

Isaiah 56:1-8 March 17

Isaiah 56:1-8 (NKJV)

1 Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, For My salvation *is* about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed.

2 Blessed *is* the man *who* does this, And the son of man *who* lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil."

3 Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the LORD Speak, saying, "The LORD has utterly separated me from His people"; Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree."

4 For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant,

5 Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off.

6 "Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants-- Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant--

7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *Will be* accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

8 The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, "Yet I will gather to him *Others* besides those who are gathered to him."

In **Chapters 1-39** of Isaiah, Isaiah confronts his own generation with how they had repeatedly failed God. They acted as if they did not care if God existed or not, they were going to do what they wanted to do. Isaiah warned that they would be hauled off to Babylon for judgment.

In **Chapters 40-55** Isaiah begins speaking to a generation that did not yet exist. God promises salvation for this people. So He calls people to prepare for the good things that God would do for them. And in the midst of all these prophecies are prophecies that span to the coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. Everything that matters hangs on Christ **coming first** to take upon Himself the penalty for our sin, and **His second coming** to take us to be with Himself.

Now in **Isaiah 56-66** the prophet shows us how to get with the program. He will show us how to prepare and cooperate with what God will be doing. He also warns about what happens if we resist.

Our outline this morning is borrowed from Mr. Ortland.

A God's people as they should be *and will be* ([56:1-8](#))

B God's people as they shouldn't be *but are* ([56:9-57:21](#))

1. Self-seeking leaders ([56:9-12](#))

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

We start with the first part of verse 1. ¹ **Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness,**

How do the words **Justice** and **Righteousness** strike you? **Keep justice and do righteousness.** When I read them, I cringe. I cringe because I know that in one sense those words are my enemies.

Suppose God were to have carried out **His** justice upon me before I knew Christ? I would have been cast into hell and would have deserved every second of it. I don't want **Justice** from God. I want **Grace**.

And the same thing is true of righteousness. I do not want to be held to the standard of absolute righteousness. I am a failure. I failed yesterday. I will fail today. I will fail tomorrow. Oh no. I cannot **do** it. And I certainly cannot **"be"** it.

So those words scare me, they discourage me. I cannot live up to those words. But we need to read the rest of the verse.

For My salvation is about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed.

Here is the secret to loving justice and righteousness without feeling masochistic or hypocritical. We have got to look to **the salvation of God**. We need to understand it and bask in it. What do we know about the salvation that God has provided? God carried out the **just penalty** for our sin on Christ. **Justice was served.** And Christ was punished. Christ was **perfect righteousness** and now we have been imputed that same righteousness. Our position before God has been changed to where **now we are justified**. We stand **justly** before God with no guilty charge to damn us. And we stand **righteous** before Christ, as if He made righteous robes that were only fitting for Him and He gave them all to us.

Why does this matter? Well it frees us to **love** what **God loves**. And it frees us to change our behavior to be more fitting with our new identity. Now we are free to **act** differently because we **are** a different person. We can act **righteously** toward God and toward each other because we have been granted a righteous standing. We can now do the right thing for the right

reason, not to **earn** something from God, but to **express** something to God for what He has already given us.

Christ's righteousness is imputed to us through justification. But in sanctification we begin to act righteously. That is the effect that regeneration has on a person. When we have the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in us, it cannot help to change us.

And justice is a good thing, a wonderful thing. You will never find the Bible saying anything **bad** about Justice. **God is Just**. It is part of His makeup. It is one of His attributes. The word Judgment here means a legal decision, a claim. It refers often to a legal decision given by God to be followed through by the people. It is doing the right thing toward people.

When we see the strong take advantage of the weak, we instinctively want justice for the weak. And that is a good thing. When we see the rich take advantage of the poor, we want the same thing. That reflects, to some degree, an attribute that God has.

So it is very good for us to want to **treat people justly and righteously**. We should want to treat them **right**. That is essentially what this is saying. And we should want to treat our God **rightly** as well.

And when we see a person who is justly under the damning penalty of God for their sin, we should also **want for them** what **Christ wanted for us**. We should want the penalty to be paid for that person by what Christ has already done. To want grace for someone is not to **despise Justice** but to **love Christ**. Now, how do we get from **where we are** to where we Keep Justice and Do Righteousness? We need a work of God. And that is what our passage is describing here. And when we watch what happens when God goes about it, we will scratch our heads in wonder. His ways are not our ways.

² Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil."

So blessed is the man who keeps justice and does righteousness. In good favor with God is the person who does these things.

And the son of man who lays hold on it. The word for lays hold on it emphasizes **the strength** with which something is grasped. I once decided to climb a rock wall that may have been 40 feet high without ropes. But it was a shale rock wall. It was decidedly stupid. But I was bulletproof when I was 20 so I did it anyway. There was one thing I had not considered. The top of the cliff was dirt on a steep hill. I realized the danger I was in when I reached the top. I had nothing to grip to pull myself over the edge. Eventually I found a

root. I could easily use the word in our text for what I did. **I laid hold on it.** It was not about to slip out of my grasp.

Now look at yourself. Do you really want to grasp onto **living righteously** before God, doing everything you are sure **He wants you to do** and doing nothing that you are sure that **He does not**? Do you really want your life limited to **no reactions** but the ones God approves? Do you want **no alternatives open** but the ones that please God. Do you want to **grab onto that** like your life depends upon it?

I know one thing for myself. **Saying** that I want to do it, and **really wanting** to do it from the bottom of my heart are two very different things. I love the idea of it, the theory of it, the quest of it. But the reality of it is not so alluring. To live like that requires that I die to flesh continually. It means telling my intuitions and perceptions and fleshly cravings and psychological reactions and every other **old nature** thing to pack sand.

Galatians 5:16-26 (NKJV)

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

24 And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

This is a hard package to grasp, like grasping a root at the top of a cliff. It is hard to **want to**. And it is **hard to do**. The flesh lusts against the spirit. If your Christian life is easy, you probably aren't doing it right. How hard your

struggle is is not and indicator of how spiritual you are. We might think that if we were really spiritual, the struggle to do right would not be so hard. But that is not true. If you follow the Spirit, no matter how hard it is, that is the indication of spiritual success, spiritual health.

Our problem is not usually in figuring out what we are doing that is wrong. Our problem is **stopping**. Our problem is saying **yes** to God when we feel like we are being **robbed of something** that is important to us. It is difficult to say **no** to the deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. The snake is still a smooth talker. Our problem is that in our heart of hearts, we really do not **trust God with the outcome that He desires. We prefer our own.**

Like I said before, what we need is more compliance to the Holy Spirit's work in us. We need a movement of God. We need God to work in us what we only **partly** want now. Sometimes He does this by taking us to the very end of our rope, by displaying to ourselves and everyone who knows us that our way does not work. It does not result in good fruit. He sometimes makes us desperate to change because our failures are so dramatic and painful. But God will do what is necessary to revive our hearts. So let's keep continuing to pray that God does whatever is needed to conform us to His will.

Now let's look at the second part of verse 2.

Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil."

It looks like the second half of the verse defines what is meant by the first half. Blessed is the man who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, which ultimately means that they do no evil.

Notice that the goal is not that a person does no activity. The real Sabbath we need is **the changed life that refuses to do anything evil**. We are already to be busy about things. We are to be busy about justice and righteousness. These ought to be done on the Sabbath. But no evil.

Now, let me ask you. When is the last time you confessed doing something evil? Have you ever used that word, evil, to describe what you did. We talk about our pasts and we use words like stupid, foolish, disobedient, maybe even rebellious, but we rarely use the word evil. But if it is not just or righteous, it is evil.

Even now, when we confess our sins to one another, do we ever use the word evil? Do we even think of it as evil. Maybe that is where our repentance should start. We should start **calling stuff** what **God calls stuff**. If we called it evil, maybe we would begin to treat it as evil.

Now let's take a quick look at the Sabbath.

- 1- It was a weekly celebration of God's perfect creation in the beginning.
Gen 2:1-3
- 2- It was a taste of what life would be like when creation would be renewed at the end of time. Isa 66:22-23

Isaiah 66:22-23 (NKJV)

22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain.

23 And it shall come to pass *That* from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD.

The Sabbath was intended to be practice for eternity. It was saying, my life is no longer business as usual. My life is for God. He has taken care of me. I am living in rest and under His command. I am living this way now in my anticipation of what is to come. It was held with strict requirements, but the essence of what it was was far more encompassing than living by a set of rules. It was resting upon the sufficiency of God, depending upon Him for our provision, and living our life for Him.

We see some insight into this in Hebrews.

Hebrews 4:1-11 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.

3 For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "*So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,'*" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4 For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh *day* in this way: "*And God rested on the seventh day from all His works*";

.....

9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

We can see from this that the Sabbath was bigger than just keeping rules on one day of the week. It represented a bigger rest to enter in. And that **it could**

be entered into. It was a state of being we are either in or out of, not a weekly occurrence.

So the **essence** of the Sabbath was a state of dependence upon God and obedience to Him. And it is through Christ that we enter this rest, this Sabbath. So the people reading our text would have taken our text very literally. But for us to **live in Christ** would be the ultimate fulfillment of keeping the Sabbath and not defiling it.

Now on with our Isaiah text.

³ Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the LORD Speak, saying, "The LORD has utterly separated me from His people"; Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree."

⁴ For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant,

⁵ Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off.

Have you ever been part of a group that you felt completely out of place with? Have you ever felt like you were a second class citizen somewhere because you don't have the qualifications that others have? I know that some of you have come to Christ from unchurched backgrounds. Maybe at first you felt very uncomfortable. Well rest assured, **God wants you included**. Look at the emphasis here. **Look at the efforts of inclusion**. Look at the **heart for the outsider**.

Here we have the foreigners in verse 3. Here are people far from God and very unlikely candidates for the kingdom of heaven. And if we look at Romans, here we are as gentiles, outsiders of the chosen people of God. And what does God say? Make it hard on these people to test them? See if they live up to the proud heritage of being a good Jew? No. There is nothing like that. This is really beautiful.

Don't let the foreigner that is sincere in his devotion to Me say- "God has cut me out of being a real member of His family." Don't let him say or think that he is excluded because of his bloodline or history. Even the sins he committed do not disqualify him. We are given a command here by extension. **Don't let sinners who come to Christ think that in any way they are second class citizens**. Isn't that wonderful. God too believes in inclusion. But the terms of inclusion are faith in Jesus Christ for salvation that results in repentance and a changed life.

Then there is the Eunuch. A Eunuch is someone who has had parts removed that will not allow him to reproduce. Look at the love held out to these human

beings. In the Jewish culture bloodline the family tree was of great importance. If you did not have kids, you have lower status. And you are often seen as cursed by God.

Now add to this that a person with this particular condition was not even allowed in the Jewish place of worship in the temple. Or maybe even in the gentile courts. They were considered unfit.

Well God has something to say to **the undesirables**, to these misfits, to these outsiders, to these lower caste.

He says hey, if you are truly one of mine, and that will be known by what you do, if you have the Christian disease that makes you want to obey God no matter what. If you have held fast to a relationship with God and all that it entails. If you keep the Sabbath as it is intended to be kept, if you are finding out and doing those things that are pleasing to God, if you are absorbed with living for Christ, if you are a true believer.... Then this is what God pledges to them.

Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off.

Look at this. God is saying to those who are technically unable due to the law to enter God's courts, He will personally give them not just entrance to but a home in His house. He is talking about a favorable status. In fact it is even more favorable than the natural sons.

He will get a name and a reputation better than those who seem to be the status holders, the ones who seem to fit in naturally, those who are established in the institution. This is like saying to a new member to the church that they are going to get blessings from God greater than the elders who have served for 50 years.

Look at this. This adopted son with obvious deficiencies according to what the world expects is going to go to the head of the class. These Eunuchs that everyone would look down on... God is going to single out for honor. They are going to be the Joseph that was elevated over all the Egyptians.

And these people are going to have a continuing heritage. They will have a name that will not end at their death. You see that was the very down side of being a Eunuch. It guaranteed that the family line would end, the name would be extinguished. The name would be cut off. But God guarantees here that the name will continue. The heritage will be lasting.

6 "Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants--

Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant—

Do you know what this is? This is a description of every true believer. This is not a description of an exceptional follower. This is, by nature, what the Holy Spirit makes a person into if He regenerates a person.

We are all sons of foreigners. We are all gentiles here as far as I know.

And if we are believers, we have responded to God's call on our lives and have been joined to the Lord to serve Him. Now we cannot think we can be joined to the Lord with a **different outcome**. Oh, it can happen for a while. We may not understand that we are required to do what God says for a while. We may only obey the parts of His rule **that we like** for a while. But eventually God will bring it to a head where we see that we must obey Christ, we must serve Him. And in that, we will grow in our appreciation of His grace and His rule—His name. We will come to love everything that Christ represents. As such, we come as servants. Christ calls us all to servant leadership.

This is describing **true Christianity**. This is describing the life in Christ. This is a true believer, no matter what our past, no matter what our culture, no matter what our status, no matter what our background. This is a new testament believer.

And what will God do for these unlikely candidates for His grace?

7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *Will be* accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

8 The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, "Yet I will gather to him *Others* besides those who are gathered to him."

What we see is inclusion and blessing and relationship. There is no second class status anywhere. The emphasis in verse 7 is **all nations**.

Sometimes it is easy to get some idea that we are in church and we are surrounded by the mean bad world and this place is a sanctuary. And there is some truth to that. But God's heart goes far beyond that perimeter. His church must be an outreach center, also, if it is to represent Him and what He wants. God has people He wants to include in His family, and it is our job to recruit, to advertise, to proclaim the good news that **they are invited** to be in relationship with Christ. We are to be **proclaiming** that good news in an effort to have people **who want** to be discipled in Christ.

And look what He wants to do to them. He wants to make them Joyful in My house of prayer. He wants them to rejoice in their new status, in their new relationship, in their new significance.

Are we? Are we joyful in our relationship with Christ. Do we feel sincerely blessed to simply have a seat at His table? If we aren't, it is no surprise that we don't have a great following into the temple's doors.

God wants a mass of people who fellowship together in the praise of Jesus. He wants thanksgiving and rejoicing to be commonplace and always appropriate. Is that what **we** want? Do we share God's heart in this regard?

I hope we are impressed with God's desire for inclusion in His family. He wants those who are not like us to surround us in our worship of Him. It glorifies God to display His mercy towards all kinds of people, especially the most unlikely. And we should know all about that. We are one of them.