

Keep justice and do righteousness.

How do you that?

By keeping the Sabbath!

As we’ve been seeing in the morning service,  
Sabbath is more than just resting.

It includes *worshipping* God – and *giving rest to others*.

If your Sabbath-keeping is oriented around worshipping God and giving rest to others,  
then you will be the sort of person who keeps justice and does righteousness!

Chapters 38-55 have set up the promise of a new work that God will do  
after bringing Israel back from Exile.

Chapters 41-48 set forth Israel as the Servant of the Lord who would bring salvation,  
but also showed Israel as blind and deaf.

There must be a Servant who will hear what God is saying, and see what God is doing.

And chapters 49-53 promise such a Servant.

One will come who will suffer and die for our sins.

So chapters 54-55 concluded the Book of the Servant with the call to “everyone”  
to come to the feast that God has prepared.

Chapters 56-66 now build on the foundation that was laid in 38-55.

Once again we see that there is a problem.

Having promised the return from Exile,

Isaiah deals with the problem that will follow from the Restoration.

Israel—even the righteous remnant—does not have the strength to overcome their enemies.

The Restoration is not going to change the basic character of the Exiles.

Therefore Isaiah promises that a Messiah will come—an anointed one—  
through whom God will establish his kingdom.

If Isaiah 1-37 is the Book of the King,

and Isaiah 38-55 is the Book of the Servant,

then Isaiah 56-66 is the Book of the Messiah,

the anointed conqueror who will bring salvation to his people  
and vengeance to his enemies.

And the Sabbath functions as one of the central themes of this section.

Isaiah 56 opens with a blessing upon Sabbath-keepers,

and chapter 58 concludes with a call to delight in the Sabbath.

Chapter 61, at the center of the book, proclaims the Jubilee—the year of the Lord’s favor—  
(the ultimate Sabbath year, according to Leviticus 25).

And chapter 63 speaks again of the “year of redemption,”

before the whole section concludes in chapter 66:18-24

with the glory of the eschatological Sabbath.

In a very real way, we live in Isaiah 56-66.

The Suffering Servant has come (Is 49-53).

The Gentiles are included in the covenant people (54-55).

We look back to the decisive, once-for-all work of God's holy Servant, Jesus,  
but still look forward to the eschatological Sabbath—  
the final consummation of the kingdom of God.

Now Isaiah 56-59 all fits together,

but this time we won't try to cover it all in one sermon!

56:1-8 opens with three declarations from Yahweh

(two "thus says the LORD's" and one "declares the Lord Yahweh")

56:9-12 contains the word of the blind watchmen

57:1-13 has as its center what "you" say,

You mockers—you sons of the sorceress,

moving from the present perishing of the righteous,

in the face of persecution from the wicked

to the future inheritance of those who take refuge in Yahweh.

57:14 then contains the word of the true prophet

and 57:15-21 follows with three more statements from Yahweh

Chapter 58 then gives the seventh word from the LORD—

the promise of the future inheritance to those who trust in the LORD.

"For the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (58:14)

Chapter 59 contains the eighth word from Yahweh.

If the seventh word contains the promise of Sabbath rest,

the eighth in chapter 59 contains the fulfillment of that promise.

Now, maybe I'm just seeing eights all over the place,

but it is interesting that the seventh "says the LORD" in these chapters

is the promise of the Sabbath inheritance,

and the eighth contains the statement of how God will accomplish that promise!

Because the seventh-day Sabbath points to the fact that man must enter God's rest,

but the seventh-day Sabbath lacks the power to bring man into God's rest.

But the eighth day is the first day of a new creation,

a new creation that God must sovereignly establish by his powerful Word.

And lest you think that I'm arbitrarily stopping at the number 8,

notice that chapter 60 calls for the people of God to respond.  
“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”  
The resurrection light of the eighth day has dawned.  
The impotence of the seventh day has been transformed into the glory of the eighth day,  
through the coming of the Anointed Conqueror—  
the Messianic King who will subdue the nations under his sway.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves!  
That is where we are going in the next couple weeks.

### **A. Three Declarations from the LORD – the Sabbath-Keeping Foreigner (56:1-8)**

*56 Thus says the LORD:*

*“Keep justice, and do righteousness,  
for soon my salvation will come,  
and my righteousness be revealed.  
<sup>2</sup> 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.”*

56:1-8 provide the first three of God’s declarations.

Verses 1-2 contain the first “thus says the Lord.”

Isaiah is speaking to those who live in between the times—

those who have participated in the deliverance of the Servant,  
but who are still awaiting the final deliverance.

In one sense, he is speaking to those who have been restored from Exile,  
and await the coming of Messiah,

but in another sense, he is speaking to us who have seen the fulfillment of Is 52-3,  
but still await the full inheritance of Is 54-5.

Because the whole point of 38-55 is that the Restoration from Exile  
is not going to change Israel.

Only the coming of the Singular Suffering Servant will bring the righteousness of God.

And so chapters 56-66 open with God’s call to “keep justice and do righteousness,  
for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance will be revealed.”

The Singular Suffering Servant – Jesus – has died for the sins of his people.

“He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities...  
and with his stripes we are healed.”

“By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my Servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”

And now those who hope in that Servant are called to live righteous lives,  
because the final deliverance is near.

It perhaps surprising to us that God should choose Sabbath-keeping as the example.

But Sabbath-keeping is a fitting choice,  
because of the Sabbath is all about living in between the times.  
It is a reminder of creation and redemption:  
Exodus 20 reminds us that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance.  
As God created all things in six days and entered his rest on the seventh,  
so also we are to work and rest in that same 6 and 1 pattern.  
But Deuteronomy 5 explains that the Sabbath is also a redemptive ordinance.  
Because you were slaves in Egypt,  
therefore you are to give your servants rest—  
because God brought you out of Egypt with an outstretched arm.  
The Sabbath is a day of Justice—a day of Righteousness.  
On it we bring rest to those under our care,  
even as God did for Israel out of Egypt,  
even as God has now done in his Righteous Servant, Jesus Christ.  
Therefore, Isaiah says, “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.” (Verse 2)  
Sabbath-keeping is a way of participating in that eschatological Sabbath  
that God has promised through his Righteous Servant.

Part of the reason why I have suggested that Isaiah is speaking to us more directly  
than he is to the Restoration from Babylon is in the next section (verses 3-7).  
Verse three introduces two categories of people who were excluded from Israel:  
foreigners and eunuchs.

Deuteronomy 23 specifies that eunuchs shall not “enter the assembly of the LORD (23:1).  
And it also prohibits the entrance of foreigners into the assembly  
until the third generation (Edomites and Egyptians)  
or the tenth generation (Ammonite or Moabite).

But here in Isaiah 56:3, Isaiah declares:  
(Read)

<sup>3</sup> *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.”*

Isaiah then answers the eunuch and the foreigner in reverse order.  
The eunuch is answered in verses 4-5.

The eunuch may believe that he is a dry tree.  
He is incapable of bearing fruit.  
But God has a purpose for the eunuch.

He will make the eunuch fruitful in his kingdom.

And so

<sup>4</sup> *For thus says the LORD:*

*“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose the things that please me  
and hold fast my covenant,*

<sup>5</sup> *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.*

Notice that this is directed to “the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths.”

Covenant-keeping eunuchs are those who delight in the Sabbath now,  
in anticipation of entering that final glorious rest.

I cannot go so far as to say that this is a warrant for monasticism.

But it certainly suggests that in the kingdom of Christ,  
celibacy has a higher place than it did under the Mosaic code!

From Adam to Christ the whole focus was on the Land and the Seed.

But now that the Seed has come and brought us the inheritance of the whole earth  
the way in which we think about the growth of the kingdom must change.

Yes, “covenant evangelism” through rearing godly children  
is still a wonderful thing,

but God is now doing a new thing through his eunuchs.

When the disciples wonder whether it is better not to marry,  
Jesus replies in Matthew 19:12,

“For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth,  
and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men,  
and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs  
for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

Our day is preoccupied with sex.

Sex has become viewed as a natural right,

and those who aren't getting some are considered weird.

But our Lord Jesus Christ remained single and celibate for his whole life.

Likewise, the apostle Paul and many of the great Christians throughout all ages.

Consider the monument that God has erected for such men and women as

Augustine, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas,

Macrina (sister of Basil and Gregory), Hildegard of Bingen,

and in our own day, Grace Mullen (the librarian at WTS).

As Paul says in 1 Cor 7:32, “The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord,

how to please the Lord.  
But the married man is anxious about worldly things,  
how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.”  
The single life is a true calling of God.  
And the single Christian shares in the full inheritance of the children of God.  
An everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Verses 6-7 then respond to the fear of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD.  
Will the foreigner be cut off in the day of judgment?

<sup>6</sup> *“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—*

Not those who love the name of Yahweh,  
those who keep the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant.  
Notice again that covenant-keepers are Sabbath-keepers.  
The foreigner who worships God and keeps covenant Sabbath by Sabbath  
will come to Zion—the holy mountain.

<sup>7</sup> *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.”*

God’s purpose and promise to Abraham –  
was that all nations be blessed through Abraham’s seed!  
And that is what Isaiah promises will happen!

God says that the day is coming when the Gentiles will be included.  
The true worshipers of God will worship in the Spirit and in truth,  
at the heavenly Zion—not merely the earthly Jerusalem.

Jesus quotes this in Mark 11:17 when he cleanses the temple –  
“Is it not written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?’”

The purpose and plan for Zion is not just for Israel – but for all peoples!

This is why *we* need to be diligent in welcoming the stranger and the foreigner!  
Hospitality is primarily about love for the stranger!

Because that is what God has done for us!

<sup>8</sup> *The Lord GOD,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,  
“I will gather yet others to him  
besides those already gathered.”*

As the Sabbath is a creation ordinance,  
so it points to a universal humanity.  
As the Exile symbolized the casting out of Eden,  
so now the restoration symbolizes the gathering of all nations.  
As Abraham had been promised that all nations would be blessed through his seed,  
so now the promise is coming true.

### **B. The Word of the Blind Watchmen – Shepherds with No Understanding (56:9-12)**

The second triad consists of the declarations of the two watchmen—  
the blind watchmen of 56:9-12 and the righteous watchman of 57:14  
(both in the third person)  
and the mockery of the wicked in 57:1-13 (in the second person).

<sup>9</sup> *All you beasts of the field, come to devour—  
all you beasts in the forest.*

<sup>10</sup> *His watchmen are blind;  
they are all without knowledge;  
they are all silent dogs;  
they cannot bark,  
dreaming, lying down,  
loving to slumber.*

<sup>11</sup> *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.*

<sup>12</sup> *“Come,” they say, “let me get wine;  
let us fill ourselves with strong drink;  
and tomorrow will be like this day,  
great beyond measure.”*

God called the foreigner and the eunuch to come to Zion and worship him.

But now God calls the beasts of the field and of the forest to come and devour the wicked  
Nothing will stand in their way.

The watchmen of Israel are blind because they lack knowledge.

They do not understand what God is doing.

“They are all silent dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.”

They eat and they sleep—but are useless as watchdogs.  
They are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way,  
each to his own gain, one and all.  
“Come, they say, let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink;  
and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure.” (57:11-12)  
The watchmen of Israel are blind and drunk,  
lacking understanding they cannot see.

Sad to say, this too often characterizes the ministers of Christ’s church.  
A shepherd must care for the sheep more than for his own gain.  
A watchman must see what God is doing  
and call the people to respond with faith and obedience.

### **C. The Righteous Man Enters into Peace (57:1-2)**

The central section of this chiasm (57:1-13) starts and ends with the righteous.

*57 The righteous man perishes,  
and no one lays it to heart;  
devout men are taken away,  
while no one understands.  
For the righteous man is taken away from calamity;  
<sup>2</sup> he enters into peace;  
they rest in their beds  
who walk in their uprightness.*

(This is connected with v13b—“he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land  
and shall inherit my holy mountain.”)

Often, when we think about the death of our loved ones,  
we tend to think in terms of the “unfairness” of how they died so soon.  
Isaiah points out the foolishness of this way of thinking!  
The reality is that the death of the righteous is a blessing to them!  
They enter into peace!

For the righteous, death is not a calamity!  
Far from it – through death, the righteous are “taken away from calamity.”

I know how hard it is for *us* to lose our loved ones to death.  
But always remember that *for them* – for those who belong to Jesus –  
death is their entrance into *peace*.  
(but beware, because – as our passage ends, “there is no peace for the wicked”!  
If you turn away from the LORD, you are turning away from peace.)

And that’s why God turns to “you.”



#### **D. Offspring of the Adulterer (57:3-6)**

<sup>3</sup> *But you, draw near,  
sons of the sorceress,  
offspring of the adulterer and the loose woman.*

<sup>4</sup> *Whom are you mocking?  
Against whom do you open your mouth wide  
and stick out your tongue?*

(These are terrible insults in the middle east)

*Are you not children of transgression,  
the offspring of deceit,  
<sup>5</sup> you who burn with lust among the oaks, [a]  
under every green tree,  
who slaughter your children in the valleys,  
under the clefts of the rocks?*

In contrast to the foreigners who will be brought to my holy mountain (56:7),  
the wicked have set up their bed on a high and lofty mountain.  
Rather than keep the Sabbath and keep covenant with God,  
you have deserted me,  
you have made a covenant with idols and with foreign kings.

<sup>6</sup> *Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion;  
they, they, are your lot;  
to them you have poured out a drink offering,  
you have brought a grain offering.  
Shall I relent for these things?*

#### **E. The Idolatrous People (57:7)**

<sup>7</sup> *On a high and lofty mountain  
you have set your bed,  
and there you went up to offer sacrifice.*

Idolatry is compared to adultery –  
turning away from the LORD to pursue illicit relationships with other gods.

#### **D'. Adulterous Liaisons with Foreign Kings/Sheol (57:8-10)**

<sup>8</sup> *Behind the door and the doorpost  
you have set up your memorial;  
for, deserting me, you have uncovered your bed,  
you have gone up to it,*

*you have made it wide;  
and you have made a covenant for yourself with them,  
you have loved their bed,  
you have looked on nakedness.<sup>[b]</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> *You journeyed to the king with oil  
and multiplied your perfumes;  
you sent your envoys far off,  
and sent down even to Sheol.*

<sup>10</sup> *You were wearied with the length of your way,  
but you did not say, "It is hopeless";  
you found new life for your strength,  
and so you were not faint.*

“You journeyed to the king with oil and multiplied your perfumes,  
you sent your envoys far off, and sent down even to Sheol.”  
Isaiah told us in Is 28 that Judah had made a covenant with death,  
an agreement with Sheol,  
when it entered into a covenant with Egypt.

Isaiah does not provide specific details here.

He assumes that you will remember the specific example of the past.

His point is that Israel hasn't changed.

You continue to make a covenant with death—you continue to seek Sheol.

And the grave will be your portion.

Israel has forgotten God.

They are living as though God will not judge them.

And this, too, characterizes us too often.

We forget that God will judge the living and the dead.

We live as though there is no judgment coming.

We have all sorts of energy and strength for our follies!

But when it comes to our devotion to God...?

And so God says:

**C'. Israel Contrasted with the One Who Takes Refuge in Me (57:11-13)**

<sup>11</sup> *Whom did you dread and fear,  
so that you lied,  
and did not remember me,  
did not lay it to heart?  
Have I not held my peace, even for a long time,  
and you do not fear me?*

Too often we think that God is just the cosmic Santa Claus who gives good stuff to everyone!

Do you *fear* God?

Our problem is that we fear something else more than we fear God!  
And the result is that we lie – we do not tell the truth –  
we do not remember the LORD our God...

The irony is that when God is patience – when God holds his peace,  
and refrains from dealing with us as our sins deserve –  
the result is that we think that God will never judge us!

And so God says – with a bit of sarcasm:

<sup>12</sup> *I will declare your righteousness and your deeds,  
but they will not profit you.*

All your “good deeds” will fall short – because you do not fear the LORD!  
But no other God can save you:

<sup>13</sup> *When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you!  
The wind will carry them all off,  
a breath will take them away.  
But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land  
and shall inherit my holy mountain.*

There is an inheritance for those who flee to Christ.

And this is why Isaiah has been using the Sabbath as his focal point.

You are so weak and frail that you need physical reminders.

You are a bodily creature, so you need bodily reminders.

Every week when you rest from your labors and worship in God’s holy mountain,  
you must remember who you really are.

It is easy to forget where you are going.

But that is why God has given you the Sabbath.

It is a place where you take refuge in the LORD.

Then the righteous watchman cries out:

**B’. The Word of the Prophet – Build and Prepare (57:14)**

<sup>14</sup> *And it shall be said,  
“Build up, build up, prepare the way,  
remove every obstruction from my people's way.”*

This is an echo of Isaiah 40,

and like Isaiah 40 it prepares us for the voice of the LORD in v15:

**A’. Three Statements from the LORD – Comfort to the Contrite (57:15-21)**

*<sup>15</sup> For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
“I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

Because once more God speaks three times.

In verses 15-18 Isaiah describes God as the One who is high and lifted up,  
the one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.

Isaiah doesn't simply say, “thus says the Lord.”

He says “thus says the one who is high and lifted up.”

He draws our attention from our earthly experience to the true reality  
that shapes all earthly experience.

The one who dwells in eternity (and therefore the one who governs the future) declares:

“I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

The exalted One, who is high and lifted up,  
yet deigns to dwell with those who are lowly.

Humility is a divine attribute.

God is humble!

And he cares for those who have no other refuge.

*<sup>16</sup> For I will not contend forever,  
nor will I always be angry;  
for the spirit would grow faint before me,  
and the breath of life that I made.*

*<sup>17</sup> Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry,  
I struck him; I hid my face and was angry,  
but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.*

*<sup>18</sup> I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;  
I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners,*

*<sup>19</sup> creating the fruit of the lips.*

And God will not contend forever,  
for if God was angry forever, he would destroy us all.

But God is the one who created the breath of life.

And yes, God will judge sin.

Iniquity must be dealt with.

And because Israel (mankind) continued to rebel,

God has judged his people.

But the day has come when “I will heal him;

I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners.”

And so God speaks a second time:

*Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the LORD,  
“and I will heal him.*

God will bring *shalom* – peace – to the far and to the near.  
This is God’s purpose – this is God’s plan!

But the wicked, who continue to rebel against God, will not prosper.

<sup>20</sup> *But the wicked are like the tossing sea;  
for it cannot be quiet,  
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.*  
<sup>21</sup> *There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”*

We are back to Isaiah 48.

Israel is no different after the Restoration from Exile than they were before.  
Israel is no different...  
But there is a difference!

In Isaiah 48 God says “your peace *would have been* like a river.”

Israel returns from Exile no different than before.

But by Isaiah 57 we have heard of the Singular Suffering Servant.

And so now God does not merely say that peace would have come.

Peace has come.

All those who take refuge in him—both far and near—both Jew and Gentile—  
will alike be healed.

Isaiah calls upon Israel and the nations to hope in the coming of a righteous Servant.

We look back to that holy Servant, Jesus,

and rejoice that Jesus has preached peace to you who were far off  
and peace to those who were near.

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.