself. That image graven in your heart is you, that natural image. You are an idolater by nature and therefore don't even have to go further. As long as I am in this flesh I stand condemned. And I told this gentleman that. I said it would be like having charges brought against you in a court for murder or high treason. Is that some thing that you wear proudly, put on your wall and people walk in? You say, “What is that?” And they say, “Well, those are the charges against me. I am excited.” That this what happens when you put the 10 Commandments out there. People are walking by. It is like they used to do with an adulterer. They would hang the big A around their neck, scarlet letter, you know. It was designed to shame, not to bolster, but how many people do you talk to, your neighbors and acquaintances. When you ask them what their hope of heaven is they say, “Well, I have sure tried to keep those 10 Commandments.”

Well, that would be like a criminal condemned before a high court standing before the judge and the judge is saying, “Why should I show you mercy?” Well, these charges, I sure tried to keep them. The judge is going to say, “What?” You know, those charges are against you.

⁵ Romans 3:19.

Unless this court finds a way to show you mercy you will die. That is what verse 19 is about. All right? Verse 20.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”⁶

That is the only correct way for us to read the law of God. It was never given as means of salvation. It was only given that the exceeding sinfulness of our sin be revealed even more that every mouth might be stopped.

You say, “Well, where is the hope then?”

Well, verse 21.

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.”⁷

It doesn't mean that God sets aside his law in order to save guilty sinners, but now the very righteousness of God without you keeping the law, in other words, this is unconditional justification. The condition is not upon man. If it was, nobody would be saved, because even all our righteousnesses, the Scriptures say, are as filthy rags.

“...being witnessed by the law and the prophets.”⁸

I like that. The law and the prophets is the Old Testament. God did not set aside his law, but the law and the prophets, the Old Testament witnesses. That is what we reading here in Isaiah 57 as to how God can be just to justify sinners. Verse 22.

“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ.”⁹

Not in. It is not your believing in Jesus that now God looks at you to justify. But it is the very faith of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ came into this world he came for one purpose and that was to earn and establish righteousness that was equal to God himself and upon completion of that work through is righteous obedience in his life and also pain that the sin penalty in his death, that God should declare righteous those for whom he died. It is through a substitute. It is simply put.

Even the righteousness of God which is by the substitution of Jesus Christ, his faithfulness as the mediator. That is what word faith is. All that pertains to him as that righteous Savior and Redeemer, sanctifier of his people. It says:

“...unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.”¹⁰

⁶ Romans 3:20.

⁷ Romans 3:21.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Romans 3:22.

Right there in verse 22 it shows us that his death was not for everybody, because the whole world lies in wickedness. But this righteousness was earned and established and imputed, it says:

“...unto all and upon all them that believe.”¹¹

Well, who believes? Certainly faith is not in us by nature. Faith is a gift of God. And the Lord grants that faith to everyone for whom the Lord Jesus Christ paid the debt. And every one for whom he paid the debt shall and does believe. God is feared. He will bring them to look to him. There is no difference, no difference between Jew or Gentile. Verse 23.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”¹²

So it is not anything in us. But verse 24 is the answer:

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”¹³

This is just as simply as I know how to put it. Now when you come back here to Isaiah chapter 57 that really is the sum of what is being stated here, that in order for God to be just and at the same time merciful, that justice has to be satisfied and for those to whom he has purposed mercy, he has satisfied that justice in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is how it can be said in verse 15 of Isaiah 57:

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place.”¹⁴

What did John write about in John chapter one? He said:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”¹⁵

But then you read verse 14 it says:

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”¹⁶

And that word dwelt is the word tabernacled. In the Old Testament how did this high and lofty, holy God dwell among the people? Well, it was in that tabernacle, but not without sacrifice. The high priest had to be the ones coming in and out and that not without blood.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Romans 3:23.

¹³ Romans 3:24.

¹⁴ Isaiah 57:15.

¹⁵ John 1:1.

¹⁶ John 1:14.

They represented the people. All of that is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, how Christ came as God's high priest and was the mediator. And when it says there:

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity..."¹⁷

It also says:

"...with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."¹⁸

It pleases this God, this holy and just God to dwell among those with a contrite and humble spirit. But there, again, find me a contrite and humble person by nature. I can't even say that I am that by nature. Those of you that know me, we all have an ego. We all think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. And were God to judge us just based on that alone, he would have to condemn us. So how is it that a sinner... when it says a contrite and humble spirit is brought low. Well, that is the work of the Spirit to do in the hearts of those that he has purposed to save. He is going to have every one. He is ... he came to fulfill all righteousnesses in his Son and by his Spirit now it says to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. That is that repentance that the Spirit of God works in the heart of everyone that God has saved.

Now Israel was going through a time of chastening when Isaiah wrote these words by the Spirit's direction. And it is representative of God's wrath being upon them as we see it in verse 16. The Lord said:

"For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made."¹⁹

If God has purposed wrath upon a sinner and does not deliver that sinner, then that spirit will fail before you. There is none that can endure his holiness and his wrath. That is what hell is all about. Now I know that is not a popular subject, but it is a reality. People are questioning today whether hell exists in reality or whether it is just in the minds of dogmatic people. Well, read the Scriptures. Christ spoke more of hell than he did of heaven. There is a judgment that awaits those upon whom God's wrath abides. But here with regard to his people... Again, we are thinking in the context here in Isaiah 57. Those for whom he has purposed mercy that wrath would not be forever.

You say, "Well, when was God's wrath ever upon his people?" Well, when Adam fell. All fell in him. That condemnation that was upon Adam passed upon his posterity. And even though sinners that God purposed to show mercy to were under that condemnation of Adam, until when? Until Christ bore it away. There was a legal condemnation which Christ had to bear and put away. It wasn't as some say, "Well, since God purposed to save them from eternity then they were always justified." No. Legally when Adam fell,

¹⁷ Isaiah 57:15.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Isaiah 57:16.

they fell. And just as it says here there was a separation between them and God and justly so in verse 17.

“For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.”²⁰

I have had some people tell me: Why doesn't God just leave the choice to man? Well, here is why, verse 17. If God hides his face, if God does not show you this mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ for which he came and paid the debt, left to yourself, you will do the same thing and I would. What is that? Underscore it. He went on frowardly in the way of his heart. In other words, you would never think of coming to Christ.

Dear friends, the gospel is not an invitation. It is not Christ standing there with open arms and waiting for sinners to come to him. Were that the case sinners would continue on in their froward way, because they are fallen creatures. Now it takes the grace of God. It takes the mercy of God. It takes God being pleased in his time to turn a sinner to Christ. And that is what Isaiah is describing here with the children of Israel. When God took his hand off of them and said, “All right, I want to turn you loose. Let's see what you do.” What did they do? They went frowardly on their way. They never thought of repenting or coming back. Such is not in the heart of man by nature apart from the grace of God. And so he says in verse 18:

“I have seen his ways, and will heal him.”²¹

Therein is the mercy of God, seeing his ways and in spite of the sinner not deserving this mercy or deserving grace, healing him. And he says:

“I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.”²²

Dear friends, that is salvation. That is the salvation of Scripture. If I am the Lord's today, if he has... if I can say I am Christ and he is mine, I have to tell you. I didn't do a thing. He did it all. He did the purposing to show mercy and he did the drawing in order for me to be brought to Christ. He did the healing. How did he do the healing? Well, Christ said or the Scriptures say:

“...and with his stripes we are healed.”²³

It took a blood sacrifice. It took none other than an innocent lamb, a righteous lamb to shed his blood in order to deliver and save a sinner such as I am. It is not in me. It is not in you. And verse 19 goes further.

“I create the fruit of the lips.”²⁴

²⁰ Isaiah 57:17.

²¹ Isaiah 57:18.

²² Ibid.

²³ Isaiah 53:5.

The fact that... and I don't know. Everybody sang this morning. We say, "Turn to hymn such and such," and we all stand up and sing. And so a lot of this maybe is coming of the lips, but those that are the Lord's people are caused to sing to his glory from the grace of God in the heart. And if you are enabled to do so, even that is not something that you have produced. It says I verse 19:

"I create the fruit of the lips."²⁵

You think about it. Fruit is passive, isn't it? If you ever walked into a grocery store and seen that nice luscious fruit all stacked sitting there and you could put your ear to it and hear the fruit say, "Look what we did." No, the fruit is passive. It is what it is by God's determination. Such is our case even before the Lord.

"I create the fruit of the lips."²⁶

If there is anybody that can stand and sing as we sang to the glory and honor of Christ and declare that it is only by his blood and righteousness alone that we are saved, then all that glory belongs unto him.

"I create the fruit of the lips."²⁷

I mentioned that in our early hour of worship. If you wonder whether a man is truly preaching the truth, just listen to him long enough of find out who is getting the glory. There is all kinds on the spectrum. The worst kind is something that is close. You will hear a preacher preach along for a while and he will say, you know, "Salvation is by grace." He will say, "It is by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ." You keep listening and then you hear that little but. But to make it effectual you have got to do something. Just there he undid the whole thing and he revealed in truth what he doesn't know. Otherwise he would never say that. I don't find any part of this where God has purposed to show mercy where he in any sense puts the condition on the sinner or in any way gives the glory to the sinner for having done something.

Verse 19 he says:

"I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him."²⁸

That right there describes the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It wasn't just for the Jew. It was for the Gentile.

²⁴ Isaiah 57:19.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

“Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near.”²⁹

There are sinners from every tribe, nation and tongue for whom Christ has died. And here the Lord says, “I will heal him.” How would he heal him? Well, again, in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. How do I know that? Look over here in Ephesians chapter two and then I will wrap this up. Verse 11.

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off...³⁰

The same word that Isaiah uses here. Peace, peace to him that is far off. He is talking about the Gentiles, Gentile nations that weren't part of that original commonwealth of Israel.

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”³¹

Who is our peace. Doesn't that fit over here, peace, peace, to him that is far off? These aren't men's words of peace. This isn't a man making the sign of a cross and saying, “Peace be to you.” No. Peace, that is that reconciliation with a holy God. Now we come full circle, how God can be just and show mercy, peace, based upon the blood sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, dear friends, it is an effectual sacrifice. I can stand here and tell you without any question there is not one in hell for whom he died. He will have every one for whom he shed that blood, because it says that here, that that peace was established by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.³²

That is the comfort. That is the promise. That is the hope for every one for whom Christ died. And that is why I can tell you today without any shadow of a doubt, if Christ paid

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ephesians 2:11-13.

³¹ Ephesians 2:13.

³² Ephesians 2:14-16.

your sin debt, that peace has been established. And I can truly say to you, “Peace, be still,” if Christ has paid your debt.

But my question is: Where are you looking? If you are looking to yourself, even if you are looking to your profession or your faith, I am telling you that is no Savior at all. Faith didn't die for your sins. Faith wasn't sacrificed upon the altar. Faith, those are the eyes that God gives those for whom Christ died to see him in his sacrifice and look to him alone.

You say, “What happens to all others?”

Well, Isaiah 57:20 and 21.

But the “wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.”³³

You know, if God leaves you to yourself you might well live out your life in works religion. But you are no better than the troubled sea. You know, when the sea is troubled, it brings up all kinds of dirt and mire. The more you strive in your works, the more you are like that troubled sea. The more you think that you are coming up with some sort of righteousness to satisfy a holy God, the more God looks at it and says nothing but filthy rags. That is that dirt and that mire.

And I am telling you, dear friends, there is no rest. There is no rest in works religion. Verse 21 says that.

“There is no peace.”³⁴

The only place where there is peace is in the blood of the cross, in that work that the Lord Jesus Christ himself accomplished. Outside of that there is no peace. Any thought of peace is just but a figment of your imagination. And you will perish with it. Oh, what a horrible state to wake up in hell and find out that the very thing you hoped in was nothing at all. It was contrary to the very work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. But for God to be just and merciful it takes that justice being satisfied and that was accomplished in Christ and his death.

³³ Isaiah 57:20.

³⁴ Isaiah 57:21.