

ISAIAH 57 SOLEMN THOUGHTS AND SWEET REFLECTIONS

This chapter opens by calling to our attention the carelessness and inattentiveness of the world, as they behold the operations of God in His Providence. God's faithful servants pass onward to their eternal rest, and the loss is not lamented as it ought to be. None seem to consider that the graces which these righteous persons exercised, and the supplications which they put up for poor perishing sinners, also cease with them. Here, indeed, is reason for lamentation concerning ourselves; but for them, no tears need to fall! For if they could speak to us, they would say – in language somewhat like that of Jesus – “If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I go to my Father” (John 14:28). Let us cherish this sweet thought! Have our friends and relatives departed and gone to be with Jesus? Think where they are now! They have entered into rest! Jesus is their rest and their refreshment (chapter 28:12; Matt. 11:28-30; Ps. 116:7).

But what a contrast we find, beginning in verse 3! Who can express the awfulness of an unawakened and unregenerated heart? How sad it is to think that from generation to generation, the deadly seeds of sin thus blossom and produce their hateful fruit! We see the sad effects of sin in the world around us every day. Was there ever a period in the annals of history when the “children of transgression” and the despisers of Christ have come forward with a more impudent and rebellious face? But what else can we expect? When the fountain of true religion is corrupted, the streams will break out in filth and impurity. And has there ever been a generation more guilty than the present for general lawlessness and corruption of life and manners? But blessed be the name of the Lord! His promise still continues to be fulfilled, for Jesus has – and always will have – a remnant of faithful followers who love and serve Him (Ps. 22:30). Amidst the multitudes who flock to pledge allegiance to the banner of Satan, are we among those happy and blessed people whom Jesus has gathered and brought into His own fold?

How lovely it is to see some sweet words in verses 15 and 16, after what has been said earlier in this chapter! They are like refreshing and cooling streams that are discovered in a weary land where no water-spring was expected. Read the verses again and again, so that their full grace and comfort may be felt in your soul! Although Jehovah inhabits eternity, yet He also dwells in the heart of the humble. Solomon was struck with wonder at the thought of God visiting his Temple, but what would he have said if he had lived to see Jesus dwelling in a body of flesh? And what ought we to say when we remember that our bodies are the Holy Spirit's temple? (See 1 Kings 8:27; John 1:14; 1 Cor. 3:16.)

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Isaiah speaks of the blessedness of the death of the righteous – verses 1-2
- ❖ A description of the abominable idolatries and sins of mankind – verses 3-12
- ❖ Promises are extended to those who are humble and contrite – verses 13-21

Can there be a sweeter description of the graciousness of God in His dealings with sinners, than that which is found in verses 17-19? The Lord corrects; the Lord hides His face; the Lord sends affliction! Wave follows wave until the unthinking soul becomes humbled. But when the Lord Who sends the rod also causes the poor creature to heed the rod and Him Who has appointed it – then the soul cries, “Save me, Lord, or I will perish!” But let us remember – in all of this – that it is solely the Lord’s work, and it is entirely to the Lord’s own glory. It is He Who creates anew both the heart and the lips. It is He Who both wounds and heals. O the blessedness of His grace!

The concluding verses of this chapter contain words of warning that are just as awful as the foregoing were comfortable. But we know that the one is as sure as the other. When God’s judgments and chastisements do not soften a sinner’s heart, they harden it. The same heat which melts wax also makes clay hard. Alas! The heart that remains hardened under the calls of grace will only increase in obstinacy. Let every one of us cry out in prayer, “From all blindness of heart, dear Lord, deliver us!”

Before we complete our study of this chapter, let us take a moment to consider the two royal palaces of the Lofty and Holy One, spoken of in verse 15. The first is the palace of eternity. How puny we feel as we attempt to scan the marvels and glories of this Divine dwelling-place, with its limitless corridors of space and time! We can only join the patriarch in his confession: “Canst thou, by searching, find out God?” O Lord! We are lost amidst the splendors of Your uncreated Divinity. We can, in some measure, understand heaven as Your throne and the earth as Your footstool; but we cannot grasp Your lifetime, for it is eternity! In the case of earthly sovereigns, the words – “O King! Live forever!” – are really a mockery; but they form a true and appropriate ascription when they are applied to the only truly Great Being!

But what is the second palace of the High and Lofty One? What a transition – from the halls and corridors of eternity to the heart of a human being! “I dwell ... with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit!” Behold, O heavens! Be astonished, O earth! Here is the omnipotent Jehovah, Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain; and yet we see Him stooping to enjoy a relationship with the children of the dust! The Greatest of Beings is also the Kindest of them all. The mysterious Inhabiter of eternity is also the Dweller in the contrite heart. With an exclamation of devout amazement, we may truly shout aloud, “Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!” (Rev. 21:3-4)

Lord, You inhabit eternity! But we thank You that You also come and dwell in our hearts, reviving us and comforting us, so that the bones which have been broken by sin may rejoice! Amen.

