

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah  
Celebrating the Return - Part 2  
Isaiah 57-59  
February 3, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

Isaiah lived in the mid 700s B. C. He lived when his people were being attacked and threatened by the world empire, Assyria. The people were being tempted to trust in man - to form an alliance with their neighbors to the north, Israel, and/or with a pagan nation, Egypt, to the south. Isaiah warned against both those temptations. Israel was also tempted to take their eyes off God and worship what they could see - idols. Isaiah warned against that.

Because Israel was so focused on trying to walk by sight and not by faith, their spiritual lives were a shambles as well. They were simply living ungodly and immoral lives.

The last history we had in the preaching of Isaiah was in chapter 39 when Isaiah predicted that the Jews would be taken into Babylon in about 100 years. From chapter 40 onward, Isaiah predicted the exile and warned the Jews not to give up hope and not to give themselves over to idolatry in Babylon, but to remain faithful to God.

He promised the Jews that if they would remain faithful, God would bring them back home to Palestine. But in returning to Palestine, they would also have to repent of their sins and return to God, spiritually speaking. There is always the temptation to give up walking by faith. In this particular text, Isaiah is going to return to his contemporary audience, the one who was living *before* the exile and warn them again that the reason why they are suffering and will suffer is because of sin. Sin is always the problem for man.

At the end of chapter 56, Isaiah warned about the heartlessness and selfishness of Israel's leaders. At the beginning of chapter 57, Isaiah continues that rebuke...

ISRAEL'S SINS: INJUSTICE: 57:1-2:

As we finished chapter 56 last week, we made note that Isaiah is (again) criticizing the leadership of the Jews. Here, Isaiah continues that criticism is saying that the "righteous man" perishes - at the hand of the Jewish leaders. And few people care - "no man takes it to heart." Devout men are taken away; no one understands. Yet, the righteous man is taken away, out of the evil in this world (vs 1).

The righteous man will enter into peace, resting on his bed, because he has a relationship with the God of heaven. Observe (vs 2) that he has peace *because* he "walked in his upright way." Your lifestyle will impact where you spend eternity, pure and simple.

ISRAEL'S SINS: IDOLATRY - 57:3-13:

Israel is, once again, warned of idolatry. The temptation to put your trust in someone or something besides the God of heaven is a perennial problem and, although we don't see idolatry as a problem among the Jews in the first century, it is always a temptation. Of course, the generation that *Isaiah is still talking to* is a generation of Jews who have *not yet* experienced the 70-year exile in Babylon. They *still* are going to be tempted to worship idols to save themselves and their country from distress.

So, in a lengthy rebuke of this behavior, in verses 3-13, Isaiah warns of idolatry and its evils. He calls to those who are "sons of a sorceress." "Son of" is a Hebrew idiom to refer to

someone who has the quality or characteristics of something so this is someone who has the quality or is characterized by sorcery - i.e., they worship idols. They are “offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute.” These may/may not be literal prostitutes but prostitution was often associated with pagan worship so there is likely false religion involved anyway. “Being children should be understood metaphorically as followers committed to the same ideology” (Smith, 549).

Some of the Jews are “children of rebellion” (vs 4) and “offspring of deceit.” Verse 5 views their pagan idol worship that happened among the trees, where they cut down their gods and worshiped them. As a part of Molech worship, they sacrificed children (2 Kings 23:10).

Verse 6 - the rocks and stones are their inheritance; they pour out drink offerings to these rocks and offer grain offerings to them. “...these people will receive their inheritance not from their gracious and compassionate covenant God but from the dead and the pagan gods of the underworld” (Smith, 552). Verse 7 - they offered sacrifices on the high and lofty mountains.

Verse 8 pictures more practices from the pagan worship and the immoral lifestyle that accompanied that pagan worship. Young makes a powerful point (404): “To commit adultery with a friend of the husband is wicked; to do so with an enemy who would destroy the husband is the height of abandoned wickedness.”

Verse 9 - they hobnobbed with the kings and those in power; the point being that they did not trust in God. Verse 10 - the path their sin took was a long path, along a winding road but they never thought about where that road ended. They never said, “It is hopeless.” They kept right on going down that same path.

Since God had not spoken up immediately and miraculously every time they thought of sinning, they were not worried about God nor fearful of Him (vs 11). When they lied, they did not think about God. Yet, God has spoken, even then through the prophet Isaiah, God was speaking, declaring what is righteous (vs 12), what makes righteousness, and the works they were doing. “Thus today, out-and-out denial of biblical faith is rarely a problem. The problem is the prostitution of it” (Oswalt, 482).

So, notice verse 13 that when they “cry out,” God says, “Let your collection of idols save you.” Yet, the wind will carry them away. It is the one who takes refuge in God who will inherit the land and possess God’s holy mountain, that is, be members of that spiritual house of God, the temple of the Messiah predicted in 2:1-4.

#### GOD BRINGS HEALING AND RESTORATION - 57:14-21:

We have seen the imagery of a highway several times before (35:8; 40:3-4). We understand that it was John the baptizer who paved the highway for the coming of Jehovah God in the person of Jehovah Incarnate. Here, Isaiah calls on the Jews to help prepare that way: “Build up, build up, prepare the way” (vs 14). “Remove every obstacle out of the way of My people.” Specifically, the Jews needed to remove idolatry, idols, immorality, and unfaithfulness so that Gentiles could more easily see the true God of heaven and call on Him for righteousness. They will, one day, return to the land of Canaan, but that will pale in importance to returning to God spiritually.

Speaking of that “holy mountain” from verse 13 and the “way” prepared (verse 14), God (in verse 15) says that He dwells on a high and holy place but He only dwells with those who are contrite (who feel remorse and are penitent) and “lowly of spirit.” He brings them into His

presence to “revive” them again. “No greater blessing can come to the heart oppressed by sin than the presence of the living God” (Young, 411). “The only people who have any hope of living with him are those who recognize who he is and who they are not” (Oswalt, 488).

Because, He will not be angry forever. If He did, there would be no hope. Man’s spirit would “grow faint before” Him (vs 16). It was because of the “iniquity” of the Jew that made God angry and He struck the sinner and “hid His face” and was angry. Disappointingly, the sinner “went on turning away, in the way of his heart” (vs 17).

But, being a God of compassion, God saw his ways and healed him (vs 18). God will lead him and restore comfort to him and to those who mourn over their sins. When God forgives, verse 19, man’s response is worship. God “creates the praise of the lips,” when the sinner realizes there is “peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near.” Peace? Spiritual peace. Reconciliation. “I will heal him.” “He who is far” is probably a reference to Gentiles and “he who is near” is probably a reference to the Jew. Paul uses a similar expression in Ephesians 2:17. We, today, express praise to God with our lips (Hebrews 13:15 quotes this passage).

On the other hand, again, Isaiah reminds the Jews that there is no peace to the wicked. They will continue to be and always will be tossed about in a sea of rebellion and disquietude with waters tossing up refuse and mud (vs 20). Put simply, “there is no peace for the wicked” (vss 20-21).

#### TRUE DISCIPLESHIP - 58:1-2:

Thus, it is time to call those who *want* righteousness to return to God with humility, faith, repentance, and obedience. The verbs here are 2nd person singular so I’m not sure if this is God speaking to Isaiah or Isaiah speaking to an individual. But, the message is the same: “Declare to My people their transgression; to the house of Jacob, their sins” (vs 1).

These individuals who respond to God “seek Me day by day,” God says (vs 2): “to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God.” The Lord goes on to say, “They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God.”

Motyer (407): “This is indeed model religion: God-centered (2a), with concern for truth a priority (2b-d), living by the word of God (2e), and using the ordinances as true means of grace (2f).”

#### TRUE FASTING - 58:3-12:

The people respond with false humility: “Why have we fasted and you do not see?” “Why have we humbled ourselves and you do not notice?” (vs 3). You can easily hear the same message to people today: “Why have we pulled out our orchestras, God, and you did not see? Why have we called on our women to preach the message to us and you do not notice?” Do you see the same point? Religiosity is *not* the mark of *spirituality*. Obedience is. Obedience was the mark of faithfulness then and it is the mark of faithfulness today. “The worship is insulting, and the emphatic *me* makes clear that it is the holy God who is insulted” (Young, 416).

See how God responds in verse 3: “Behold, on the day of your fast, you find your desire, and drive hard all your workers.” In other words, #1, they were doing what *they* wanted to do, not what *God* wanted them to do and; #2, they were exploiting their workers which means their religion was not affecting their lives anyway. What good was the fasting doing them?

So, verse 4, they were fasting “for” contention; that was the end result. “Contention and strife,” to strike others with a wicked fist (vs 4). They were not fasting in a way to allow their voices to be heard “on high,” that is, by the God of heaven. “They may be afflicting their bodies, but they are not afflicting their souls” (Oswalt, 498).

Were they fasting like God wanted them to fast? “For a man to humble himself” (vs 5)? That was the point of fasting - to show real humility, not to show super Christianity. It was for “bowing one’s head like a reed, for spreading out sackcloth and ashes.” That is the type of fast that would be acceptable to the Lord.

The fast *God* chooses to accept is the fast that “loosens the bonds of wickedness,” when the Jew turns his heart back to God and gets his life right with God’s laws and expectations. God’s fasting would “undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke” (vs 6).

The fasting that *God accepted* would be fasting that would lead the Jew to dividing his bread with the hungry, not exploiting the worker (vs 7), bringing the homeless poor into the house, covering the naked with clothes and helping those who need help, our fellow human beings.

If the Jew were to obey God’s word, fasting with the heart God would accept, then light would break out like dawn, showing them the proper way to glorify God (vs 8). Their recovery into a right relationship with God would be speedy and their own good works, their “righteousness,” would go before them like a good reputation proceeds before someone. The glory of the Lord would follow behind them like a rear guard.

If the Jew were to obey God’s word and fast with the right attitude, then they will call on God and He would answer (vs 9). They would cry and God would respond, “Here I am.” If they remove the yoke of sin from their midst, remove the accusatory pointing finger, and speaking wickedness (those are the things they ought to be truly fasting “from,” rather than meat and bread), if they were to give themselves to the hungry (vs 10), and satisfy the desire of those afflicted, then their light of a godly example will rise up in the darkness and the gloom would dissipate like darkness in the midday.

Then, the Lord would be their perpetual guide and satisfy the desires of their hearts, even in scorched places (vs 11). He would give strength to their bones and they would become like a well-watered garden, like a fountain of living water, springing up into everlasting life (compare John 4:13-14).

The faithful remnant will rebuild the ancient ruins, raise up the age-old foundations, and be called the “repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which they dwell.” (vs 12). They will have a renewed, restored, reconciled relationship with Jehovah God. Incidentally, “rebuilding the ancient ruins” is picked up by Amos 9:11-12 and quoted by the apostle Peter in Acts 15:16-18, referring to the church of Christ.

#### TRUE SABBATH OBSERVANCE - 58:13-14:

To summarize what Isaiah wants to say about the sabbath, which is only an example of what the Jew ought to be and have been doing relative to obeying the Law of Moses, Isaiah says in verse 13: “Because of your sabbath observance, if you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable,

and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasures and speaking your own word,...

"Then," Isaiah preaches, "You will take delight in the Lord, and" He will make you ride on the heights of the earth. He will feed the Israelites with the heritage of Jacob their father. To emphasize the truthfulness of what Isaiah has to say, he again refers to his own inspiration: "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

"Is our religion for our 'pleasure' or for God's - that is the issue" (Oswalt, 508).

### ISRAEL'S SIN - 59:1-15:

Isaiah's introductory word here, "Behold," is a way for him to summarize what he has been saying - "Look, it's not the fact that God *cannot* save you or that He doesn't *want* to save you." "The Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear" (vs 1).

Rather, it is "your iniquities" that have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (vs 2). Your problem is *your* problem - sin. Once again, "iniquity" is used 30 times in Isaiah. "Sin" is used 22 times. In fact, all the way through verse 15, Isaiah is going to be talking about their sins.

Verse 3 - their hands were defiled with blood. Their fingers were defiled with iniquity. Their lips had spoken falsehood. Their tongue had muttered wickedness. Observe the number of body parts that are mentioned by Isaiah in this text, illustrating the point that sin affects the *whole person*: hand, ear, face, fingers, lips, tongue, feet.

Verse 4 - They were not taking each other to court based on righteousness. In fact, they were trusting in confusion, speaking lies, conceiving mischief, and producing iniquity. "They may think they are acting sensibly but actually it is all nonsense: to all appearance they have reached a thought-out position - trust the government, trust armed strength, trust alliances, trust the fundamental instincts of people of goodwill - but the fact is that all trust, except that reposed in the Lord, is trusting *tohu*, the unstable" (Motyer, 412).

Verse 5 - The end result of their behavior was bad - adder's eggs; and worthless - spider's webs. The one who eats the eggs die. Snake break out of the eggs. That is, the end result of their behavior was bad. How picturesque, if unnerving to show how the fruit of their behavior was death.

Verse 6 - The webs they wove would not serve them any good - they would not be clothed in what they wove. Their works are works of iniquity and in their hands was violence.

Verse 7 - Their feet run to evil; they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts were thoughts of iniquity; their highways - rather than a highway of holiness - were highways of devastation and destruction.

Verse 8 - In fact, they do not even know the way of peace because there is no justice in their tracks. They have made their own paths crooked and the one who walks on that path does not know peace.

Verse 9 - Beginning here, it almost sounds like Isaiah is making a confession on behalf of his people, much like Daniel does in Daniel 9. Notice the first personal plural pronouns. "Justice is far from us; righteousness does not overtake us. We hoped for light but, behold, darkness. We hoped for brightness, but we walk in gloom. "Authentic hope is willing to wait,

trust in God's timing, and follow God's just ways because trust is securely founded in the person of God who sovereignly planned the future and has all the power necessary to accomplish what he has planned (8:17; 14:26-27)" (Smith, 595).

Verse 10 - We grope like blind men. We grope and stumble at midday, like dead men.

Verse 11 - We growl like bears and moan sadly like doves. We hope for justice but there isn't any. We hope for salvation but it is a long way away.

Verse 12 - Why? "For our transgressions are multiplied before you. And our sins testify against us; For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities." Notice the piling up of synonyms for sin in this verse and 13:

Verse 13 - Transgressing and denying the Lord and turning away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving in and uttering from the heart lying words.

Verse 14 - Justice is turned back and righteousness stands far away. Why? Because "truth" has stumbled in the street and "uprightness" cannot enter.

Verse 15 - Indeed, Isaiah preaches. "Truth is lacking." "He who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey" to Satan.

#### GOD'S DELIVERANCE - 59:16-21:

Picking up with the last half of verse 15, Isaiah turns to the Lord and His work of salvation, of deliverance. The Lord saw the situation of the Jew and it displeased Him that there was no justice among His people. God is going to answer this prayer of Isaiah and the faithful Jews whom Isaiah represents. God will bring salvation and it will be in the person of Jesus Christ.

There was no man to be a leader (vs 16); no one to intercede on behalf of the Jew. So, what does the Lord do? He steps in and fills the gap. With His own arm, He brings salvation; His own righteousness upholds Him.

In fact, the Lord God is clothed in righteousness (vs 17); He wears it as a breastplate. He is clothed with salvation; He wears it as a helmet. He is clothed with vengeance against His enemies; He wears it as clothing. And, He wears zeal; it is a mantle. "All this figurative language is a strong way of saying that God devoted Himself to the salvation of His people" (Young, 438).

Verse 18 - God is going to do what is right for or against those who deserve what they receive. Wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies.

Verse 19 - The result will be that they will fear the name of the Lord from one end of the globe to the other, from west to the rising of the sun. He will come with power, like a rushing stream driven by the wind.

Verse 20 - Indeed, a Redeemer will come to Zion. We know that Redeemer is Jesus Christ. Paul quotes this passage in Romans 11:26-27, referring to the first coming of Jesus Christ. People who believe in premillennialism apply the passage to the second coming of Christ. There are no reasons to believe that the promise is yet to be fulfilled. The Redeemer will come to "those who turn from transgression in Jacob." If you repent of your sins, God will provide the Redeemer.

Verse 21 - Then God says that His word, His message is going to be completed, fulfilled. Neither the Spirit nor the words put in Isaiah's mouth will fall to the ground from generation to generation, "from now and forever," until God accomplishes what He is going to accomplish.

Next week:  
The Grand Finale of God's Restoration - Part 1  
Isaiah 60-61