

The LORD continues the theme from the previous passage, an invitation to all to come and partake of Jesus and find spiritual satisfaction. We're invited to enter into that covenant God promised to David, the Messiah from the line of David who would reign forever, from Whom God's steadfast love will never depart.

*<sup>1</sup> Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed."* Isaiah 56:1 This chapter begins with a warning. The readers were not to give up keeping justice and doing righteous acts. While in captivity, the nation of Judah would be tempted to conform to the world around them. Later in captivity they would become prosperous and the lure of unjust gain would entice them. When they returned to Jerusalem they compromised by taking pagan wives and putting their own interests above that of the LORD and the nation.

The warning was that the Messiah was soon to come. "My salvation" and the revelation of the righteousness of God both refer to the Messiah (Isaiah 51:5). In fact, the Hebrew word for salvation here is the name of Jesus, Yeshua. It would be 400 from the return of the Jews to Jerusalem until Jesus was born. Isaiah became a favorite of the Jewish people throughout that time. This is why John the Baptist's message resonated with the people (Matthew 3:3). They expected the Messiah to appear. John's message to repent and prepare for the coming of the Messiah is of the same theme as this verse. We should heed this warning today as the Second Coming approaches. It's time to get our act together and do what is right, keeping justice and acting righteously. The Lord will return. Death does not always give you time to prepare. What will He find you doing?

*<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil."* Isaiah 56:2 Those who keep justice and do righteousness, who stay in earnest about obeying God, who keep the Sabbath, and refrain from evil are promised a blessing. We are to be just because God is just. If we compromise when justice would cause us loss, why should we expect justice from others? Justice is right because it is the nature of God. We are to be righteous because God is righteous. While the meaning of righteousness includes being just, it is also to be morally ethical. The Hebrew word is derived from a word meaning "straight" (Psalm 145:17). We use the word "crooked" today to mean morally perverse. To be righteous is to conform to God's standards. To keep the Sabbath meant to rest on that last day of the week while worshiping and thanking God for His goodness. Walking in the Spirit makes every day a Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9-10).

Why would the LORD warn people to be good if the Messiah was coming? Wasn't He coming because we fail to be good? Absolutely! However, as we'll see at the end of the chapter, those whose hearts are corrupt would find themselves in opposition to the Messiah. Those who were seeking God from the heart, whether they were accepted or rejected by the religious establishment, would flock to Jesus (Mark 12:37).

*<sup>3</sup> Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."*

Isaiah 56:3 Not only would those Jews seeking God from the heart be invited to come to the Messiah, but also the foreigner who was seeking God. We've already seen in Isaiah that the Messiah was coming to be a light to the nations and that His salvation would go out to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). Here it is spelled out so plainly that it is hard to understand why the Jews of the first century did not expect it.

Jews in Jesus' day despised foreigners. Yet here in verse 3 through 8 we see God specifically declare the Gentiles will have a big part in the Kingdom of God. First, God addresses the eunuchs. Many of the leaders who were taken into Babylon were made eunuchs. It was to take away their hope of posterity and get them to serve for the present only. I wonder if Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had a copy of Isaiah (Daniel 1:6-7). This would have encouraged them to have hope in a spiritual heritage in spite of their lack of physical lineage. We saw in the previous chapter the hope of spiritual lineage (Isaiah 54:1). Those whom they influenced for God's glory would be counted as their spiritual children.

*<sup>4</sup> For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, <sup>5</sup> I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.*

Isaiah 56:4-5 During Jesus' day, eunuchs were not allowed into the temple grounds. That attitude toward them may have been the same during the exile. They were probably seen as those who compromised with the conquering power and as unclean. But as Daniel and his friends are an example, they were more faithful than the rest of the Jewish people. While all people bowed to the king's image, these men refused to compromise (Daniel 3:16-18). It may be because of these promises they read in Isaiah.

They also held fast to the covenant by refusing to eat non-kosher food. They chose to please God in everything they did (2 Corinthians 5:9). God honored them by delivering them from the fiery furnace. He exalted Daniel to one of the highest positions in the land, influencing generations of kings. God did give him a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. That is the Book of Daniel. His name will be forever remembered. This is just one way God honors those who choose to please Him in all they do. I named my son Daniel. He grew up with pictures on his wall of Daniel in the lion's den. The Prophet Daniel's integrity and relationship with God has been a testimony to youth for two and a half millennia. Would the desire to please God in all you do describe your choices?

How does this apply to us who are blessed to understand the grace of God? Verse 3 began by speaking to the foreigners who had joined themselves to the LORD. That is all people who are not of Jewish lineage. We shouldn't say that because we are not Jewish

that God will separate us from His people. This is the Apostle Paul's message that being a child of God is not through physical lineage, but through faith (Galatians 3:7). We join ourselves to the LORD by faith when we accept the God of Israel and His Messiah, Jesus. Our Sabbath rest is Jesus (Hebrews 4:9-11). He is our justice and our righteousness. And because He is righteous we seek to be like Him in all we do and say (1 Peter 1:16). If that is not your aim, be honest about your priorities. What lasts?

Verse 5 needs some cultural explanation to get the full impact of what God is saying about His gift to us of being in His house and within His walls. Jewish homes were small family compounds. When a son in the family was to be married, the son would add on a room to the family buildings that surrounded a courtyard. Only when the new room was added to the others and the father approved it as sufficiently complete, could the groom go to claim his bride. She would move into this new room within the walls of the family compound. The Son is Jesus. He has claimed us for His bride. He has gone to prepare a place for us, and He will come again to receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also (John 14:1-3). In Jesus, we are accepted into God's family.

*<sup>6</sup> "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—* Isaiah 56:6 Who are these Gentiles who are to be the bride of the Son? They are those who have joined themselves to YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They minister to Him, love His name, and serve Him (John 14:21). He is their Sabbath rest. They will not compromise or ignore their time with the LORD. They cling to the New Covenant in Jesus' blood as their only hope of salvation.

*<sup>7</sup> these 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 peoples."* Isaiah 56:7 It is these who God will bring to His holy mountain, which is to say His holy kingdom. It is symbolized by Mount Zion and its temple. The home of God is a house of communion with Him. Our service to God will be acceptable to Him for it is directed by His Holy Spirit. The sacrifices God accepts are a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17).

The Jews had a short wall around the temple on Mt. Zion that forbade Gentiles to enter and warned of execution if they did (Ephesians 2:14). I wonder what they thought of this passage. The only time Gentiles entered that earthly temple, it was considered defiled and had to be re-consecrated. This passage never saw fulfillment in the earthly temple. This promise to the Gentiles is in regards to the heavenly temple.

When Jesus cleaned out the outer court during His last week of ministry, Jesus quoted this verse (Matthew 21:13). While Gentiles were allowed in that outer court, they were never allowed in the house, the temple itself. The area where they were allowed was so noisy with merchants and traffic carrying things from one side of the city to the other

that one would have a difficult time praying. This earthly symbol of the heavenly temple so distorted the picture of God's heart that Jesus had to act (Hebrews 8:5). He drove out the merchants and wouldn't allow anyone to carry things through the courtyard (Mark 11:16).

This shows us how passionate God is to commune with us, to include us into His family. **Prayer is one of the most neglected disciplines of today's believers.** It is one of God's most gracious gifts to us. He actually includes us in bringing His will into the earth. The God of all creation is willing to listen to you. But an even greater privilege is that He wants to speak to your heart (Matthew 6:6; John 16:13).

For years I've tried to cast the vision for volunteers to occupy the prayer room and pray for us as the Word is proclaimed. Most Sundays no one seems to take the challenge. Perhaps I haven't shared the power of prayer and the glory of participating with God. How much more would be accomplished in our hearts if there were those who would put prayer behind the Word of God, praying for us to be impacted by the Holy Spirit through the Word?

Notice that God promises to make us joyful in His house of prayer. **The second fruit of the Holy Spirit (joy) is lacking in many believers because we do not take time to enter into prayer.** They don't take the time to let God encourage them and declare His love for them. Joy is a by-product of realizing God's love for you and participating with Him in His plans. If you are lacking joy, join the disciples in asking Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1

*<sup>8</sup> The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."* Isaiah 56:8 Just in case we didn't get the point God keeps making throughout Isaiah, God makes it very clear here. He is not just gathering the Jews back to Jerusalem; He is gathering the world to Himself. New Jerusalem is made up of Jew and Gentile, all who hold fast to Jesus and the New Covenant He offers us.

*<sup>9</sup> All you beasts of the field, come to devour— all you beasts in the forest.* Isaiah 56:9 Verse 9 is a shift in the text from speaking of Gentiles coming into the kingdom to the failings of Israel's leaders. It was true before, during, and after the captivity. It was especially true in Jesus' day. A call goes out to the predators. When the shepherds don't care about the sheep, the wolves will enter the flock and devour. It is evidence of the failure of the watchmen (John 10:12-13).

*<sup>10</sup> His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.* Isaiah 56:10 The Jewish ruling council was supposed to be watching out for the spiritual welfare of the people, but instead they were more concerned about their position, pride, and profit. They couldn't tell the difference between a wolf and the Savior. They were spiritually blind.

Dogs were often used to help protect the flock. But the leaders were like lazy, voiceless dogs that did nothing to protect the flock. There was a false sense of security when they were there. For a Jew to be called a dog was an extremely derogatory expression (Revelation 21:15). But here the description is made worse by the attributes ascribed to these leaders.

*<sup>11</sup> The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. But they are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.* Isaiah 56:11 Not only are they clueless and lazy, they can never get enough to eat. For all they cost, they do nothing in return. They aren't even there for one another. They are each in it for themselves (Ezekiel 34:2). They don't follow the ways of God. They have their own selfish way.

*<sup>12</sup> "Come," they say, "let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure."* Isaiah 56:12 Eat, drink, and be merry is their plan. But what adds to their shame is that they think they will never have to answer for their selfish disrespect for the position they have been given (Ezekiel 33:6).

There is a contrast here with God's call in the previous chapter to come and drink wine without cost, the joy of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 55:1). Here the leaders call to come and get drunk on physical wine while proclaiming that there will never be a Day of Judgment. No wonder Jesus' harshest words were reserved for those religious leaders (Matthew 23:27). They were the ones responsible for all the noise in the outer court. They had no regard for Gentiles and didn't care if Gentiles got the wrong impression of the God of Israel. Like many of the passages we have studied in Isaiah, these two parts of this chapter seem so different and yet they came to gather in the Gospels. In this case it was Jesus' cleansing of the temple bringing together the house of prayer and the greedy watchmen.

Sadly, these verses are too often true of the rulers of this world. Power puffs them up in pride. There is no fear of God in their eyes. They live for today while taking the position they have gained for selfish advancement, fame, and pleasure.

We are offered two alternatives to greatness in this chapter. One is God's way of humbly coming into the New Covenant and joyfully living in that House of Prayer as a servant of Almighty God. The other is that of this world's leaders, gaining the respect of man to abuse it for selfish desires. One ends in eternal glory. The other ends in the judgement they deserve. Grace goes out to all. There are exceptions to evil watchmen. The Gospels tell us of the salvation of two noted leaders of Israel, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Grace is extended to us all. The call to come rings in our ears from both the Lord and from the world. One is offering true life, the other is a call to death while we live (1 Timothy 5:6). Both are costly. One ends in eternal glory, the other judgment. Choose this day whom you will serve.

## Questions

- 1 Who is God's salvation and the revelation of His righteousness?
- 2 How do we get the blessing of verse 2?
- 3 What two types of people are encouraged in verse 3?
- 4 Who specifically may this have encouraged? How?
- 5 How does God honor those who choose to honor Him in all they do?
- 6 Describe the bride in verse 6.
- 7 What is she promised in verse 7?
- 8 How valued is prayer to you?
- 9 Which verse tell us Gentiles are part of God's kingdom?
- 10 What was wrong with the leaders back then? Today?