

ISAIAH 56

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

After the exceedingly great and precious promises of Gospel-grace in the last chapter, which were foreshadowed by the temporal deliverance of God's captive people from Babylon; we now have what seems to be the beginning of a new sermon (which continues into the next chapters), which includes reproofs and threatenings. Indeed, the Word of God was intended for conviction, as well as for comfort and instruction in righteousness.

The theme of the first two verses of this chapter is to show us that when God is coming toward us in a way of mercy, we must go forth to meet Him in our way of duty. He here tells us His intentions of mercy to us (verse 1): "My salvation is near to come" – the great salvation that was worked out by Christ, which the people of Isaiah's time had seen typified by the salvation of the Jews from Sennacherib. In that salvation, God's righteousness is revealed. The law revealed that aspect of the righteousness of God by which all sinners stand condemned, but the Gospel reveals that by which all believers stand acquitted!

The Lord here tells us what His expectations are from us, in consideration of this great salvation. We may not say, "We see Christ's salvation near; and so now we may live as we please, for there is no danger now of missing it or coming short of it." That is taking advantage of the grace of God. Rather, on the contrary, when His salvation is so near to us, we ought to double our guard against sin. For example, He desires us to be honest and just in all of our dealings; and He also desires us to religiously observe His Day of rest, for we are not just if we rob God of His time. The observance of the Lord's Day is here put down for all the duties of the first table of the Law, which are the fruits of our love to God; just as justice and judgment toward our fellow human beings are put down for all those of the second table, which are the fruits of our love to our neighbor. The best way to have the blessing of God upon all our activities during the week is to conscientiously keep His Day holy.

In verses 3-8, the prophet – in God's name – encourages those who were not Jews by birth, but who were still eagerly joining themselves to God. Such persons would certainly be laboring under great discouragements. Some were discouraged because they were not a direct descendant of Abraham, as the Jews were. They had joined themselves to the Lord; but they questioned whether God would accept them, because they were not physically born into Abraham's family of descendants. Some others were discouraged because they were not fathers in Israel; such persons looked upon themselves as dry trees, and of no use because they had no children. This was especially grievous because the promise

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A charge to keep the Lord's precepts – verses 1-2
- ❖ Blessings are promised to all who come under God's covenant – verses 3-8
- ❖ A charge against the careless spiritual watchmen of God's people – verses 9-12

of a numerous posterity was the particular blessing of Israel, which was even more valuable to them because the Messiah was to come from among them. Yet God did not want these people to make the worst of their case, nor to think that it would exclude them from the Gospel-Church; so here He gives suitable encouragements to each of these kinds of people just mentioned. To those who had no children, He reminds them of the good character that they had (verse 4), even though they lay under this reproach; for in their whole lifestyle, they chose those things that pleased Him. Although these persons may not have children to be the music of their house or arrows in their quiver, yet they shall have a blessing that is more than equivalent; for the Lord Himself will be their habitation and glory. As for those who were discouraged because they were not descendants of Abraham, it is here promised that they would surely be welcome in Christ's Church (verses 6-7). As long as they forsook all other gods, joined themselves to the Lord to serve and love Him, and took hold of the Gospel-blessings that were offered in His covenant – then they would be welcome among the Lord's people.



It is also promised here (verse 7) that multitudes from heathen nations shall come to the Church: “my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people!” In the Old Testament, the Lord's place of worship was not to be entered by anyone who was not a Jew; but in the Gospel-Church, all people from all nations are welcome! And it is hinted here (verse 8) that when the Gentiles (non-Jews) are called into Christ's Church, they shall be incorporated into one body with the Jews – so that, as Jesus said in John 10:16, there may be one fold and one Shepherd.

By a very sudden change of his style, the prophet goes from words of comfort to words of reproof and conviction (verses 9-12); and he goes on in that strain, for the most part, in the three following chapters. Desolating judgments are summoned in verse 9. The sheep of God's pasture would now be made the sheep of His slaughter, to fall as victims to His justice. And the reason of these judgments is here given in verses 10-12. The spiritual shepherds, who should have been the watchmen of the flock, were treacherous and careless. They did not have any conscience concerning the great trust that had been reposed in them, and so the sheep became an easy prey to the wild beasts. They were perfect epicures who were addicted to their sinful pleasures, especially their drunken partying. And they were very secure and confident of the continuance of their prosperity and ease; they promised themselves that they would be as merry tomorrow as they were today. But alas! No one ought to boast of tomorrow; for perhaps this very night, their soul may stand before the judgment-seat of God!

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that since we have an interest in Your everlasting covenant, we enjoy true spiritual blessings that are even better than the blessing of sons and daughters! Amen.