

Isaiah 56:1-8

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[0 : 00] Our text for this morning is Isaiah 56. We're going to be going through verses 1-8. I'll give you all a moment to turn there.

But as we're looking at this text, I'll just say up front, we're going to be thinking about it somewhat broadly with the topic of missions as it pertains to the Old Testament and as it relates to God's overarching redemptive plan throughout the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

Many of us have asked questions before like, did God adjust his plan to save Gentiles or has he always planned that? Another way that can be asked is, does the Old Testament ever actually talk about God planning to save Gentiles?

And on top of that, you might ask, did God save Gentiles in the Old Testament or was it merely talk or hinted at in something that didn't happen until New Testament? And furthermore, why does God save?

To what end or what purpose is he saving has chosen? So this is a sampling of some of the things we're going to be talking about today through our text, Isaiah 56. So turning there, verse 1, thus says the Lord, Isaiah writes, thus says the Lord, keep justice and do righteousness for soon my salvation will come and my righteousness be revealed.

[1 : 24] Blessed is the man who does this and is the son of man who keeps and holds it fast. 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. But thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant.

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.

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, 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. From my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel declares, I will yet gather others to him besides those already gathered.

[2 : 36] So just real quickly here, a little context. Again, Clay preached on Isaiah 40 last week and did most of the grunt work for me in laying that. But I just wanted to note two things that are pertinent for our discussion today.

One, it is important to note that Isaiah is a contemporary of Hosea and Micah. And if you're familiar with Isaiah, if you're familiar with Hosea and Micah, you recall that those prophets are constantly calling out Israel and Judah for their sin, namely injustice and a lack of righteousness.

They're worshiping foreign gods. At this point, it was a nation that exploited the poor and the vulnerable while worshiping these false gods and only giving external ritualistic worship to Yahweh, not true single-minded devotion as he has called for.

So that's important to note. And the other thing I wanted to note contextually before we move on is that we need to bear in mind that Israel and Judah are on the verge of collapse. God has been announcing his judgment.

It's been withheld at times through the prayers of Hezekiah and other intercessions. But nonetheless, it is on the way, and the Babylonians will drag them away into captivity, into exile. And they're going to be in exile for a while, and there's going to be three dispersions.

[3 : 50] So we want to keep that in mind as we read this text with all that God's saying in it, all that God is planning, all that God is doing. So just looking at verses 1 through 2, and I've subtitled this

section, A Call to Righteousness.

And I'll read it again briefly, but we see here the Lord says, So this is not works-based salvation. Paul's very clear on this in Galatians. Tyler read this text for us this morning. We didn't collaborate. That just worked out. But Paul writes, For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law and do them. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law. For the righteous shall live by faith. Galatians 3, verse 10 through 11. So Isaiah himself understood the logical flow of this. He understood regeneration leading to sanctification.

[5 : 03] In other words, we have to be made right, made new. And then we can grow in holiness, grow in obedience. Regeneration precedes sanctification. And Isaiah recognizes this, and we see that in chapter 1, verses 16 through 17, as he records the Lord.

And the Lord said, Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. It's that regeneration language. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. There's the sanctification. That idea of turning. Total repentance. 180 degree. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. So again, the flow. It goes from washing, that renewal, that regeneration, to sanctification, to doing good, to stop doing evil.

So what is God saying in our first two verses back in our primary text, Isaiah 56? He's saying that the true people of God will and should act like people of God.

[6 : 08] They should be godly as a result of their faith. God is just. Isaiah 61.8. So as his people, we too should act justly. God is righteous.

Psalms 119.137. So as his people, we too should act righteously. Keeping justice. Doing righteousness. This is why God mentions the nearness of his kingdom.

And arriving in the later half of verse 1, for soon my salvation will come and my righteousness be revealed. This serves as a reminder and an incentive. Hey, I'm coming.

Let that incentivize you. In other words, we practice righteousness now because one day we will be made entirely renewed and completely obedient from the heart. And if we're not acting like citizens of heaven now, then we have no reason to think we will be someday.

All right, we should be putting on the things of God now. And we can only be the people of God by faith. And that faith produces those good works. It bears fruit, as Jesus himself said, I am the vine, you are the branches.

[7 : 13] Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. That's John 15.5. So we cannot keep justice nor do righteousness apart from Christ by faith.

So going back to our text, Isaiah 56, we see that God says all of this, justice and righteousness language, all of that is in relation to his covenant with Moses in verse 2, when he refers to those who keep the Sabbath.

Keeping the Sabbath is the most important sign of the Mosaic covenant. Exodus 31.12. And the Lord said to Moses, you are to speak to the people of Israel and say, above all, you shall keep my Sabbaths.

But this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy for you.

Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. So this is of vital importance. In other words, when an Israelite is looking at this text, they're not just hearing, oh, Sabbath law, they're hearing Mosaic covenant.

[8 : 24] Understanding this is in connection with covenant. So when we look at that, we've got to go, okay, well, what's going on? Well, it's an external sign like practicing righteousness and keeping justice.

It's revealing what's going on internally. It's revealing that regeneration, that salvation, that demonstrates one's belief in God to provide and sustain him. It is an exercise of faith because keeping the Sabbath requires people to not work seven days a week despite whatever shortage of food or what have you, whatever problem they may face.

In other words, it could potentially be a loss in the worldly sense when you're thinking about it pragmatically. So for them to give up a whole day of work in a time in which food is everything, right?

Farming, harvesting, that's how everything's driven at that time. That is an act of faith. So we see then it is entirely by faith that we are able to meet the standards of God because we are all lawbreakers, both Jew and Gentile, Romans 3.23.

So we show this faith by our works, as James and Paul most clearly articulate throughout their epistles. It is by faith that saints of both Old Testament and New Testament, Old Covenant, New Covenant, are saved.

[9 : 40] For even Abraham himself, the father of our faith, as you've heard the expression, was saved by just that, faith. So in short, we as a people of God, in light of these first two verses, we are called to be holy for he is holy, Leviticus 11.44.

And this only happens by faith. So moving on to our next section, verses 3 through 5, and I've entitled this a reminder of the promise to Abraham.

So we're talking about the Mosaic Covenant, and we're about to move into the Abrahamic Covenant. But picking up in verse 3, God says, So again, this is hearkening back to the Abrahamic Covenant.

God promised Abraham that he would father many nations, and that all of those nations would be blessed by him and his descendants. Genesis 22.18. In his offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

So again, looking back at Isaiah 56, we can see that the foreigner, right, the nations, right, the foreigner here, he is being brought near.

[11 : 19] He has as much reason to hope in God as the Israelites, as the physical seed of Abraham does. So they too, as the seed of faith, they have as much reason to hope in God, so long as they come to God on God's own terms, namely through his covenant.

But did foreigners ever actually become part of the people of God in the Old Testament? Did God save them during that time, right? This is that question I mentioned earlier. And the answer is, well, yes. There's actually a significant amount, but I'll note just four briefly.

Moses's wife, if you've been doing the Bible reading plan, you probably caught this this week, but Zipporah was a Midianite who joined the covenant by circumcising her son. Exodus 4.25-26.

So here you have a foreigner being blessed by Moses by way of covenant, being brought in, being grafted in. Two, many Gentiles, likely to be mostly Egyptian, joined the Israelites on their exodus. Exodus 12.3 says, And granted, many of them rebelled later on, but it's not a total rebellion by all of them. It's never really clear on that, but I think we can infer many of them probably remained faithful and partook of the covenant as Zipporah did.

[12 : 34] Another individual is Ruth. She was a Moabite who joined in the covenant with God and was part of Christ's lineage. Ruth 1.4, Matthew 1.5-6.

And finally, and probably most notably, most famously in the entire Old Testament, is the city of Nineveh. Repented and turned to God, and their salvation in a broad sense was confirmed by Christ himself, Matthew 12.41.

A great New Testament picture of these eunuchs and foreigners who entered the covenant that God is speaking of is found in Acts 8 with the Ethiopian eunuch. The Ethiopian eunuch, who is both a foreigner and obviously a eunuch, was reading Isaiah 53, 7-8, when Philip encountered him. Of course, we all know the story. Philip uses that text to preach to him about Christ, forgiveness of sins, and being made new and aright with God by way of Christ, by way of the cross, death, resurrection.

And that results in the Ethiopian repenting of his sin, and Philip baptizes him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is just one of many fulfillments of Isaiah's prophecy of the eunuchs and foreigners who become God's people.

[13 : 47] The Ethiopian eunuch came to God by way of God's new covenant, which includes the external sign of baptism. So though there's some discontinuity in the exact external signs, there's much continuity in terms of the meaning behind it, the faith behind it.

It's all by faith. And it's interesting, too, because Deuteronomy 23, 1 forbids any eunuchs from coming into the presence of Israel and the Lord for worship.

But here, Isaiah speaks of an elimination of that restriction. It no longer bears. It's not the same, right? Now the eunuch is called to serve God and be in right standing with him, as is the foreigner. So the eunuch should not be discouraged that he is a dry tree, as our text writes, which is meaning unable to reproduce, because God has made provision for the eunuch to keep the Sabbath and

enter a covenant relationship with him.

The reminder of the Abrahamic covenant means a lot of things, but we cannot overlook the missional aspect of it as it is so, I think, critical to this text, I think is central to this text in many ways. [14:56] Again, Genesis 22, 18 shows us that God's plan for Abraham, and by extension Israel, has always been to bless the nations, the foreigners, the eunuchs. This means God has always intended to save both Jews and Gentiles, as it's been part of his predetermined plan.

God is about the work of drawing a people for himself from every tribe, tongue, and nation, Revelation 7, 9. And Paul, the apostle, confirms the good news of the Abrahamic covenant, the gospel of it, when he writes, in the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Galatians 3, 8 through 9. And just a nice little verse here in the Old Testament, I think somewhat captures this well, beautifully, is from Isaiah's contemporary, Hosea.

We recorded the word of the Lord, and declared, and this is the Lord speaking, I will have mercy on no mercy, and I will say to not my people, you are my people.

And he shall say, you are my God. Isaiah 2, 23. And that's such a beautiful picture, when you consider it, because I'm just going off the faces here, but I think everybody in here is probably more Gentile than not.

[16:24] And this means, we too are grafted in, we too are part of that blessing, we too can be brought into that covenant. This is news that should cause us to leap for joy, we're not cut off from Israel, but we are brought in by faith.

And a quick word of encouragement as well, keep in mind the context. So going back, I mentioned Israel and Judah are about to be dragged out, away from the promised land, away from the covenant land.

They're going to be Babylon's captives for their sin. God's prophesying this through his prophets. They're being punished for their injustice and unrighteousness. That's about to happen, in just a short while.

And yet our text here is very encouraging. It seems to be talking about people being gathered on the holy hill, which we'll come back to. But meanwhile, the Babylonians, similar to the Assyrians, they're thinking that they were mightier, and that their gods were the true gods, and that the Hebrew God, our God, Yahweh, was weak.

They thought they were conquering Israel because of their greatness, their merit, their things, their whatever. But they failed to recognize that God was merely using them as a tool for his purposes, namely, the carrying out of Israel's punishment, which was most fitting for a couple reasons.

[17:41] They were guilty of injustice, as I've said so many times now, and now their punishment is that they will serve as slaves in an unjust Babylonian society. Another reason it's fitting is that Israel failed to be a blessing to the nations.

They failed to draw people in and gather them for worship, as God had ordained. But even now, in the midst of their punishment for their sin, God is still accomplishing his plan to gather people for Israel to be a blessing to the nations, as they are now about to be dragged out to the nations to proclaim the glory of God.

And two obvious examples of that are Daniel and Esther, and just consider the many ways in which they glorified God in pagan lands among the nations. So I'm mentioning all this to say that regardless of what persecutions we face, regardless of what trials or obstacles arise, and even despite our own sin, nothing will thwart or oppose the plans of God.

Nothing's going to get in his way of bringing the nations to gather, to worship. So God is calling his people to keep justice and practice righteousness while also reminding his people that he is using each individual to bring about multiplication, that we should all be messengers of his good news and witness the expansion of his kingdom as free captives from their sin.

But why? To what end is he doing this? And this leads us to our final section, verses 6 through 8. And I've subtitled this, Those God Gathers Will Worship.

[19:16] Starting in verse 6 again, 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, 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. My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel declares, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.

So the answer is clear. God gathers his chosen for the express purpose of worship. It is not enough that they are gathered. We know that God gathers people out of Egypt so that they would worship him, Exodus 7, 16.

But as he was giving the law to Moses on Mount Sinai, they gathered to rebel by worshiping the golden calf. It's all Exodus 32. In Matthew 21, starting verse 12, we see many gathered at the temple, but Jesus drives them out.

Why? Because they are not worshiping God rightly in his house of prayer. Further, their actions were wretched because this very house was meant to be a place of blessing for all people as they worshiped, and yet the merchants were using it as a den of thieves to rob people, to bring oppression, to serve injustice.

[20 : 43] The same problem we're seeing in Isaiah. They completely inverted God's expressed will and desire by their sinful rebellion. Again, it is not enough that the people are gathered.

They must be gathered to worship. And Isaiah 56 makes it clear that we are gathered to serve God, to love God, to offer sacrifices, prayers, and offerings. This is the language of worship, the language and actions of one who has truly denied himself, picked up his cross, and followed after Christ.

If you will, turn with me real quickly to John chapter 4, verse 20. This is the famous passage in which Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman at the well.

Again, I think there's a lot of things going on here that are striking in comparison with Isaiah 56. Picking up in verse 20, the Samaritan woman is speaking, and she says, Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you, referring to Christ, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.

Verse 21, Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

[22 : 07] We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

He's gathering them. Verse 24, God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, I know that the Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ.

When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. So a couple of observations. In the new covenant, the hill on which we worship is irrelevant.

Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but we are able to worship the Lord everywhere now that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We also see that Jesus, as the Son of God, echoes God the Father in Isaiah 56 by clearly asserting that he is saving people for himself to worship in spirit and truth.

We must be active about the work of obedience and doctrinal purity if we are to know and worship God rightly. It's all of 1 John. We know we love him if we keep his commands, we keep his word, we keep his law.

[23 : 25] We have to know him. And finally, Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the Holy One of Israel, whom we will worship one gathered for the marriage of the church and the Lamb of God.

Revelation 19, verse 6, Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty pearls of thunder, crying out, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exalt, and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, Write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true words of God. Then I, this is John speaking, Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, You must not do that.

I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The great multitude being made up of Jews and Gentiles, those whom God has called, they, we, will give him the glory.

[24 : 47] We will wear fine linen as we produce righteous deeds by faith, and we will be gathered and worship the Lord. So just three applications in closing.

We want to be about the works of missions. By prayer, by giving, by encouraging, by serving. We have many in our church that are senders and we have many in our church that are goers. Let's come alongside them in whatever capacity that we can to serve the Lord. And don't undermine prayer. I think so often people feel, oh, well, I don't have enough money to give or I don't have the ability or the means or calling or whatever you want to call it to go over and do that work. Well, prayer is one of the primary motives in which the church has grown and you see it throughout Acts. And that's something you can do and it's free. Right? It's easy. Let's be in prayer about missions. Let's be in prayer for missionaries and prayer for the lost. Second application, let's take heart in knowing that nothing can thwart or stop God's plan of salvation and restoration. We do not have to worry about persecution, poor political candidates, or anything that might seemingly be in our way.

[25 : 59] Obviously, a lot of things are going on right now in our country and some good, some bad, and, you know, we all have our interpretations of them, but regardless of what's happening, regardless of how many conspiracy theories are true or this or that, it's irrelevant.

It's not going to stop God. It's not going to thwart his plans to gather. It's not going to stop him from saving those whom he's called. And three, most importantly, and I think if we're doing the first two right, it results in doing this third one, we want to worship the Lord.

We do this by obeying his word, by keeping justice, practicing righteousness, by being salt and light to the earth, a blessing to it and its peoples. We should be thankful as Gentiles, foreigners to Israel, that God has always planned to graft us into his salvific plan.

let's express that thankfulness. We should be thankful that he is a just and righteous God who we can trust. And we are going to an eternal kingdom where there will be no injustice, oppression, wrongdoing, or any evil of any kind.

We're not going to worry about voter fraud or any kind of other worldly thing. In everything we do, we are going to glorify God. Everything falls under that umbrella and there is no substitute for it.

[27 : 16] Without it, missions, salvation, and everything becomes meaningless. We are saved for the purpose of worship and we go on mission and support missions for the sake of gathering God's people on his holy hill for worship.

So let's go to the Lord now in prayer and let's worship him.