

The Great Invitation **Isaiah 56: 1 – 12**

Our sermon text this morning will be Isaiah chapter 56. We will look at the whole chapter. I'll attempt to cover the whole chapter, so we're going to read Isaiah 56 in its entirety. Before that reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, our God and our King, we pray that you would speak to us now from your word, and that we would be truly worshipful in our hearts, worshiping in spirit and in truth as we hear the word read aloud, and that you would speak to us. I pray, Father, you would help me as I speak. I pray you would help us all as we listen. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 56, starting at verse 1: “¹ Thus says the LORD: ‘Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed. ² 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.’

“³ 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.’ ⁴ For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵ 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.

“⁶ ‘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—⁷ 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.’

“⁸ The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, ‘I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.’

“⁹ All you beasts of the field, come to devour—all you beasts in the forest. ¹⁰ His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. ¹¹ 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. ¹² ‘Come,’ they say, ‘let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure.’” Amen, and may God bless His word to us.

So we're at Isaiah 56—ten chapters to go. Isaiah 56 through to Isaiah 66 forms a unit. It's not necessarily a whole separate prophecy to everything that has come before. It's more a response and a development of the themes that have come before, and it's more a response and a development of the salvation, or the theme of salvation, through the work of the servant that God has promised to us, from Isaiah chapter 40 through to Isaiah chapter 55.

Isaiah 56. We're going to look at it in three sections: Verses 1 to 2, I've got a subheading and that is, "A People Transformed"; verses 3 to 8, I've got a subheading, "True Israel Gathered"; and verses 9 to 12, I've got a subheading, "Judgment of the False Shepherds." Let's get into it.

Isaiah 56, verses 1 to 2. Let's read it: "¹ Thus says the LORD: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed. ² 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.'"

This saying, direct from God through the prophet Isaiah, comes immediately after, remember, the revelation of the worldwide salvation that is to be preached out into all the world, due to the work of God's servant.

And Isaiah is also speaking, not only to all the world and to the church throughout history, he's speaking to a people in his day, in his time, right where he is. And he's telling those people, all of them, he's telling them this: The Lord is coming. The Lord is coming. There's a similarity between those to whom Isaiah was preaching and to us.

Their similarity is, they're waiting for the coming Lord, the coming Savior, the coming servant. He's coming to work a ministry of salvation. He's coming to purchase a people for God. We're waiting for that same Lord. We're waiting for Him to come again. We're waiting for His return. We wait for the same God. So though Isaiah speaks particularly to his people in his time, he's speaking to us. We have plenty in common with the believers who heard the preaching of Isaiah.

We all believe in the same Savior. They believed in the coming Savior; we believe in the Savior who has come. They believed in the works that were to be done; we believe in the works that have been done. They were waiting for that Savior; we're waiting for that Savior. They were waiting for that Savior to come to the mountain of God, and to the temple of God. Well, Scripture now tells us that all the earth is filled with His glory, that Jesus has taken possession of all the earth. We're waiting for Jesus to come and fill the earth, to take all the earth. We're waiting for the same Savior.

And so Isaiah is now saying there is a certain attitude. Those who would call themselves believers, those who would be converts, there's something about them that is different to the people around them. Look at what he says: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed." Live as godly people in an ungodly world. Be a testimony to the people around you of my goodness. Obey my law.

Salvation has always been about taking disobedient people and making them obedient. It's always been about taking people who are sinners and transforming them into people who are faithful. Verse 2 pronounces the blessing: "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."

So has Isaiah slipped off into pharisaical legalism there? No, he hasn't. What Isaiah is saying is that the people who are the people of God are visibly the people of God. They do the things that set them apart in the world as the people who have received salvation. He's not saying that the

people who obey these commands, in obeying the commands are earning their salvation. He's saying that the people who are called by the gospel that we heard about in what we call Isaiah 55, the chapter just before, the people who are called by that gospel are changed by that gospel.

Look particularly at Isaiah 55, verse 6: "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

What does it look like in Old Testament Israel to be a wicked man who has forsaken his way, and an unrighteous man who has cast off his wicked thoughts? You look like a worshiper. You become a worshiper. How did you worship in Old Testament Israel? You worshiped through attending at the temple. This was the center of worship. They're not earning their salvation by coming to the temple to worship. They're worshiping at the temple, and they're keeping the Sabbath, keeping the Sabbath with a blessed and joyful heart, because they love the Lord.

So what's that saying to us? Well, it's saying to us what we already know from the writings of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, for example. You don't earn your salvation, but you certainly live as a person who has been transformed. Righteousness does not earn us any credit with God. Obedience does not put God in our debt. But if there is not obedience to be seen in our lives, we have no right to claim that we are the people who have been called.

If we have not been transformed, if we have not been made visibly the people of God, we have no right to claim that we are the people of God. And we're not earning salvation, and we're not making ourselves better than the people around us, and we're not earning God's blessing—but we are responding to the salvation that has been given to us as a free gift. And that's what Isaiah's speaking of here. The people who trust in God, they're transformed. They're the true Sabbath-keepers. What did Jesus think of the Sabbath-keepers of Judah when He came, when He walked in the land of Judah? What did He think of them?

Turn to Mark chapter 2, for example. I mean, they made a big song-and-dance about their supposed observance of the Sabbath. It was certainly very important to the religious leaders in the days of our Lord. Mark chapter 2, let's start reading at verse 23.

“²³ One Sabbath he,” that is Jesus, “was going through the grainfields, and as they,” that is Jesus and His disciples, “made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.” ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ ²⁵ And he said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?’ ²⁷ And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.’”

What's Jesus saying about the Sabbath? He's saying the Sabbath is a gift of God to you. It's a gift. It's a day set apart for rest and for worship, that we may gather into the presence of God. You weren't made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not more important than you, as a Christian. The seventh day is not more important than us. I'm not saying it's unimportant. And we

worship now on, biblically speaking, the first day, or the eighth day—the day after God finished creation. And many believe that ties it into the new creation. We worship on the first day, or the eighth day. It depends on how you want to look at it, but we still worship on that day in a seven-day cycle. And it was made for us, that we may enjoy it, that we may worship therein, that we may gather into the presence of our God as a corporate body.

And Jesus, the Son of man, is the Lord even of our Sabbath. He's the one we gather to worship. He's the one in whose presence we are called. He's the one in whom we find salvation. It's because of Him that we gather to worship. And back in Isaiah 56, verse 2, we keep our hands from doing any evil. Is Isaiah saying there's such a thing as sinless perfection? I don't believe so, I don't believe he's saying that there is in this life any such thing. But what he's saying is that you can just see in someone who's truly a believer that they restrain themselves from sin, that they hold themselves back from wickedness. There's something about them. They're different to the people around them, and they're different because God has transformed them.

And notice that these people are doing these things because they're in the attitude of waiting. Just looking again at verse 1 of Isaiah 56: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed." Be waiting. Be living in expectation. Be living in such a way that as if the Lord were to return today, you would not regret the way that you live. You would not regret the very way that you do things.

Now, we won't get to boast in His presence. You know we won't, I know we won't. It's not as though if the Lord returns today we'll say, "Look, here we are on Sunday! Aren't we good?" But you've got to understand, you know, one of the things He said, He said, "Will He find faith in Israel?" Well, His church is the true Israel, the true offspring of Abraham, born through Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham. And He's coming again, looking for what? Faith in Israel. He's looking for life in His church. You don't want to have things that you wish you weren't doing.

God's people should gather on God's day, which has been set apart now as the Lord's Day—we call it Sunday—to worship in the presence of the living God. Why? Because we have been transformed. The longer I've been a Christian, the more of a Sabbatarian I've become—to put it in the terms that many speak in—the more convinced I've become that Sundays are to be set apart as a day of worship. I'm not saying that this must be some kind of legalistic setting apart. I'm not saying that Mum's got to roast a dinner on Saturday night so she doesn't cook on Sunday morning. I'm not saying any of that stuff. I'm not saying those things, but I'm saying that this day is a day for the worship of the living God.

And one of the things that we notice as we look around this town around about us is that Sunday, as far as they're concerned, is a "sleep-in, relax, and do whatever you please" day. Do whatever you please. Ride your pushbikes, sit in the coffee shops, have a coffee, have a chat. I don't even know what time the local pubs open, but I'm pretty sure they open at about 11:00 o'clock or 10:30, or something on a Sunday morning. Turn up then, have a few beers, have the kitchen at the pub cook you a nice dinner. Spend the day doing whatever you please. I'm not even talking about whether or not they're getting particularly drunk, stoned, or bombed out of their brains, though I know many do. I'm simply saying that this day is not set apart as the Lord's Day.

We have no influence. You can see by the way the Lord's Day is spent that we the church, and other faithful churches in this town, are actually having no impact or influence on the way that the people around us are living, because of the things that they're doing on a Sunday. We can see that. And isn't that hard, and hard to swallow? And don't we just feel in our hearts that it ought to be different, that even the unbelievers ought to be fearing and looking to hear the word of God? Don't we just feel in our hearts that there's something wrong here?

My friends, we in the church in Australia and here in Cooma, we so desperately need the work of the Spirit of God. We so desperately need an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. Apart from that, we're doomed. And I'm not trying to be melodramatic. We're doomed. You look at the way elections went in Victoria. All things happen according to the will of God, but look at the people who were elected. Look at the policies that they have in place and that they're planning to put in place. The people voted for their own destruction.

It's coming. Whether it comes in our lifetimes or the next, I don't know, no idea of any of those things. But one way or another, the correction will come, because all of the earth is the Lord's, and He will not allow a rebellious people to continue to rebel against Him. And one of the signs that we are a rebellious people is that Sunday means almost nothing in our nation. It means nothing except a day to do as you please. It's not the Lord's Day, it's "my day." That's the attitude of the people. It's not the Lord's Day, it's my day to do as I wish—to relax, to satisfy myself, whatever I feel like doing. And that is sad.

That is sad, and I apply it to us with sadness, yet the passage before us is not filled with bad or sad news. Let's look at verses 3 to 8. True Israel gathered. God's true people gathered. Isaiah 56, verse 3:

“³ 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.’ ⁴ For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵ 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.

“⁶ ‘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—⁷ 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.’ ⁸ The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, ‘I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.’”

Let's just turn straight to Deuteronomy chapter 23. I'll read to you three verses. Deuteronomy 23, verses 1 to 3: “¹ ‘No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD. ² No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD. ³ No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever.’”

And what did Isaiah say? The foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord; the eunuch who keeps the Lord's Sabbaths and holds fast the covenant; the foreigner who loves the name of the Lord—what does God say? Looking at Isaiah 56, verse 7: “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.”

A eunuch, if you don't know it, is a man who has been castrated, usually for the service of the king, and it's basically meant to make them totally unable to assault any of the king's harem. It makes them incapable of doing that harm. And in Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are told that they should have none in their nation. Kings of Israel were never to make men eunuchs. But if there were men in the nation who suffered such a fate, they were not to enter the assembly of the Lord.

What can we see there? Well first of all, God blesses fruitfulness. Male and female, He made them. Male and female. One of the things about homosexuality is it's a form of self-imposed infertility. You don't get babies from men with men, or women with women. God made mankind to be male and female, and in being male and female, they bore His image and they gave life. They gave birth. Eve was “the mother of the living.”

So the law of the Lord, I think in a reflection of those things, therefore commands that the infertile—infertile men—are not to be gathered into His assembly. But the law of the Lord is not the gospel. The gospel comes from the law, and the gospel fulfills the law, and the gospel sends God's people back to the law in faithful obedience, but the law of the gospel is not the law.

Isaiah tells us that these people who once had nothing to do with the worship of God, not only are they invited into the gathering of the people, not only are they drawn into those who are worshipers, but look at what God says. “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.”

My friends, when they're called, when they're saved, when they repent, no matter where they're called from, no matter what they're saved from, no matter what sin they're guilty of, the called, saved, repentant people who are called to gather into the presence of God—their offerings, their sacrifices, and their prayers are accepted by God. They become truly, completely, and totally the people of the living God. They receive all the same benefits that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had. They become a part of the children of Abraham.

This gospel is a gospel of salvation. It's a gospel that united repentant sinners into one body. It's a gospel that crosses the boundaries of race and of ethnicity. It's a gospel that crosses the boundaries of sin. And it draws people in, and it draws them into a true and a genuine salvation.

As I read those things, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples,” I'm reminded of what it says in Romans chapter 12, the first two verses of Romans chapter 12, which read, “¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Notice what Paul says concerning these Romans, amongst whom there would certainly have been a mix of Gentiles and Jews. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” These people who have been physically deformed, these people who have been made eunuchs—and I honestly do believe that we can expand that category to include all kinds of sin that bring about infertility: homosexuality, sexual uncleanness, you name it—they become an acceptable living sacrifice, offering their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

That’s why we cannot accept, for example, the category of the homosexual Christian, or the gay Christian. You can’t accept that category, no more than you can accept the category of the pedophile Christian, or the adulterous Christian. If they are a Christian, what they were no longer applies; if they are regenerate, what they were is not what they are now.

You can’t modify this concept of being a Christian by identifying it with a sin. It’s a lie. The moment we accept that, you really don’t have a gospel. You really don’t have such a thing as justification or regeneration. You just don’t have them. You just take all the doctrines upon which the gospel is built, and just throw them out—they’re gone! The moment you accept that there’s such a thing as a gay Christian, you don’t have good news to preach.

Why am I hitting that topic? Because that’s the one that’s in the world today. That’s where the battle is. That’s where the fight is today, here, now. I could pick any other subject. You don’t have a druggie Christian; you don’t have a pedophile Christian; you don’t have a murderous Christian. But the action today, the battle today, is this concept of sexual purity, most particularly sexual impurity in the form of the homosexual and gay movement, and they want us to accept that there is such a thing as a gay Christian. What they want us to believe is that they were born the way they are, and it can’t be changed; therefore, God made them that way; therefore, God wants them to be that way.

In other words, there’s no such thing as sexual sin. As soon as you accept that, it’s all gone. It’s all gone. As soon as you accept that, it’s all gone. What God says is gone. Why? Well, if I accept their argument that they were born that way, then let me, for example, say, You must therefore accept that I am adulterous Christian. God made me with a desire for many, many, many women. It’s just the way He made me. And why should I repent, for example? (Don’t take that literally; it’s a “for example.”)

What I’m saying is, the moment that we accept that their sin can be accepted into a church, we’re accepting any sin, and we have no grounds upon which to talk to people about their need of repentance, and to enact church discipline, and preach the doctrine of regeneration. When you speak to them, if you deal with them carefully and talk to them carefully and understand what they’re saying, what you’ll find is that they don’t actually believe that to be born again is to be anything. They don’t believe that regeneration is a real transforming change, worked by the Spirit of God. Simply put, they’ll say something like, “Look, I believe in Jesus and I have all the same desires that I once had.” Therefore, there’s really no change when a person is born again. I would say, very carefully—I mean, I have to know each individual, and as I say this, just understand something, there’s a difference between pastoral application, dealing with individuals one person at a time, and just stating a general principle.

General principle: If the person does not believe that they've been changed, whether they know it or not, they're not actually regenerate. All right, I'm not saying that they have to have some certain particular experience. You don't have to become a Christian through some emotional outburst in front of a thousand witnesses. You don't have to become a Christian by signing the card. You don't have to become a Christian according to any particular formula. There are different people in this room and different ways of conversion for all of us. But you do have to know that you are a Christian and that you have been changed. You do have to take your identity from Christ who has saved you.

I can understand anyone telling me the lust is still there and I fight against it. That's the Christian life. That's the Christian life—you fight against the lust, you fight against the flesh. But the flesh is not your definition, it's not who you are. The wickedness that once ruled over you no longer rules over you. That's what the Apostle Paul is speaking of in Romans chapter 6: Consider yourself to be dead to sin. You have been crucified with Christ. It's there, it has to be fought, but it does not rule me.

And that's the gospel that we have to preach—the gospel of faith and repentance. Learn to hate your lusts, learn to hate your sins, learn to divide yourself off from them. Do not allow them to define you. If you're happy for them to define you, there's a very high probability that you are fooling yourself in your Christian proclamation, in your claim that you are a convert. God will gather them all into His kingdom. They come from any background, they come from any place, they come from any race. They were once idolaters, they were once wicked, but He has transformed them. He has changed them. He has made them His own people.

Looking at verse 7 of Isaiah 56, God says, "These I will bring to my holy mountain." I will bring them to my holy mountain. Isaiah often refers to this concept of "His holy mountain"—Isaiah chapter 2, Isaiah chapter 11, Isaiah chapter 25—looking forward, Isaiah chapter 57, Isaiah chapter 65, Isaiah chapter 66, speaking of the holy mountain, the holy mountain, the holy mountain.

I looked up all those references. I read around them, I read their contexts. In the vast majority of them, God, whenever He speaks of His holy mountain, He speaks of the fact that He will draw peoples from all the world to His holy mountain. From all the world, He will draw from all the nations. All the sinners of all the nations will be drawn to worship God on His holy mountain.

Turn to Psalm 24. We'll start reading at verse 1: "¹The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, ²for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. ³Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. ⁵He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob."

Verse 3: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?" Who shall join the Lord in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, and does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

Now either that's saying that no single human being upon this earth gets to meet with the Lord on His holy hill, because I don't know anyone who in and of themselves has clean hands and a pure heart; or it's saying something different. What do you think it's saying? Well, look at what it says: "⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

Those who come to the Lord, lifting up clean hands and a pure heart, are those who have received blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Those who come to the mountain of the Lord are those who are cleansed, those who are saved, those who are washed, those who are regenerated, those who have repented of their sins. None other. None other.

When I say that we lift up clean hands and a pure heart to our God, I'm not saying that we do that because we ourselves are sinless. I'm saying that we are counted as sinless *in Christ*. We are in Christ. Jesus rose from the dead, why? Because sin and death had no grip on Him, because Satan had nothing in Him, because He Himself was without sin.

So Christ suffered for our sins and He was treated as though He had committed every sin that we have ever committed, we and all the believing church throughout all human history, all of those sins piled upon Christ. But Christ Himself, guilty of no sin. And we are joined to Him, and we are in Him, through faith.

So we do lift up clean hands. We do have a pure heart. Why? Because God has given the gift of justification to the people that He loves. He's imputed the righteousness of Christ to His people. And though we're sinners, He loves us and He sees us as being just as holy and sinless as Jesus Himself is. As hard as that may be to believe, it's the truth. It's the absolute truth.

And for somebody who feels that they themselves, or somebody who wants to say that they themselves are—let's put it this way, okay "homosexual Christian"—what's the problem? The problem is, a Christian is a justified person who is in Christ Jesus and counted as holy and righteous in the sight of God. What's the problem with the phrase homosexual or gay? The problem is that God says that that particular sin is an abomination and He hates it.

So what are people saying when they're saying that? What they're saying is, "I am a sinner, but God loves me as a sinner." When they say "homosexual Christian," they're saying, "I am a sinner, and God loves me and my sin, and He loves me in my sin." What are they denying? They're denying the transforming grace of God.

Justification sets you apart from your sins because as you are justified by God, you're given the gift of His Holy Spirit, you're given the gift of regeneration, you're made alive, and that which once ruled you no longer rules. Jesus has risen from the dead! He's come out of the grave! Our sins did not have the power to hold Him down. Therefore, for those who are united to the risen Christ, for those who are united to Christ who has come from the grave, our sins do not have the power to hold us down, because we are in Him. We've got to think that way. We've got to think that way. It's not a mental trick, it's what God says is true. If God says it's true, it's true!

Therefore, Christian, adapt your mind to God's way of thinking. Think God's thoughts after Him. Not to think God's thoughts after Him is to call God a liar, it's to call God a sinner. To us that phrase "gay Christian" is to say that God is "sinful God." It's to call God a liar. God says, "Such *were* some of you." In other words, God says, "I don't see the saved sinner as being what they once were."

So if you're a saved sinner, you don't have the right to say, "Well, God, you're a liar. I am a gay Christian. I am a lesbian Christian. I am a pedophile Christian. I am an adulterous Christian. I am a murderous Christian. I am a drug-dealing Christian. I am a carnal Christian." God doesn't say that. He says, "were." He says, *were*.

When we come to the mountain of the Lord, we come as people who have received the gift of righteousness. The hands that we lift are clean hands. The heart that we offer is a pure heart. Our lives, according to Paul, are a sacrifice that is holy and acceptable. Our very bodies are sanctified through the faith that we have in Christ. And yes, I know, we still battle with the flesh. You're never, ever going to hear me tell you that there's sinless perfection available in this life. You know it's not and I know it's not. Experience tells me otherwise.

But you're going to hear me tell you again, and again, and again, and again—if you're a Christian, you've been transformed, you've been given a new set of desires, and you rule over your sins, and you fight against your sins. You go to war against the flesh, you go to war against the world, you go to war against Satan. And live holy, righteous lives in the sight of our God, forever repenting, forever acknowledging to God that we are sinners and we so desperately need His help. But even in that confession and repentance, we are actually living righteous lives in the sight of our God.

God has said we are something. What has He said? He's said, "You're in Christ." Therefore, you don't have the right to say "I'm in sin," unless you really are in sin. If you really are in sin, just say, "I'm in sin and I'm not saved yet," and start seeking for repentance and salvation. Don't claim to be in Christ if you're not in Christ. But if you're in Christ, you have the power of God within you, and you should be fighting against your sins, and hating them—and hating that within yourself that clings to them.

We've been called to the holy mountain of the Lord. We've been called into the very presence of God, my friends. We don't bring our sins. You don't get to bring your sins. If you're Christians, God in Christ has cut you off from your sins. He's made a division. That which that person once was, they no longer are. Why? Because "they are my child in Jesus Christ my Son." You don't get to bring your sins and parade them. And if you think you do, as I said, I must question whether or not you are truly regenerate.

Our passage this morning finishes, verses 9, 10, 11, and 12, with God's threatened judgment—His judgment of false shepherds; His judgment of lazy liars who would be the leaders of His flock. Let's read it, from Isaiah 56, verse 9:

⁹ All you beasts of the field, come to devour—all you beasts in the forest. ¹⁰ His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. ¹¹ 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. ¹² ‘Come,’ they say, ‘let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure.’”

These people who claim that they are the leaders, these people who claim that they’ve got nothing to worry about—they claim to be the watchmen of God, verse 10: “His watchmen are blind.” Look at some of the pictures that Isaiah paints. I love them. Silent dogs that cannot bark. Now, in ancient Jewish days, dogs were not really considered to be a desirable animal, and they weren’t really considered to be a pet. They really only had one use, and there was one value in tolerating their presence. When strangers came near your place in the night, at least they got up off the ground and barked. They woke you up. The one advantage of having dogs around was that they kept watch over territory. These watchmen are blind; they’re dogs that don’t bark.

Look what he says: “dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.” We’ve all got dogs. What about when your dog’s laying on the ground, dreaming? He lays on the ground dreaming, a leg going in the air, but nothing’s happening. And the head’s moving, but nothing’s happening. They really think they’re doing something. They really think they’re on the chase—that rabbit, that squirrel, that whatever, it’s just in front of me and I’m going to get it! And they’re just lying on the ground, going through the motions. And that’s what a watchman is like who doesn’t preach the truth—a dreaming, useless, good-for-nothing dog, that won’t even bark at strangers.

“The dogs have a mighty appetite.” We all know that feeling, don’t we? Have you ever fed your dog, and then, whoosh! It’s gone. They don’t even chew. They seem to inhale. You drop the food in the bowl, whoosh! Gone. “Did I feed the dog? Did you feed that dog?” “Yes, I fed that dog.” “He’s still acting hungry.” “I fed him. I gave him the prescribed amount.”

These false teachers, like dogs, they never have enough. They never have enough what? Whatever it is they’re in the ministry for. Maybe it’s girls, gold, glory—one of the above, or all three. They never have enough. They never have a big enough paycheck. They never get enough admiration from the people who listen to them. They never get the things they want. They always want more. They’re like a dog—the food comes out, they inhale it, and it’s gone.

But look at what Isaiah says: “But they are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.” ¹² ‘Come,’ they say,”—and now they celebrate—“let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure.” The optimism of a fool. “God will never judge me. God will never take vengeance upon me. I’ve got it sorted.” And you talk to people and find their security is often placed in some foolish thing. “I’ve got it sorted. Thirteen years ago at an evangelism rally, I went forward and signed a card. I’ve got it sorted. If you look at the front cover of the Bible that’s sitting there on my shelf, you’ll see that a pastor signed it three weeks later, on the day that I was baptized. I’ve got it sorted. Nothing to worry about. It’s sorted.”

Or, seeing as though Isaiah is giving us a picture of the false confidence of fools in leadership, you may get to hear something like this, for example, when they speak to someone like me or someone like some of yourselves; “Look, I understand that you need to have a faith where you think that the Bible is God’s word, and I understand that you are the kind of person that needs that kind of religion. But my God—my God is not like that. My God is generous. My God is

loving. My God just takes me as I am. My God is always there for me. I feel no need to fear Him. I feel no need to tremble before Him. He speaks to me. He tells me lovely things. It's amazing, you know, the things that I so long to hear, God tells me. And so, life is good, and it can only get better. And the donations will keep coming in, and my wages will keep going up. Life is good, and it can only get better. Let's celebrate."

Back at verse 9 of Isaiah 56: "All you beasts of the field, come to devour—all you beasts in the forest." Whenever a prophet in the Scripture calls the beasts, the birds of prey, whatever, God is speaking judgment. God is judging those who answer to Him for the things that they have done. And God sends out the call: "Birds of prey, gather to feast upon the flesh of those whom I slaughter." And here, it's beasts of the field—wolves, dogs, lions—"Come! Come, you beasts of the forest. Come! "Feed"—upon whom?—"these silent dogs that do not bark; these optimistic fools that have said that I, their God, am just the sweetest, gentlest old man you could imagine. These fools that imagine that I don't get down and personal when it comes to dealing with sin and wickedness. They're your food. They're your food."

Sometimes when I'm driving overnight out west, I pass the trucks of kangaroo hunters—trucks loaded with kangaroos hanging off hooks, blood dripping out of the back of the tray of a truck, running all over the road. They're heading towards the dogfood factory. Hundreds and hundreds of them, just slung up for food. Well that's the picture that God is giving to these false teachers. "You're going to be food. You're going to be butchered. You're going to be slung up. You're going to be handed over to the beasts of the field. No one's going to bury you, no one's going to remember you. There's going to be no remembrance of you. There's going to be no grave. No, no, no, no, no. When my judgment comes, you die where you are, and you're food for the animals."

That's what God says to the false teachers who don't preach the gospel, who don't preach the truth, who don't preach this gospel of faith and repentance in God's suffering servant, who will rescue His people from their sins, these false teachers who leave people comfortable and happy in their sins. I'm telling you, they don't have a future. Don't look at how good their lives look today. They may drive Ferraris, they may live in big houses, they may be getting the face lifts and the cosmetic surgery. They may have the crowds of thousands. They may have the money coming in the mail. They may have all of those things.

Babylon has a lot to do with money. Look in the book of Revelation at Babylon, and at how the world trades with Babylon. Babylon has an enormous turnover! And if you're part of the Babylonian system, well, you get part of the Babylonian turnover—Babylon in its spiritual sense, I'm meaning. I guess you knew that, but I'll just clarify that. These false teachers, they're not shepherds of Israel, they're a part of Babylon. They're like a leech attaching itself to a healthy donor. They come into God's church and try to suck the life out of it. They're a parasite.

It's terrible when you find Babylon in the church. It's terrible when churches become synagogues of Satan, to take another phrase out of the book of Revelation, but it can happen. We've got to preach the gospel, the pure gospel. We've got to call sin, "sin." We've got to share the bad news and the good news. We must be willing to be convicted of our sin. We must be willing to preach the bad news to the people around us, *with* the good news.

In Isaiah 2, where Isaiah speaks of the people coming to the mountain of the Lord, the peoples being gathered to the mountain of the Lord, he speaks of the fact that out of that mountain, out from that gathering, must go two things—the law and the word. And I think that those two things are the good news and the bad news. The law must go out. “This is my holy, righteous law, and you have broken it. And I am God who will judge, and I am God who will avenge.” Death is the penalty for the breaking of the law.

And also, the word must go out. The word—the same word spoken of there in Isaiah 55, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” It will succeed in calling God’s people to repentance, even as it succeeds in hardening the hearts of those who will not turn, those who will not hear.

It’s all success. From God’s point of view, it’s all success. His word is accomplishing His purpose. We, as Christians, what do we want to see? We want to see it accomplishing its purpose in salvation. We want to see people called to faith and repentance. We want to see the church growing. We want to see hearts broken. We want to see people loving the Lord. We want to see people worshipping the Lamb. We want the house of the Lord to be a house of prayer. We want to see people offering their lives as acceptable spiritual sacrifices in the presence of our God. And that’s only right.

Jesus told us, “Go out into the world. Preach the gospel.” That’s what we want. That’s what we’ve got to be praying for. And my friends, we’ve got to be speaking the truth, always. Always the truth. You don’t lead people to the truth through a false gospel. You only lead people to true worship through a true gospel, the one and only true gospel. There is no other.

The true gospel is that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Built into that verse is the concept that everyone’s perishing—“that they should not perish.” Everyone’s perishing. Why? Because they’re breakers of God’s law—evil, wicked people, perishing. And they need to turn to Christ for eternal life.

And the day is coming—the day’s coming. Just remember this as I close. “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed.” Isaiah 56, verse 1. We have been saved, we are being saved, in the return of the Lord when He comes to judge the earth, we will be saved. But we must live in faithful obedience. We must be a people set apart unto our God. We must be a people who live in obedience to His word. Let’s close.

Father in heaven, we pray that you would bless the preaching of your gospel in this nation. We pray that you would bless our feeble attempts to serve you in this way. We pray that people would be called to faith and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, Father, that these things would be ever on our minds, that we would love you truly, that we would love your word, that we would be hungry for your word and obedient to your word. All of these things we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.