

When The Dogs Stop Barking

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Bible Text: Isaiah 56:9-57:14

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Today we'll be reading from Isaiah 56, starting in verse 9 going through Isaiah 57:14.

9 All you beasts of the field, All you beasts in the forest, Come to eat. 10 His watchmen are blind, All of them know nothing. All of them are mute dogs unable to bark, Dreamers lying down, who love to slumber; 11 And the dogs are greedy, they are not satisfied. And they are shepherds who have no understanding; They have all turned to their own way, Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one. 12 "Come," they say, "let us get wine, and let us drink heavily of strong drink; And tomorrow will be like today, only more so."

1 The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart; And devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from evil, 2 He enters into peace; They rest in their beds, Each one who walked in his upright way. 3 "But come here, you sons of a sorceress, Offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute. 4 Against whom do you jest? Against whom do you open wide your mouth And stick out your tongue? Are you not children of rebellion, Offspring of deceit, 5 Who inflame yourselves among the oaks, Under every luxuriant tree, Who slaughter the children in the ravines, Under the clefts of the crags? 6 Among the smooth stones of the ravine Is your portion, they are your lot; Even to them you have poured out a drink offering, You have made a grain offering. Shall I relent concerning these things? 7 Upon a high and lofty mountain You have made your bed. You also went up there to offer sacrifice. 8 Behind the door and the doorpost You have set up your sign; Indeed, far removed from Me, you have uncovered yourself, And have gone up and made your bed wide. And you have made an agreement for yourself with them, You have loved their bed, You have looked on their manhood. 9 You have journeyed to the king with oil And increased your perfumes; You have sent your envoys a great distance And made them go down to Sheol. 10 You were tired out by the length of your road, Yet you did not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found renewed strength, Therefore you did not faint. 11 Of whom were you worried and fearful When you lied, and did not remember Me Nor give Me a thought? Was I not silent even

for a long time So you do not fear Me? 12 I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, But they will not profit you. 13 When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you. But the wind will carry all of them up, And a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land And will possess My holy mountain." 14 And it will be said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way, Remove every obstacle out of the way of My people."

Holy Father, thank you so much for these words. Lord, we thank you for the gentle reproofs you give us. Lord, I ask that as the word is preached here you would speak to us, that you would open our ears, soften our hearts. Help us to see where we have been lazy shepherds. Father, we thank you and we submit to your word this morning. These things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we enter into the unsearchable treasures of the wisdom of God in this passage in Isaiah 56:9-57:14, there is an illustration of the harmful effects of self-indulgent watchman and the resulting idolatry and the unhappiness of the people that comes about as a result of those conditions. I had a little boy come up to me just before this service and said, "Mr. Brown, what should I listen for?" I said, "Make sure you listen for watchman, dogs, shepherds, a funeral and idolatry." So that's what we have here.

This text documents a time in history when the watchmen don't watch, when the dogs don't bark and when the shepherds don't lead because they are obsessed with all of their own comforts. It strikes me that we live in times like these now. We live in a time when the church has not spoken to particular areas and now the church is really being forced to speak and the consequences of speaking are becoming more and more difficult. If you want to see some examples of this, go to defendingmarriage.com and you'll see dozens of examples in 2015 alone where people spoke and suffered severely like never before in our nation's history for rising up and barking and speaking against the things that should be spoken.

Now, when we get to Isaiah 56, there are two sides to it. We've already looked at the meaning of the Sabbath and it describes in the first eight verses this gathering of God's people, this happy community. They are accomplishing justice and righteousness through their keeping of the Sabbath. They are coming and worshiping God. He is cleansing their minds and they're going out and establishing justice and righteousness and they are keeping this covenant that God had delivered through the Ten Commandments, specifically to worship God on the Sabbath and this has a dramatic effect on society: it brings justice and righteousness into the world. This is one of God's means of bringing justice into the world is through the keeping of the Sabbath.

Then in verse 9, the Lord speaks of the danger that exists when you have unfaithful watchmen and how it causes his people to fall into times of spiritual peril. It causes the opening of the doors to idolatry by their laziness and their refusal to bark has dramatic consequences that are outlined, particularly in chapter 57. The intruders are infiltrating

and the dogs aren't barking and he's contrasting the joys of the Sabbath, the justice and the righteousness that come into your heart, into your life, your family, your church, your society through the worship of God because everything begins with the worship of God and when the worship of God is out of order, all of society is disorderly. So you have this contrast of the joys of the Sabbath with the harm that's done by the sinful negligence of the shepherds or the dogs or the watchmen. So, also I just want to acknowledge that this passage sets the tone for the next several passages of Scripture in the book of Isaiah which results in a happy future that waits for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose. They obey him. They take hold of God and they take hold of the Sabbath and they bark and, as a result, you have blessing.

Now, when we get to verse 9, you see the danger of lazy and indulgent shepherds. If you have an outline in front of you, you'll see this on your outline. In verses 9-12, that is the category of discussion that Isaiah is engaged in and the first thing we encounter in verse 9 is the vulnerability of people in times like this and the Lord describes these conditions in verse 9 with these words, "All you beasts of the field, come to devour. All you beasts of the forest." What Isaiah is saying is that when the Sabbath is not kept and when the dogs don't bark, it's open season for the people of God and no one is watching, no one is speaking, no one is barking because no one was worshiping and the watchmen were asleep and the people are actually devoured. He says, "Bring in the beasts," because when the dogs don't bark, the people of God are like sitting ducks and that's the whole idea.

Notice in verse 10 how the watchmen leave the flock unprotected. By the way, there are three terms that I think are synonymous: watchmen, dogs and shepherds. They are all the same kind of person and Isaiah is just trying to help us, again, understand in very graphic and beautiful terms to grasp what this looks like in a person's life. So in verse 10, we learn that the watchmen are blind. Now, there is something that the watchmen don't see, take note of that. Then it says, "They are ignorant." That means that there is something that the watchmen don't know. They have not been filling their minds with the word of God and they don't know. Then he says that, "They are all dumb dogs, They cannot bark." This means that there is something that they should be doing. They should be barking. Then it says in verse 10, "They are sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber." Now there is something they are drawn to. They are drawn to sleep. They are drawn to self-gratification and they just want to do what they want to do. They have created a vision for their life and they're doing it and it has to do with rest and they're slumbering.

Then in verse 11, we learn more about the problem. "They are greedy dogs Which never have enough. And they are shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory." So there is something that's driving them, it's their own greed. They want what they want when they want it and it has to do with slumber and indolence.

Then in verse 12, you read this word, "'Come,' one says," and he's talking about these watchmen, dog, shepherd kind of people. "One says, 'Come, I will bring wine, And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; Tomorrow will be as today, And much more abundant.'" Here is a scenario of these dogs gathering other people to them to do the same

thing because when you don't want to bark, you want to find other people who won't bark as well. When you want to operate in your greed, you want to find other people to flatter you so that your greed won't look so bad; your lack of barking won't be so distinctive; and your lack of knowledge might not be so widely exposed.

So that's what we have here. So here in Isaiah, the prophet is confronting lazy and indulgent shepherds or watchmen or dogs. Now, who are they? I want to suggest that they without question refer primarily to the leaders of the people of God but they also refer to others who have authority to speak: fathers and mothers. This terminology is used for all kinds of leaders and so I don't think this passage, we ought to think of it as being isolated only to those who would be in those days prophets, priests or kings or in these days pastors. In the New Testament era, all are prophets, priests and kings. We are a kingdom of priests now and we have all of these same roles. My view of this passage is that the watchmen here are the people of God and all have various levels of responsibility to bark and to know and to do. So that's the whole idea that's here.

It's interesting, the word "watchmen" is translated from the Hebrew word "shamar" or "shomer." It's a word that appears 468 times in the Bible but it's only translated "watchmen" eight times and other alternate translations are: keeper, guard, guardian, watch, observe, heed, preserve. You'll find passages of Scripture where the watchmen guard the crops from animals and from thieves. You'll find this word used for those who stand on the walls of the city to look out for the attackers and so the word is used in various ways and here it's used for this condition that is existing here.

Interestingly enough, one of the most wonderful uses of this word is found in Psalm 121 and in this passage, the noun "shomer" and the verb "yishmar" which means "to guard and keep" appears six times in eight verses and they all describe God and his care. So when you understand the whole doctrine of what it means to be a watchman or a shepherd, this is something that we learn from God and in Psalm 121, you find these words that speak of this role of God to watch and shepherd his people. He says, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills, From whence my help comes. My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps," shomer, "He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps," shomer, "Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper," your shomer, "The LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve," yishmar, "you from all evil; He shall preserve," yishmar, "your soul. The LORD shall preserve," yishmar, "your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore." It's a picture of God's vigilance. We can be comforted that God Almighty is watchful. While earthly shepherds and dogs may not do their duty, God is not that way at all and we worship God for his kindness in the midst of times like these when barking is perhaps at a rarity.

I think translating this in terms of the church in the New Testament era, that the Lord is speaking of the role and the life of those who have the authority to speak and that would be pastors; that would be fathers and mothers; that would be civil leaders; that would be those who operate companies and have authority over different things. And it includes all

believers because we are a kingdom of priests and we not only watch over our souls but we have a responsibility for watching over the souls around us.

So what we find in chapter 57 is the consequences of lazy watchmen and that those consequences really are defined by the idolatry that you find in the broader culture when the dogs don't bark. So I think what Isaiah is saying in those whole context that begins in chapter 56 and goes all the way maybe even into chapter 60 and 61. I used to think it only went to 59 but I'm thinking actually Isaiah is continuing a chain of logic to explain how restoration happens in a society; how justice is preserved; how the streets get restored; how the breaches get healed. It's this whole picture and it includes the people of God who speak. They bark. They take care. They watch and so in the same way that the breaking of the Sabbath deprives a culture of justice and righteousness as we learned in 57:1-9, so negligent shepherds deprive the people of the godliness that leads to life and rather, it plunges them into idolatry.

So what you find here in this section are these graphic images. You have blind and ignorant watchmen. You have dumb, sleepy dogs who don't bark. You have shepherds who don't really know very much and they are just lost in themselves. They just want to live their life of leisure. That's what they care about the most and these are the great dangers of all shepherds and we as prophets, priests and kings in our own culture, have to recognize this. So I think that frames, basically, the discussion here. The idea of the watchmen is something that we ought to always keep in our minds. Ezekiel 3 speaks of this and Ezekiel 33, particularly verses 1 through 9, speak of this matter of being a watchman and I think we're perhaps familiar with these passages of Scripture where God says to Ezekiel, "I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel," and essentially in summary he says, "If you do not watch and if you do not speak, you will be held responsible for the sins of those who fall." So it's a very sobering thing. God actually has made his people responsible to bark.

So go and look at Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33 and read about these things because I think it really frames the whole idea of watchman but, again, he's using various images: watchmen, dogs and shepherds and they are self-indulgent. I think we should recognize that these responsibilities are critical for us, that we as fathers and mothers, we as pastors, we as leaders in any area, we as a kingdom of priests, need to hear this message. All of us are implicated here and it would be a mistake to think that this is only talking about the civil or the religious leaders of Israel. I think that's a huge mistake.

Now, watchmen and dogs and shepherds have their own weaknesses. I think we should all acknowledge that. There is not a dog or a watchman or a shepherd in this room that doesn't have particular weaknesses. Sometimes dogs don't bark. Sometimes dogs bark at the wrong things. Sometimes dogs bark too much. Sometimes they bark too little. This passage is about barking too little, by the way. We should stay on point there. And what we learn here is that they ought not to be making up their own way in this world. They draw from the word of God, not their own imaginations. They must be theologians. They must prophesy. They must understand the Bible. They must understand the mind of God on all matters. They need to understand the whole counsel of God from Genesis to

Revelation. Yes, your family, every person in your family must be instructed in the whole counsel of God and so the church stands in the same place. These things that pastors are designed to dedicate themselves to, the word of God and prayer, those are the two primary responsibilities of pastors, an ardent dedication to these things solves these problem here and in many ways, fathers and mothers have a very similar role. They have received commands from the word of God to teach the word of God when they sit in their house, when they walk by the way, when they lie down, when they rise up. That's barking, by the way, Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78.

This is about how shepherds bark in the context of their families and all of this really arises out of their worship which I believe Isaiah is implying here, that it arises out of the worship of God on the Sabbath where there is an entire day of delight where the mind is saturated, the tongue is full of the praises and the instruction of God and it sets the tone for all of life. The entire family is brought into this because fathers and mothers are charged to make sure that their families keep the Sabbath, including everyone that's in their realm of authority: those who work for them and even their cattle. So all of these things really come out of the worship of God.

We just completed this father/son retreat talking about stewardship and one of the messages that I gave had to do with the stewardship of the family and I said there are at least five ways in Scripture where God has charged for the stewardship of the family. The first is the keeping of the Sabbath. The second is the fulfilling of the fifth commandment which is the honoring of your father and mother. The third was the daily instructions in the home: when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down. Then fourthly, the discipleship of the local church where the preaching of the word of God, the equipping of the saints, takes place. There are various gifted people in the church that are designed to impact your life. Your family really needs other inputs than just your own family. Then finally, the fulfilling of the dominion mandate: bearing fruit as each family comes together and cries out to God and says, "Lord, how would you have us bark? How would you have us live in this world? How would we practice hospitality? How would we declare your glory? How would we be a living picture of your lovingkindness in the world? How will our marriage be a picture of love? How will our children be a picture of the children of God who are obedient and who honor their father and mother? How is our family going to declare the beauty and the glory of God in the world."

So this is the first part of our text this morning in these verses from verse 9 to the end of chapter 56, now in chapter 57, we find the results. If you're following me in the outline, you'll see this second portion of this passage before you. In chapter 57, verses 1 through 13, it gives the results. The message continues on but expands on the consequences of watchmen who do not bark but just serve themselves. So in this section, you find the devastating consequences when shepherding is in a state of collapse. So this brings us to a funeral in verses 1 and 2, "The righteous perish." This is one of the consequences that we experience in our society when the shepherds don't lead and the dogs don't bark and the watchmen don't watch.

There is a dramatic effect and in verses 1 and 2, Isaiah is using the language of a funeral. There is something that is lost. There is a death that has taken place. Someone has been taken up out of the world, that's verses 1 and 2. "The righteous perishes," verse 1, "And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil." Verse 2, "He shall enter into peace; They shall rest in their beds, Each one walking in his uprightness." This is a picture of the death of godly people in this society and so he's describing the funeral of a righteous person and he's describing what kind of men are taken away. There are three words that he gives to describe these kind of men: they are righteous; they are merciful; and they are upright. I think one of the things that we learn here that even in times of great apostasy, there are righteous men who are on the earth but you may not see them for a long time. It's a terrifying proposition that's here in verses 1 and 2. They are righteous. In other words, their hearts are toward God. They love righteousness. They love God's ways. They are merciful. Their hearts have been tenderized by the love of God and they find themselves in league with those that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

This is the kind of people that being taken from the earth, but what's happening here is that where are the mourners? No one is mourning. No one is mourning the loss of the man who loves God and keeps his commandments. Nobody is even asking why. They disappear and they don't even notice that the godly men are gone. It's such a picture of tragedy here and so Isaiah is identifying this thoughtlessness and what has happened is that the righteous have died because God wants to bless them by taking them out of the evil of this earth and they enter into his rest and as a result, the godly are fading from the scene. Isaiah has already spoken about this in very vivid detail in chapter 3 where he speaks of the mighty man, the man of war, the diviner, the prophet, the insightful people, the leaders, the strong men, are gone. Solomon spoke of this in Ecclesiastes 7. He says, "There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, And there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness." Psalm 12:1 contains the same message, "Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men." Micah 7:2 speaks of the same thing. And so the good men are swept away and nobody cares. Nobody considers.

Then after delivering this picture of a funeral and the loss of godly men, God confronts their sorcery. He uses some very graphic terms to explain what it means to stop barking and we should not minimize the importance and the gravity of how God views people who do not bark and who do not watch. He's calling it sorcery in verse 3, "But come here, You sons of the sorceress, You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!" Refusing to watch, caring only for your own pleasures and not barking, in this context, makes you the son of a sorceress and the offspring of an adulterer and a harlot and he's talking about a parent and a child. There is the son and there is the offspring and these are the children of idolatrous parents. They led their children into idolatry and they did not bark and they did not watch and, as a result, their children became children of harlotry spiritually speaking and it should raise the stakes in our minds about what dangers there are when the shepherds don't care, they don't know and they don't bark and they don't watch. I think

he's speaking about me, who are pastors, and he's speaking to people like you who are fathers and mothers and I think he's also speaking to all who are Christians who are afraid to bark.

So we have to ask ourselves in what ways are we lazily engaging in our own agendas and, as a result, we're quiet. We have nothing to say when we're not watching what's going on in our little societies that God has given us governance over. In what ways are we engaging in idolatry and passing it on to our children passively, recommending it by our lifestyle. Job speaks of this in Job 30:8, "They were sons of fools, Yes, sons of vile men." Isaiah 2:6 says they had filled their houses with Eastern ways. We should never minimize what worldliness would do to a family or to a church or to a nation, but it begins with those who just quit speaking and they quit watching, they quit barking.

Then in verse 4, Isaiah identifies their mocking spirit. In verse 4 we read, "Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth And stick out the tongue? Are you not children of transgression, Offspring of falsehood." So God is posing a question because they are ridiculing certain people. They are ridiculing the righteous and the merciful and the upright. It's a society that ridicules those that bark and what strikes me about this is the common understanding of the sticking out of the tongue. You don't let your children stick their tongues out at one another for a reason because it means a dishonor. It has to do with ridicule and you don't want your children to be sticking their tongues out at other people. It marks them as children of iniquity and so he asks, "Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth And stick out the tongue?" and the answer is they are sticking their tongues out at the watchmen who bark. They are jesting at the watchmen and mocking and belittling them. This is a social condition that you end up with when the people quit barking.

This is the same kind of mocking that Jesus Christ was subjected to. Psalm 22:6-23 explained this. It's a prophetic Psalm and it's a picture of people ridiculing Christ. In verse 7 he says, "They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" It's a picture of mocking Jesus Christ on the cross and he says, "Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion." This is the dissension that the Lord Jesus Christ causes in the world and it causes people to mock and stick out their tongues and ridicule them.

I think we should ask ourselves: do we ever do that? Do we ever ridicule those who are barking? And taking lightly the barkings of faithful watchmen will have dramatically disappointing consequences.

Then he reveals their idolatry and with verse 5, we're taken into the world of idolatry in Israel and there is language here that should teach us about idolatry in our own days. Verse 5 speaks of lust under the trees, "Inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree, Slaying the children in the valleys, Under the clefts of the rocks?" Keil and Delitzsch, the Old Testament commentators, say this, "From the tree worship with its orgies which was so widely spread in antiquity, the prophet passes to speaking of this

Canaanite abomination, human sacrifices, which had been adopted by the Israelites." So here you have children being slain in the valleys. This is child sacrifice and we shouldn't think that we're too far away from this in our own culture, a culture that has murdered over 50 million babies without all that much resistance. But idolatry always leads to the diminishing of an understanding of man being made in the image of God and particularly children. Children are always the big losers in idolatry, by the way.

Then in verse 6, the language changes. He gives a different kind of scenario, "Among the smooth stones of the stream Is your portion; They, they, are your lot! Even to them you have poured a drink offering, You have offered a grain offering. Should I receive comfort in these?" Now, what's interesting about the language here is apparently the people were doing this in the name of God. They were doing this in the name of Jehovah God. Much of the idolatry in Israel, while it used Baal and Molech and the others, they also mixed it with God; with God language; with ceremonial law imagery and activities because they mixed it all up. So that's why he said, "Should I receive comfort in these?" because on paper, they were doing it for God. Their worship had become their own invention. They refused to worship God in the way that he had defined for them to worship and, as a result, they syncretized their whole worship with the worship of devils. So their worship was a mixture of God language and devil language and they are pouring out libations on these smooth stones. Laying the meat on the stones that they had sacrificed and then perhaps even laying their children there as well.

Then in verse 7, there is more language to help us understand what this idolatry was like. It was like adultery, verse 7, "On a lofty and high mountain You have set your bed; Even there you went up To offer sacrifice." When people went to sacrifice in the high places under the trees, under these great majestic trees that were pictures of fertility and success and strength, there was stuff going on under the trees. There were beds under the trees and there was harlotry going on under the trees in the beds. By the way, it wasn't the trees that was so interesting, okay? It was what was going on on the beds that was so attractive to them.

Then he exposes what they're actually trying to hide in verse 8, "Also behind the doors and their posts You have set up your remembrance." In other words, the people were trying to act religious and they're hiding their articles of their idolatry and their immorality and their harlotry behind the door so that when somebody walked in, they didn't see it. It seemed like a Christian home but it was a Christian home in name only because there were idols behind the door. This happens so often. We have idols behind the door. We don't want anyone to know about them. We'd be mortified if people found out the things that we were watching; the beds we were looking at on our screens; and the things that we thought about and the books we were reading; the music we were listening to. We are going to turn that music off. We're going to get rid of it. We're going to get it behind the door when the righteous come in.

So behind the doors these things have been put and then he says, "For you have uncovered yourself to those other than Me, And have gone up to them; You have enlarged your bed And made a covenant with them." This is a picture of immorality that

was taking place in the high places. That was what was interesting about the high places. He says, "And you have made a covenant with them; You have loved their bed, Where you saw their nudity." So while on the one hand she's embarrassed and puts her idols behind the door, on the other hand she's engaging in these practices and God here in this verse is just making public what they're trying to hide. He's trying to expose them for their duplicity. Often the public image is different than the private reality in a home. You might think about what's behind your door. Is there anything behind your door that needs to be removed?

Now remember, this is a picture of the people of God. They go to worship. They do go to worship on the Sabbath. They do do all the religious things. They are fulfilling the ceremonial law but yet they have these other things going on on the side and so my appeal is to consider: is there anything behind the door that you ought to remove forever? Is there anything behind the door? Your conscience is speaking to you. I know that. I know that God has given us all a conscience and our consciences are speaking to us now. Don't pass this moment without recalling what ought to be put out that you've been hiding behind the door that you would be embarrassed if someone knew what you were looking at or listening to or thinking about or doing. You know what those things are. God has given us a conscience. He has given us the Holy Spirit. I pray God this morning would use this time, use these very words to help us to cleanse our houses; to get the leaven out of the house; to sweep it out and burn it forever. Baal worship was very popular but Baal worship isn't really very different than the things that happen in houses today. It happens all the time in the things that we read, in the things that we see. It's what happens in the theaters and the stadiums where they observe public immorality like you do in the films and like you see on the internet and you think that you watching these things is different from this kind of idolatry and it isn't at all. It's exactly the same thing.

In the high places, the whole community would come out and the best pagan ideas for success would be communicated there. It was like a business seminar and the wicked personalities were there. You can read 1 Kings 15:12-14 and you can see the kind of popular wicked personalities. They were kind of like the rock stars and the Hollywood performers. They were people like Britney Spears and Madonna. That's what was going on in the high places. And they danced around the Asherah pole which is nothing more than a phallic symbol. This was a sexualized idolatrous culture. Very, very much like our own that we have become so insensitive to. Please, I pray God would raise your sensitivities to the things behind the door. God is giving an opportunity here for more joy, for more happiness in your house than you ever dreamed because that's the result of throwing your idols away.

Then you see that these idols were ever expanding in verse 9, "You went to the king with ointment, And increased your perfumes; You sent your messengers far off, And even descended to Sheol." In other words, it's a picture of a person who just wants more and more happiness from their idolatry; just going out and getting more of it. The human soul is insatiable for idols. That's why John Calvin said that the human heart is a factory of idols. That's what's happening in verse 9.

Then in verse 10, God divulges the true impact of their idolatry and this is something we should always recognize. It is so wonderful that God would tell us the truth about idolatry and a sexualized culture, the things that we think are bringing us some kind of pleasure. Here's the analysis: you're wearied by all this but you don't even admit it and you don't grieve over it. You just don't let yourself even think for a second. You're going to submerge your weariness. He says in verse 10, "You are wearied in the length of your way." That's what happens. You get wearied by your idols and, hey, the sexual images that are being watched, they just weary you. They wear you out and they disappoint you. Idolatry is the most wearying activity of the human heart.

He says, "You are wearied in the length of your way; Yet you did not say, 'There is no hope.'" You still thought there was hope. Somehow you held out a little bit of hope so you went back again and you pulled that thing out from behind the door and you thought it would give you pleasure and it didn't. It just wore you out but you don't admit it. You just keep going back. Somebody sent me a sermon that Paul Washer preached a little while ago where he was saying that turning away from adultery and sexualization, particularly with the eyes, is really the bottom wrung of Christianity. It's really the first thing you must get rid of. It's not the last thing, it's the first thing.

Here you have this picture of these wearied people but they still see hope. They still find life in their hand and therefore they are not grieved and so they just keep exhausting themselves. I think the drug industry is one of the great helps to this, you just medicate yourself in your weariness, in your pain, and we have invented all kinds of drugs to help people get away from their pain when really what's wearying them is their sin.

Then God unmasks their true motive in verse 11 and how they got there in the first place. You'll be surprised to see how they got there. Do you know how they got there? Fear. Fear of man. "And of whom have you been afraid," verse 11, "or feared, That you have lied And not remembered Me, Nor taken it to your heart?" In other words, they keep lying about the pain because they fear what people will say and do to them and they don't bark because of fear.

He says, "Is it not because I have held My peace from of old That you do not fear Me?" In other words, God is saying, "You know, I wasn't pushing you around. I turned you over," and I think he's saying, "I've held my peace." In other words, "I declared my truth to you and you rejected it and I did not stand in your way." I think that's the idea. It may not be but I think that's the essence of it at the end of verse 11. You know, how much of our idolatry can be traced to this single thing, the fear of man? We want the applause of men and so we don't bark and it's because we are afraid of people. Often parents become afraid of their children and they don't bark and their children get in front of them and they start leading and the parents are afraid of their children. It happens all the time. Sometimes pastors are afraid of their people. Sometimes they're afraid of their friends and so they want to maintain their social acceptability and so they won't bark. It's from the fear of man. The greatest reason why we don't speak what we ought to speak is fear of man. We so value our reputations, we so want to be congratulated by this world that we'll hang onto that idol and we won't admit how harmful it's been to us and we'll just keep

taking our medications and we're saying, "I still find hope in it," and Isaiah is here to try to argue us out of that.

Then in verse 12, you see this religious passion, it just doesn't profit. He says, "I will declare your righteousness And your works, For they will not profit you." In other words, they were doing these things for righteousness; they were religious people. They were observing the Sabbath and doing all their stuff according to the Bible pretty much except for they had this other stuff behind the door and he's saying, "These are all your righteous works? They don't profit you. All of your worship doesn't profit you." Isaiah spoke of this earlier on in Isaiah, he said, "Don't bring me your sacrifices anymore. I hate them. Don't bring them anymore." Why? Because of those things behind the door. They have not been removed. They still hold out a hope. They are still loved and they are still maintained because of the fear of man. We should always ask: how many things are there in our lives that we haven't put aside because we're afraid of other people? We know in our hearts that God would have us abandon and yet we keep it because we're afraid of what other people might say.

Then in verse 13, at the beginning you see the total powerlessness of all of this immorality and adultery and all of these crutches. They are powerless. He says, "When you cry out, Let your collection of idols deliver you." Give it a shot. See if they'll help you when you really need it and they're not there. He says, "But the wind will carry them all away," the slightest thing, "A breath will take them." Do you see that in verse 13? This is stunning language about how powerless, how insipid, how unprofitable our idols are. Just the wind. A breath. A breath. Isaiah says, "A wind," then he says, "No, it's just a breath." He is debunking. He's showing the cracks. He's smoking out the reality. He's advertising that these things will just drain you; they'll weary you; they will not deliver you; they'll blow away and the slightest breath will throw them down. Isaiah has already spoken about this a number of times. Isaiah has been belittling the idols over and over again in this prophecy. Earlier on in Isaiah he said, "You know, your idols, you're going to be embarrassed at them. You will be so sorry and you'll throw them down to the bats and into the holes."

Then at the end of verse 13, there is a change and he's basically saying, "But God is not that way. God is not that way at all." He says, "But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land, and shall inherit My holy mountain." It's like the sun has just come out and God does what he always does, he always says, "But. But God." And here, those who put their trust in him, who would go behind the door and clean it out, they are not wearied. They are rather energized and they are empowered but it is conditional. It is conditioned on one thing: trust in the Lord believing that he is the giver of life; believing that he's the bread of life; believing he's the light of the world; that he's the only true good in this world; that he is a good shepherd; that he is a faithful dog and he does bark and he does rescue his people.

This is what Isaiah has already communicated in chapter 40, "They will mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint." And God will raise them up and they won't be dumb dogs anymore. In verse 14 we learn what

happens to them, they speak. "And one shall say, 'Heap it up! Heap it up! Prepare the way, Take the stumbling block out of the way of My people.'" This is the blessing of God in a person's life. It changes everything when you trust him and you let go of the idols and you go behind the door and you admit what's there. You trust God and it changes everything and you become a repairer of the streets, a rebuildder. You become the one who rebuilds the old waste places which Isaiah will speak about in chapter 62 and in chapter 58.

I'll give you a little foretaste of that. Chapter 62, verse 6, "I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; They shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent." He is speaking of the people of God in the new covenant era. "And give Him no rest till He establishes And till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. The LORD has sworn by His right hand And by the arm of His strength: 'Surely I will no longer give your grain As food for your enemies; And the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine, For which you have labored. But those who have gathered it shall eat it, And praise the LORD; Those who have brought it together shall drink it in My holy courts.'"

So there is Isaiah's testimony. Here are some applications. If you have authority, don't bark but speak, warn. Recognize what might be the reason why you don't bark is because you have something behind the door and you know that if you speak, everyone will know that you are a hypocrite. That's often the reason we don't speak: we fear man and we know that we haven't really repented. You know, there are ways that we bark in this church through preaching, through counseling. We send people weekly to the abortion clinic to speak. We're trying to spread the preaching of the word of God throughout the world on certain means. We created a website called "Defending Marriage." We do weddings. We teach. We publish. We disciple. This how we speak. This is how elders are designed to speak. But families are designed to speak as well. I think, you know, pray for your shepherds that they're not asleep but that they are diligent; that they are full of the knowledge of God. Pray that they would put to death the deeds of the flesh. Pray that they would grow in humility. Pray that your shepherds would put no unclean thing before their eyes. Pray that they would love righteousness and hate lawlessness. Pray that they would be full of love. Pray that they would be fearless. Pray that they wouldn't be afraid to speak. And I think we can pray the same things for all of us here, that we become a people who bark and to recognize if there are any reasons why we're not barking and could there be something behind the door that is restraining our voice.

I think as we live in the times that we do now where the need to bark is so great and the consequences are so harmful to bark to really preach the word of God as it is, we in this church need to be a people who will be fearless and we will speak. I pray that God would give us a congregation of people who will not be like these shepherds, not like these watchmen, not like these dogs, but that we would be faithful watchmen and faithful shepherds and faithful dogs. That we would speak the truth in love and that we would not fear man and that we would find ourselves in the abundance that is promised here when we trust the Lord. You know, really it's a picture of trust in the Lord that is here, that God would raise up a people here in this place who trust the Lord and they fear not man. They

believe that Jesus Christ is the giver of life. They believe that he is the Good Shepherd. They believe that all of his ways are good and all of his ways are pleasant ways. That's the kind of church that Isaiah is addressing here.

Would you pray with me?

Father, I thank you for these words. These are very difficult words in many ways for all of us to hear. We all have areas that are behind the door. I pray, O Lord, that you would cleanse our houses of all impurity, that you would help us, O Lord, to be like these who have been energized by their trust in you. Lord, we know that you and you alone are only worthy of trust, that Jesus Christ and his salvation is the only hope that we have and so I pray, O Lord, that you would exalt Jesus Christ among us and that we would trust him with all of our hearts. Amen.