

Isaiah 56 9-12 March 24

**Isaiah 56:9-12 (NKJV)**

**<sup>9</sup> All you beasts of the field, come to devour, All you beasts in the forest.**

**<sup>10</sup> His watchmen *are* blind, They are all ignorant; They *are* all dumb dogs, They cannot bark; Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.**

**<sup>11</sup> Yes, *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.**

**<sup>12</sup> "Come," *one says*, "I will bring wine, And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; Tomorrow will be as today, *And* much more abundant."**

The topic for this morning is disqualified leadership.

We saw in verses 1-8 of our text the wonderful plans God has. God tells us what He is going to do. God is going to gather together the least likely of candidates to join His kingdom. He is going to include those that everyone would vote are the least likely to succeed. And that would **be us** as well. They will be given an everlasting name. They will be people with changed lives as a result of what God has done.

And then all of a sudden the topic is changed completely.

It is as if he is saying, this has nothing to do with the kind of leadership that comes from man. He will accomplish what He is going to do **in spite of** the human leadership in place.

It is interesting to apply this passage to what actually **happened to Christ**. He **did** what this prophecy **promised**. He brought all the least likely candidates into the Kingdom. But look what the human Jewish leadership was doing at the time. They fit this description of disqualified leadership.

Now, as always, we want to find the most direct application of this scripture to our own lives. It would be nice if we could just limit it to those mean old Pharisees and Sadducees. But we will see principles here that apply to all leadership. And that is where we need to apply them.

Now who is in leadership? Well it might seem nice to apply this to just the Elders. Then you could just sit and watch **us** squirm under the weight of God's Word. But you are not so lucky. We are all in this together.

Do you have someone that, when you turn around they are following you?

Guess what. You are in leadership. We elders are in leadership. Sunday school teachers are in leadership. Small group leaders are in leadership.

Husbands are in leadership. Mothers are in leadership. And anyone who has influence over the lives of others, even though there is no position or title,

they are in leadership. Even Eli has some leadership responsibilities to Wyatt and Wyatt to Carter.

Most of us are in some kind of leadership.

Now, why does it matter? Isn't everyone responsible for themselves?

Well let's see what our text says.

**9 All you beasts of the field, come to devour, All you beasts in the forest.**

One of the primary reasons that leadership is so important is that this world is rife with danger.

The New Testament is full of warnings, over and over again, against dangers of all kinds. There is the danger of false teaching, the danger of falling away from the truth, the danger of people coming into the church to take advantage of people, the danger of leaving our first love, the danger of falling into sin, the danger of complacency. We have the external danger of evil influences. And then we have what is probably the greater danger of our **fleshly desires** that are holdovers from the person we were prior to Christ.

We have dangers **within** and **without**. We cannot all protect ourselves. We need help. And the help comes in the form of leaders. And we gain a benefit from our leaders, only to the degree that we submit ourselves to their godly leadership.

That is life inside the church.

Now in our text we have an uncomfortable event. God is calling to the enemies to come devour his wayward people. Here we have God calling to the predators, "**come and get em**". We need to think clearly about this. God has no problem using evil for His purposes. Isaiah has been showing examples of this every step of the way. Just as God commands us to come to Him to receive the benefits of relationship to Him, He also commands his enemies to come and engulf those who He desires to judge. This is a scary God, and not one to take lightly.

OK, so we have leaders because there is danger **out there** and **in here**. For us one of the greatest dangers is when fleshly functioning is allowed to run wild in the church. I am convinced that our life events are partially arranged by God to display to us just how much **our instincts cannot be trusted**. The failures in our obedience are almost always a result of trusting the wrong source of information. We trust our inner talk. We trust what we tell ourselves. We trust our hearts. We trust our feelings. We trust our fears. We trust our compulsions. We trust our lusts. We trust as, Paul calls them in Timothy, deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. We believe in sin's deceptions. And we refuse, at that point, to trust God's word. I am not sure that there is a greater danger to a believer than what a believer tells him or

her self. Nothing destroys our ability to lead more than our proclamation by our lives that we don't believe the doctrines we preach. People are not going to be swayed by our words when **they know** that not even we **believe what we are saying** enough to allow it to **change us from doing what we want to do**.

Paul tells Timothy often- watch your life and your doctrine. Both have to be in concert.

Leadership is desperately needed in the church all the time at every level.

Because the danger is from within and without. And it is ever present in every single believer in the church. That is the world we live in.

Now, how is the leadership going to respond to the threat that God has just called in?

**10 His watchmen are blind, They are all ignorant; They are all dumb dogs, They cannot bark; Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.**

Do you see the humor in a blind watchman? What is the watchman's job? It is to watch. It is to keep an eye on what is going on. The job is to see. And what is the one thing that this watchman cannot do. They cannot see. Jesus called the leaders blind guides. Now what is worse than having a blind watchman?

**Trusting the blind watchman to protect you.** And that is the problem.

These people do not have the qualifications to do their job. They must be able to see and they cannot. They do not know what the real danger looks like. Oh the Pharisees could see some things. They were proficient weather men.

They could tell if it was going to rain tomorrow. But they could not tell that rejecting Christ, even though he offended their pride and made them look like idiots, **rejecting Christ would put their nation in ruin.** They could not see that Jesus was the Messiah, God's Son. They could not see that all of their responses that they thought were wise and necessary were simply carrying out the plans of their father the devil.

So we see that the first qualification we need in a leader is their **ability to see.**

They have to be supernaturally enabled to respond to God's call on their life.

They must be a believer, one who truly believes God and is growing in submitting to God's leadership over their lives.

Now I have a riddle for you. In what state can you **never know when you are in it** but **you always know when you leave it?** The state of ignorance.

Next it says **They are all ignorant.** Simply put- they don't know. They should know things but they don't know them.

Ignorance is an odd state. You only know if you were in it by your experience when you leave it. You can never know if you are in ignorance until the truth is revealed to you. Then, depending upon how you respond, you find out how

ignorant you really were, or if you were really ignorant at all. You cannot remember being ignorant. The only real clue about your state of ignorance, the only real litmus test, **is the moment you discovered the truth.**

Now we can be ignorant about **facts**, or we can be ignorant about **concepts**. The Bible gives some good examples.

We will start with facts. Facts are simple things to understand. God allows A. He forbids B. Etc. They are understood in about the time it takes to hear or read them.

Back in 2 Kings chapter 22 the Book of the Law had been lost. Then suddenly it was found and read to King Josiah.

### **2 Kings 22:11-13 (NKJV)**

**11 Now it happened, when the king (Josiah) heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes.**

**12 Then the king commanded *some of his people* saying,**

**13 "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great *is* the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."**

Here we see the perfect test for ignorance about facts. Do you want to know if ignorance was the only reason you committed a sin? If it was you should see 3 things occur when you suddenly understand the simple facts. 1. You will be shocked to find out the truth. 2. You will be heart broken to discover you had sinned. 3. Your behavior will immediately conform to what God said. That is what happens when someone desires to obey God but simply doesn't know the facts. When they learn the facts it changes them because that was the only missing element.

If there is no **memorable surprise** and there is no **immediate change in behavior**, our problem was not **ignorance of the fact of what God wanted**. The problem was in **our willingness to do what we suspected God wanted**. OK, what about **concepts**? Concepts can take time to understand. Sometimes they are even beyond our understanding. I was ignorant about the principles of how we apply Christ's work in fighting sin for a long time. Some concepts take time, they take a process. We see an example of something like that in John 3. Jesus is carrying on a discussion with Nicodemus. Jesus is talking about how the Kingdom of God works.

**8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

**9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"**

**10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"**

I feel a little pity for Nicodemus at this point. This should have been a concept that Nicodemus knew. But he didn't. In all his study it had escaped him. We get the idea in scripture that Nicodemus eventually **did** understand. But it wasn't sudden. It wasn't simple. It took some time. It was not like Josiah hearing the law being read. It was more like a student studying theology. It is like us as we are learning what following Jesus is really about.

The ignorance that Jesus is talking about is one of not understanding **how God works, who God is, what true spirituality is all about**. Leaders cannot be ignorant of scriptural fundamentals.

I believe that is what the passages about elders' qualifications in First Timothy and Titus are all about. We have to show competence in living and in doctrine. We have to show not only that **we know what God says about living** but that we are willing **to do what He says**. We need to be fit to lead people into how to obey Jesus. If they obey Jesus like we obey Jesus it should be an improvement. We need to be fit to make disciples to make disciples.

Listen to the list. It shows us what good leadership should look like. This should be an exact contrast to the leaders in our text.

**1 Timothy 3:2-7 (NKJV)**

**2 A bishop (elder) then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;**

**3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;**

**4 one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence**

**5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);**

**6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.**

**7 Moreover he must have a good testimony (a martyr's testimony) among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

Notice how these people have to be people who put their money where their mouth is. Elders are not primarily administrators or delegators. We aren't there just to tell people what to do or make sure everything gets done. They don't have to just be able to recite doctrine, but that doctrine has to be

employed in their day to day struggle to do the right thing. They must show some success in the areas that are hardest for them.

Where it says able to teach, I think it is referring to our text. They cannot be ignorant of what scripture says to real life. We have got to get that it addresses **every part of our lives**. There can be no part of our lives out of the control of God's Word. And we have to understand that it is not just about obeying a bunch of commands. It is about accepting our identity from Christ and living as new creatures. It is about understanding things from scripture that Nicodemus completely missed.

We have to be able to show that we are able to lead in spiritual things in our homes before we are qualified to exhibit that same leadership to the church. We need to be faithful in leading in the smaller to qualify for leading in the larger. There has to be competence in leadership, unlike the leadership of Nicodemus or the leaders of Isaiah's day.

And he can't be a novice. He absolutely can't be ignorant of the mature concepts. He cannot be ignorant of how God works.

So that was the second ignorance. The ignorance of concepts.

Now for the third ignorance.

The third ignorance is the ignorance of the Jewish leaders in our text.

It is **chosen** ignorance. It is like what someone in our small group jokingly said. Don't ask what your authority wants because **you will have to do it**. It is an ignorance whose source is really not a lack of **knowing what to do** but a **lack of willingness** to do it.

How can you know if you are in this state? When you finally hear the truth revealed in a way that is unavoidable, there is no memorable impact. The impact upon discovery is a non event. It doesn't even stand out in your memory. Whether you technically knew it or not, there was **enough frame of reference to know it**, you just chose not to. The point of discovery reveals the degree of ignorance.

You see, we all are choosing what we will learn, what we want to know. We all take the initiative to discover what we are hungry for. Everyone does. And that which we **choose to learn**, that which we **choose to be good at**, reveals a lot about us. The skills we choose to focus on and excel at reveal us. We will see these leaders had developed skills. They knew how to throw a party. They knew how to get from those around them **what they wanted**. They were clearly choosing to think a great deal about the topics they liked. But learning about **what God wanted** was not one of them. And that tells us a lot about them. Ignorance was not an excuse for them. It was actually a **symptom of their lack of love for God**.

### **They *are* all dumb dogs, They cannot bark;**

What are the attributes that a watchdog must have? First they must be able to see. Second they must be practiced in barking. So, what good is a watchdog that can't bark? They will do no good at all in protecting the people of the house.

Leaders must be good at discerning what danger is and communicating it forcefully to those under their care. **Good watchdogs disturb people.** Good watchdogs sometimes create **conflict and chaos.** But they do it, because of danger. A good leader cannot be overly concerned about what reaction his proclamation of truth is going to create in the hearer.

We need to bark sometimes. We need to call danger what it is, even if the person we are talking to doesn't want to **see it** as danger or doesn't want to **deal with** the danger. If we as leaders aren't willing and able to bark sometimes, we aren't performing well as leaders. Israel's leaders were worthless. They couldn't bark.

### **Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.**

Is sleep a bad thing? No absolutely not. Ask a new mother like Monica and she will tell you it is one of the most valuable commodities in life right now. So sleep is good. It is essential to our lives. We must have it. So why is this a problem in the text?

It is pretty simple.

### **A leader cannot carry out their responsibilities when they are asleep.**

These leaders were content to, by their selfish absence, make those in their charge **take care of themselves.** They abdicated the leadership responsibilities God had given them. And that is a dismal, unacceptable failure of leadership. God did not put them in a position of leadership so they could **bail out of it** whenever they had a desire for their personal comfort, whenever it got too hard. He put them in the position to do a job and He will hold them fully responsible for doing that job. Just as God assigns the responsibilities He also assigns our circumstances. The job that did not get done will be on their heads.

The leadership's choice of sleeping instead of working displayed a selfishness that the rest of the text expands on. There is no pity or compassion here. Simply rebuke.

We see their choice here. We are called upon to **Love God** with all our heart soul mind and strength. What did these leaders love? **Sleep.** That is a very poor substitute.

My brother bought me a cup for Christmas years ago. On one side it had the slogan, **stay awake, stay employed**. Now staying awake is not enough to keep a person employed, but even in the world's business endeavors, sleeping is certainly enough to get one fired. And God's business is infinitely more important than the world's business.

Now these leaders may have had dozens of ways to justify their sleeping. But at the end of the day they were going to be held accountable for not fulfilling their responsibilities.

The punch line here, the easy application, is that leaders are not allowed to abandon their responsibilities **for their own comfort or escape**. That is not how **Christ served the church** and that is not how **we are to serve His people**.

If God has placed people in our care and we are prioritizing our own comfort over their care, it is time to repent. It is time to do anything that we have to do to turn that around and obey God. If **what God assigned** and **what God expects** was not possible to do by faith, He would not demand it. And He does demand it. Maybe we will need the help of our brothers and sisters. That isn't at all unusual. They often have the gifts we need to rely upon. We are not fit for leadership if we will not prioritize the clear needs of those God has given us to serve over our own fleshly preferences and luxuries. This is a challenge to all of us. Because this is a battle for every leader. Loving others the way we love ourselves is no picnic. And leading by serving is extremely demanding. But we have a great coach. Just look at what Christ suffered for our good.

<sup>11</sup> **Yes, they are greedy dogs Which never have enough.**

Greed is an awful thing. Scripture has a lot to say about it.

The point here is that leaders should never exploit the resources of those they serve for their own selfishness. There should only ever be one reason people serve those that Christ has given them. And it is because those people are Christ's. We certainly **gain a benefit** from those we serve. Every one of you has enriched my life. Some more than others. 😊 I'll let you guess who is who. But anyway a leader is disqualified from leadership if we view service as a way to fulfilling our own selfish desires.

How do you view the people around you here? Do you see them as people to lay down your lives for in service? Are they ways for you to express your love to Christ? Ways that you can pay a cost to express appreciation to Christ? Or are they people **you keep hoping you will get stuff out of that you really want?** Christ really doesn't get all that much out of His relationship with us.



We do well to look at loving each other as **being something we do for Him**. Maybe that would keep us from being miffed and offended because of all the responses we **hope to get but don't**.

**And they are shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory.**

Here we really have more of the same. This whole thing is describing people who are given spiritual responsibility for other people and who never buy into the reason they have the authority. They think it is all about them, about what they need, about what they want, about what they feel compelled to do or have. They allow their own advantages and preferences to rule the day. They allow flesh to tell them what to do instead of God. They hold as something **other than God** as their **true** god. And they are not willing to **trust** God or **submit** to God in the things they **really want or feel they need**.

It isn't complicated.

Christ calls us to lay down our lives for each other. He means what He says. We are to have the mind of Christ. He expects it because He is worthy of it. We can come up with excuses all day long but we only deceive ourselves with them. God is never fooled.

Leadership is a serious responsibility. The opportunity to influence someone is a very weighty matter. And we must take it seriously.

When we are shepherds, we must understand. We have got to do our homework. We have got to call the home base. We need to know what God wants. We cannot blow off that responsibility. We must, as elders must be, able to teach, able to teach others how to obey the hard things like we obey the hard things. That is discipleship. That is Christianity 101.

We cannot view our responsibilities to others in the church from our own personal perspective. **We** didn't die to create this family. **We** didn't pay the price for the salvation of this family. **We** did not choose this family or determine before the beginning of time who they would be. So we cannot look to what **our personal preferences** are. We cannot decide according to our personal advantages. We cannot measure how we treat others on an economy. An economy is where **you give something to get something**. The church of Christ has no economy. We give something because we have already been given everything we could ever need. This is the church. This is where people start dropping dead when they exaggerate contributions they made to benefit others in the church. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? Christ's church is ultra special. It is like no other group on this planet. It gets God's full attention.

The word for territory is interesting. It refers to a border, an end of a space. It is like singling out those in the church who are of our tribe, or of our family to show preference to. It is picking those who **are important** because they **personally benefit us**, from those who we gain no advantage from. Again it is seeing church from **what is in it for us**.

I hope we are all getting this. This church is Christ's. I am not to be measuring any of the people or interactions based on **what I am getting** or what **I have the potential to get**. I am to love you because Christ loves you and me. You are to love me because Christ loves you and me. We measure all of our behavior based on **how pleasing it is to Christ**, not how pleasing it is to each other. This is supernatural thinking. There is no club on the planet that runs like this. The world should know us by our love for one another. And this is all because of Christ's love for us.

This has all been a conversation about leadership. The litmus test is **will we do what a brother or sister needs simply because it pleases Christ**. Doing the right thing might create all kinds of personal discomfort. It might require us spending things we really wonder if we can do without. It requires us to do things we might feel are impossible for us to do. But that is what leaders are required to do.

We cannot follow the examples in our text. We cannot fail like they did by simply doing that which our seemers tell us is appropriate or necessary or allowable. This church has a Master, and we are required to follow His example, which by the way, cost Him His life.

Now the last verse.

<sup>12</sup> **"Come," one says, "I will bring wine, And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; Tomorrow will be as today, And much more abundant."**

Here again is an example of self serving leadership. And again, some would argue but I think that wine, in and of itself, is seen as a blessing of God. Its misuse is clearly a sin, just like sleep.

Now we get an inside scoop on how these leaders operate. And it is shameful. They intentionally get themselves to the place where they cannot reason. They escape their responsibilities and make themselves incapable of carrying them out. First they escape in sleep. Now they escape in drunkenness or getting high or whatever intoxicant they choose. And it is not an accident. It is intentional. They **plan to do it** and **they do it**. They keep their tools handy. And look at how they regard it.

They have no fear of God. They have no fear that God may step in and stop their behavior because it offends Him. Their attitude is that they can do

whatever they decide to do as long as they want to do it. They expect that they have every right to do whatever they want to do. Maybe they feel they are entitled to it. Maybe they think their excuses hold and that they need this. Who knows? But they have a very exaggerated sense of optimism. One commentary calls it inebriated optimism. When inebriation is required for us to be optimistic, we are in a very bad state.

What is called for in leadership is a **very serious attitude regarding what God says and what God wants**. If we are to be leaders worth following, we must establish that we care far more **what God says** than how any of those who we lead **may react** to what God says. We have got to love truth and we have got to love God far more than we love our peace and tranquility. We sometimes need to be the barking dog. We sometimes need to deliver the painful truth. We sometimes have to get into people's faces and spaces and deliver the message that **this behavior cannot stand**. Things must change. God demands it. And we will not pretend that Christ is worthy of any less than our obedience. And that is a costly ministry. But Christ knows all about costly ministry. The question really comes down to, do we love Him enough to take up His cross and follow Him. That is where all this leadership begins.