

Title: Gospel-fruit
Text: Isaiah 56-57
Theme: Living out the imputed righteousness of Christ
Series: Isaiah #49
Prop Stmtnt The righteousness that Christ produces reflects him

Read Isaiah 56.1-2

After his Triumphant Entry, Christ went into the Temple and cleaned house. The authorities (religious leaders) had created a cash cow. It was another example of how people abused their authority to take advantage of the ones under their care. There was no shortage of sin in the world when Jesus came. He could have gotten wound up about any number of things, but the one issue that drove him to getting physical and in righteous anger, putting the hurt on some guys, was how these guys were stepping on the little people, in the name of God. The dealers in the Temple were placing obstacles in front of people. So, quoting from this chapter (Isaiah 56) Christ says that the Temple is designed by God to be a house of prayer, but they have turned it into a den of robbers (Jer. 7). Today, we are going to look at Isaiah 56 and 57 and we are going to see why Christ reacted the way that he did, and why his reaction was holy, righteous and pleasing to his Father. These men in the temple were abusing their position of power to make it appear as if they determined the standards of righteousness. They were holding this power all by themselves and used it to serve themselves. But this is in direct opposition to what God himself has done through Christ and it is egregious conflict with what God calls leaders to be. In this text we see that God reaches the outcasts of the world and causes them to be his very own. God names foreigners (those who are different than us), eunuchs (those who are scarred, broken, alone, labeled) and he makes a promise to them. The contrite and the humble are the ones that he dwells with and uses. You see, our Savior became outcast for us. The Servant poured himself out for us. Isaiah wrote about this and promised this in the previous chapters. He explained how the Messiah would come and carry the sins of the people and die for them. He spoke of the humiliation and the rejection of this suffering servant. But, what happens to those who trust in the Messiah? What happens to those who follow the One who is outcast for our sins? These last 11 chapters of Isaiah are written in view of that. They focus on how people are to live in view of the righteousness of God, and the tension that comes because we cannot do it as we should. Look at 56.1. Isaiah is writing with an eye on the salvation that is coming. My guess is, that Isaiah probably thought of the coming of our salvation as being spiritual, national, (international), and physical, and that it would probably all happen at the same time. Although Peter says (1 Peter 1.10-12) that the prophets wrote about things that they did not fully understand. Everyone was wondering how it would all fit together. One of the surprises then was the gap between the two comings of the Messiah. Isaiah's audience lived in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. We live after the fulfillment of his coming AND in anticipation of his return. We are able to live by sight in what has already happened and in faith in what is going to take place. So, there is a great deal that we have in common with the original audience to whom Isaiah wrote. But, let's step back for just a minute.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived in the southern kingdom of Judah around 700 BC. He wrote and preached most of his long life and was probably killed by Manasseh the exceedingly wicked king of Judah who drove the nation to the brink of destruction.

Isaiah 1-39 – Warning! God has to respond to your sin! (The Assyrian threat)

Isaiah 40-55 – Salvation! God is going to save you through judgment. (Babylonian exile)

Isaiah 56-66 – Righteous living! God's plan is to spread his glory through his children to the entire world.

Having made it clear that God is sending a Savior to die for the sins of his people, chapters 56-66 are a call to live in view of that salvation and they lay out the contrast between the people who truly love God and live for him and those who love themselves and live for their own pleasure. There is not only a contrast, but there is a great conflict between the two. Because sometimes, the people who say they love God and live for him, in reality love themselves and live for their own pleasure. They use the cover of devotion to God as a means to exert abusive and crushing power over others. Those who truly love God will not do that. Those who love God are those who love the humble Savior. They are moved by his humiliation and death for us. They are humbled themselves and identify with the rejected and outcast King. Do you now see what the church is? We are followers of the outcast. We are the assembly of the rejected. So, what does salvation-driven, humble living look like in this world? Chapters 56 and 57 lay that out in part. I believe that 56 and 57 belong together in a sort of chiasm.

These two chapters have some of the greatest promises and the most intense warnings ever. They give us great hope for fellow outcasts and severe warnings for those who think they can make their own rules and live in worship of self.

Introduction to the section: (56.1-2) Verse 1 is a command to pursue justice and righteousness in view of the salvation that is coming and verse 2 is a promise to those who do. God promises a blessing, contentment, happiness to the one whose faith in God is evidence in obedience to God, which is described as keeping the Sabbath and not doing evil. Those two things may seem a bit odd to be combined together, since the one (Sabbath) is so specific, while the other is so general. But, they actually are very helpful, since God is making it clear, that he is not satisfied with someone just keeping the rules externally (Sabbath) as a cover-up for evil and at the same time staying away from evil has to have some definition. God has given specific commands for his people. In the OT, the Sabbath was one such law for the nation of Judah. It is no longer a law for the church, though I think there is much to commend to it as a principle for rest and renewal that I explained in our Exodus and Hebrews series. But, I take verses 1-2 as an introduction to this section, telling us that we are to live in view of God's salvation and that God blesses those who do. The next section begins with a promise.

Promise:

1. **God rescues the outcasts.** (56.3-8)

Verses 3-5 focus on individuals, while verses 6-8 focus on people at large. The individuals that are named in verses 3-5 are foreigners and eunuchs, both of whom would have felt like outcasts in Isaiah's day in Judah. The point of these verses is....

A. Look at what God does for outcasts. (3-5)

Your world may reject you, may view you as damaged goods, one who does not fit in, but not God. Verse 3 says, "Don't say this" because (v.4) this is what God says! I will make a monument, (a marker of remembrance). I will remember the outcast. I will give the one who has no one to carry on his name, an everlasting name. I will give the one who cannot have a family a home and a family that is forever. All of this anticipates the NT teaching of adoption into the family of God. Every outcast who comes by faith to Christ (Suffering Servant) is placed into the family of God. That is what we already have and what we already are. This news is not just good news for you; it is good news for every outcast from all over the world.

B. Look at what God has for people all over the world. (6-8)

Why do you think this is here? Do you see what Isaiah is doing? He is anticipating our tendency to forget the fact that we are outcasts who by grace alone have been called to be God's. Judah did. They forgot that they were miserable slaves unable to rescue themselves in Egypt. They forgot that they were in bondage and could not escape. Now they are acting like they are the great ones and that everyone is inferior. That is such an enormous warning to us! God is not only reaching outcasts, but he wants us to not forget that and instead of thinking that we deserved this, we are to be overwhelmed at his mercy and to recognize that God's grace is for outcasts all over the world. That is the promise of these verses and that is why Christ is so incensed at the moneychangers in the Temple. They were taking the very place that was intended to be a gathering point for people from all over the world, to be a place that was telling people that they were not good enough.

Ask yourself this with me. Do you project to others that they are simply not good enough for you? Do you, in representing Christ, give people who are different than you the impression that they will never quite meet your standard, which could lead them to think "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"? In other words, I will never be accepted by God because I am not accepted by the people who claim to be accepted by God. Let me encourage you and challenge you in a couple of areas that I think that we have to continually be sensitive to. When a person comes here for the first time, they feel like an outsider. Now, this is true in a social sense. Common courtesy and manners says that we should be kind and welcoming. But, common courtesy and manners are not our goal – the gospel is! The gospel says, if you are an outcast, if you feel like an outsider, if you are estranged from feeling at home and belonging, then you are with the right people because we have all been there and we would all still be there if God had not rescued us by grace through faith in Christ. Now, we belong to a family. Now we belong to God. Now we belong to each other and we want you to belong as well. What does that look like to a person who is among us for the first time? How do you reflect that? Secondly, I am aware of the glorious fact that our body of believers is made up of people who come

from all sorts of different backgrounds. I love that! That is a fulfillment of this text and I find that so exciting and challenging. We do not all dress the same way. If everyone dressed super casual, then what would that say to the person who is dressed up? We would be saying – you don't belong here because you dress differently than we do. But we don't believe that! If everyone dressed to the nines, what would that say to the person who comes in casual attire? We would be saying, you don't belong here, because you do not dress like we do – and we don't believe that! Here is what we believe. Christ came to this earth and became an outcast and died on the cross for your sins. He made a way for you to belong to God. That is the only way that we can belong to God. But, because we belong to God through Christ, we belong to each other and we belong to everyone who belongs to God through Christ!

Warning:

2. **God will judge abusive shepherds.** (56.9-12)

That is why this warning is so severe. God warns those who presume to represent him either as a prophet (9-10) or a leader (11-12) and instead of humbling oneself to care for those under your care, these are abusing those for their own sakes. God is calling to the beasts of the field to come and attack the prophets and leaders who fail to care for their own. The point is this: judgment is coming fast and furious upon those who are charged with leadership and fail to protect.

A. **Warning those who fail to warn (prophets).** (9-10)

The watchmen (prophets) are judged because they did not speak up to warn their people. Watch dogs are no good if they do not bark when a wolf attacks the flock. If a prophet fails to warn people about sin, they are not just useless, they are dangerous because they give people a false sense of security. I know that warning people about sin and speaking up on these issues is not popular at all! But the elders cannot say that they care about you if we do not warn you about things that will destroy you. The reasons why we would not warn you are because we fear your reaction, or we do not want to live holy lives ourselves.

B. **Warning those who lead for their pleasure (shepherds – leaders).** (11-12)

These watchmen are not just lazy people-pleasers. They use their positions of leadership to feed their own greed, lust and debauchery. They love the sense of unaccountable power and feeling like they can do anything they want. They live above the law; therefore they can use the law for their own pleasure. These leaders will do anything to stay in power because they do not know the true reason and responsibility of power. If you are in a position of leadership and you really care for those that are entrusted to you, it is a heavy weight. One that you at times would gladly give up. Not these guys. The corruption trial of the former mayor of Detroit is such a grievous illustration of this. But what is worse, much worse, is the stories of pastors who abuse members of their flocks, in the name of God. I talked with a pastor in Detroit this week who told me that until the city gets leaders (plural) who have integrity and who care about the people and care about

truth more than they care about protecting their positions of power, that the whole things will go under. He is just one pastor. He says this as one who cares about feeding his people the Word of God and not giving them the garbage and theological toxic waste of the prosperity gospel. There is a church that meets down the street from him, where the pastor arrives in a white Bentley on Sunday mornings! When the only people prospering from leadership are the leaders, then something is diabolically wrong with the leadership.

Warning:

3. **God will judge idolaters.** (57.1-13)

These 13 verses are very graphic in their depiction of where this all leads. Here is the connection. Leaders who do not fear God and who live for their own pleasure, set the pace for their people. Whether this is a business, a “church”, a city, a country, or the world, here is what happens. And Judah’s experience is an illustration of it. People are so driven by their demands for pleasure and so controlled by their relentless pursuit to satisfy their desires that...

A. **No one cares that the righteous are disappearing from the land.** (1-2)

These two verses remind us that in the midst of this, there are godly people who are living in contrast to and in conflict with this. Some of you refuse to lie at work. You refuse to cut corners, make up stories and cover up failures with false information. You are a pain in the neck – aren’t you! Some people just want to fire you because you make them look bad. If you quit, no one would care. They have no idea that the only reason that they can stay in business is because of a measure of truth and honor. Once that is gone, the whole thing goes under.

Isaiah is painting a picture of a third world country, where leaders use their positions to enrich themselves and destroy anyone who threatens their position. The righteous person is truly grieved at this. He is an outsider, a lone voice and a pain in the neck to those in power. When he disappears, there is relief. The death of the righteous is a judgment on the land and a blessing to the righteous.

B. **Rejecting God results in a life completely ruled by lust.** (3-13)

These verses are some of the most grievous verses in the Bible. They tell the story of people who are so given over to sin that their lives are truly debauched. The language is graphic, but not in a gratuitous way. They depict what happens to people who reject God. The pattern is always the same. Sin ALWAYS goes from bad to worse. There are no exceptions. Lies breeds transgression which breeds lust, which breeds death. But, what is really behind idolatry? The idolater is trying to exert some kind of influence upon events. He attempts to find what powers are in control and he tries to bribe them. Even child sacrifice (5) was and is still done by people in order to appease the gods. This is what is so truly sad. Sacrificing to a god, does not appease a god, it just causes more carnage. But all of this is lost on the idolater. He is so blinded by his own sin, so bound to his relentless pursuit of power. He will do anything to get his way. (10) But, in the end, it

will never work. (13a) Isaiah is describing what many of the people of Judah had become. Their sin was flagrant, blatant, bold, and shameless. They were public and proud of their sin and hid their insecurities and doubts behind their determination to “party til we die.” Do they really believe that there is no judgment?

Promise:

4. **God dwells with the humble.** (57.14-21)

These two chapters end the way they began. The person who is outcast as far as the world is concerned is the one that God cares for.

A. There is no secret to access to God (14)

In contrast to those idolaters who attempt to construct elaborate rituals to impress the gods, (and others), who sacrifice things of great value, who stage impressive performances; Isaiah says that the way to God is obvious, but you have placed obstacles in the way. The way to God is through humility.

B. God dwells with the humble (15)

Who are the humble? They are the ones who know they are not perfect and do not pretend to be. Therefore, anything good that happens to them is a surprise, not an expectation.

When the Oakland A’s began the baseball season this year, no one predicted that they would do anything. They had a roster of no names and the league’s lowest payroll. But, they kept winning and their story in September was really amazing. When they lost the 5th game to the Tigers, that eliminated them from the playoffs, their fans, filling every seat, stayed to the end and gave them a standing ovation for a very entertaining season. Contrast that with the Yankee’s fans. They expected to win. After all, we are the Yankees. And everyone knows this about the Yankees fans, “We don’t date losers.” We will cheer you, but don’t get used to it. Because if you don’t keep it up, we will turn on you, because, we really don’t care about you, we only care about ourselves.

Do you know what this text is saying? It is saying that God dates losers. In fact, he will only date losers. This high and holy God, dwells only with those who realize that they need him and they have no hope without him, and that they have nothing to give him, nothing to earn his favor, nothing to manipulate him, nothing that he needs, and nothing that will give them any leverage. Anything that we try to manufacture or put on in an effort to cover our need only adds to it. Be honest before God. Admit your sin. Admit your failure. Admit your brokenness, your fears, your insecurities, your emptiness, your vain attempts at covering it up. And know this...

C. God restores those who repent (16-19)

There is healing (18), comfort (18) and peace (19) awaiting those who humble themselves before God and admit their sin before him and trust in Christ as the one who died in their place.

There are two ways to live.

- 1) Admit that you are a loser who needs God and find grace.
- 2) Pretend that you are not, and go your own way and face justice.