

Lesson 27
Isaiah 55:1 – 57:21

The Gracious Son of God, a Suffering Servant (Part 3)

Memory verse: For He says, "In the time of My favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation." 2 Cor.6:2

The Servant died not only for the sins of Israel (53:8), but also for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29; 1 John 4:14). Isaiah makes it clear throughout his book that the Gentiles are included in God's plan. What Isaiah and the other prophets did not know was that believing Jews and Gentiles would one day be united in Jesus Christ in the church (Eph. 3:1–12).

Chapter 55 is actually part two of Isaiah's celebration of the Servant's work of redemption. In view of what God would do for humankind (chapter 54), people would need to appropriate the salvation that he provided (chapter 55).

As in the preceding sections (52:13–54:17), the people of God in view are primarily Israel but not exclusively Israel. As the Lord's salvation extends to all people, so do the benefits of that salvation—for as many as take advantage of it. This chapter contains one of the warmest gospel invitations in the whole Bible. It forms a fitting climax to this section of Isaiah that deals with God's provision of salvation (chapters 49 to 55). The people would need to listen to and rely on God's unconditional promise, but their salvation would cost them nothing.

As chapter 55 unfolds, the offer continues to be to come to God, but the focus shifts from receiving satisfaction to resting in faith, and from salvation's freeness to its transforming power.

Chapters 56 and 57 introduce the main subject of this section of the book, which grows out of what Isaiah revealed previously. If salvation depends on God's grace, do God's servants have any responsibility other than receiving that grace? Simply being a member of the covenant community of Israel and fulfilling the cultic (worship system) requirements of the Mosaic Law might seem to be an adequate response for some Israelites.

Isaiah revealed that God had redeemed them so they could demonstrate His righteousness in their lives in the world. This would glorify Him, bring others to Him, and result Israel's greatest blessing. However, demonstrating that righteousness was impossible for them to do by themselves (cf. chapters 1 to 39). They needed to appropriate His grace as redeemed people - redeemed from captivity (chapters 40 to 48) and redeemed from sin (chapters 49 to 55) - to become the servants of God that He intended them to be.

Chapter 56 contains moral exhortations in view of God's salvation. It also begins the explanation of the solution by placing in stark contrast two opposing views of what pleases God: simply being a child of Abraham, versus living in loving obedience to God. It continues into chapter 57 whereby Isaiah identified another mark of Israel, which boasted in its election by God and viewed righteousness in terms of correct worship ritual. This was the widespread departure of the nation from God (apostasy). She had forsaken God and had pursued idols.

Chapter 57 concludes the section begun at 56:1 dealing with the need for humility and holiness in the redeemed people of God. Isaiah explained that the basis of God's acceptance and blessing of His redeemed people was righteousness (56:1-8). Then he showed that Israel lacked that righteousness (56:9–57:13). Her leadership was wicked (56:9–57:2) and her populace was apostate (57:3-13). He explained that the solution to Israel's predicament was Yahweh's enablement (grace). The only way she could be what she should be was with the Lord's help.

Jesus is still inviting all today to repent and have faith in Him. But no one should delay in doing this! The phrase "while he may be found" suggests that, if we do not take His invitation seriously, the invitation may cease while we are delaying.

Scripture reading: Isaiah Chapter: Is.55:1-13; 56:6-8; 57:15-21.

Things to learn: 1) Invitation to the Gentiles 2) Unfaithful Leaders 3) Idolaters, pride and greed.

Discussion Questions:

Q1. In Is.55:1 to 56:8, there is an invitation to the Gentiles. What is the invitation all about and is this only meant for the Gentiles in biblical times?

Q2. In Is. 56:9 to 57:2, The Lord brings up the subject of leadership again. Why is it so important for the nation of Israel and even the church to have responsible leaders?

Q3. In Isaiah 57:3 to 21, God is angry with idolaters, the proud and greedy people. This applies to the people of Israel and even Christians today. Why?