

Isaiah 57:1-10 (NKJV)

1 The righteous perishes, And no man takes *it* to heart; Merciful men *are* taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil.

2 He shall enter into peace; They shall rest in their beds, *Each one* walking *in* his uprightness.

3 "But come here, You sons of the sorceress, You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!

4 Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth *And* stick out the tongue? *Are* you not children of transgression, Offspring of falsehood,

5 Inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree, Slaying the children in the valleys, Under the clefts of the rocks?

6 Among the smooth *stones* of the stream *Is* your portion; They, they, *are* your lot! Even to them you have poured a drink offering, You have offered a grain offering. Should I receive comfort in these?

7 "On a lofty and high mountain You have set your bed; Even there you went up To offer sacrifice.

8 Also behind the doors and their posts You have set up your remembrance; For you have uncovered yourself *to those other* than Me, And have gone up to them; You have enlarged your bed And made *a covenant* with them; You have loved their bed, Where you saw *their* nudity.

9 You went to the king with ointment, And increased your perfumes; You sent your messengers far off, And *even* descended to Sheol.

10 You are wearied in the length of your way; *Yet* you did not say, 'There is no hope.' You have found the life of your hand; Therefore you were not grieved.

Would anyone looking at how you respond to your day to day events describe your life as peaceful?

You might think- that is not realistic. Look at this life. Look at what **can** go wrong. Look at what **does** go wrong. We might think, peace is only for those who are stupid. It is only for those who cannot think clearly about all that can go wrong.

But that is not what we see here. Look closely at this passage and you will see that the righteous is taken into peace. Verse 2 and Verse 19 says that Christ

creates peace to both the unlikely and those who are now close to Him. But look at the contrast. Look who has no peace. Verse 20 The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. There is no peace for who? The wicked. This isn't a real complicated concept. There is peace for the righteous. There is no peace for the wicked.

So what do we do with this? Will we take it to heart? We will see where peace comes from this morning. But we will also mostly see a people who have no peace and will not get any peace by the way they are living. We should learn from both the good examples and the bad.

¹ The righteous perishes, And no man takes *it* to heart; Merciful men *are* taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil.

² He shall enter into peace; They shall rest in their beds, *Each one* walking *in* his uprightness.

Our last text ended with the failure of the **drunken shepherds** of the people. But what about the **righteous**? Are there any? What is happening with **them**?

The text seems to lean in the direction of sudden death. The righteous were perishing, and it may or may not have been of natural causes. The point was that no one was seriously considering what was happening to the righteous. Now, what happens when someone dies who we have depended upon for spiritual strength and wisdom? Many of us will instantly think of Mike. Did that death go unnoticed? Hardly. It affected many of us deeply. We were deeply aware of the loss. Many of us lost the person who we would go to when we needed wisdom in our situation. There was mourning. There was an undeniable affect. Do you see where I am going with this?

How could the righteous be dying in our text and **no one notice**? The first problem is that **no one was depending upon them**. Who needed them? The general population were progressives. They no longer needed the traditions from generations before. They no longer needed this God who was no longer cool and didn't give the right perks. They were on to new and better gods, the gods that looked more like themselves.

Then there is a second thing to notice here. These people are **taken away**, and what they are taken away from is evil. This does not seem to be people dying from old age. It looks like God is **removing them** from this planet. He is doing them a kindness. He is doing them a favor.

How hard it is for us to grasp this idea. We all **know** that it is true. But it seems to always end up being our **conclusion** rather than our **assumption**. Do you know what I mean?

I got lost while deer hunting down by Friendsville. I ended up down by the river. All of my hunting partners were long gone. So I had to figure out how to get back to the car. So I trudged through all kinds of rough terrain to find out first, where **I** was, and second, where the **car** was. Now when I finally got back to the car, would anyone looking on in that whole process say, "oh that's too bad. Jon can't stay outside and keep walking around looking for his car?" No, we would be happy that the sojourner reached his destination, that the seeker found His home, that the struggler received His rest. That is how scripture **always** paints it. I think it would be good for that to become our **assumption** instead of our **conclusion**.

That is how our text paints it. It is seen as a blessing. The righteous is taken away from evil. Is that what we want? Do we want taken away from evil? I think I do. I want the struggle to be over. I want the victory, once and for all, won in the battle against sin. I want the presence of sin gone forever. That is one side of what happens in eternity. All the bad things are gone, and all the good things are better. What is not to like? What is not to look forward to? Now our text tells us none of this is noticed. None of this is considered. Those looking on could care less. They have no idea of how God does things. He **truly does** remove some of His children in a way that looks early to us. But it is sometimes simply a mercy to them. And I suspect sometimes they have **learned and done** what God **wants learned and done**. We don't know. But it is never a cruelty when God takes His own to Himself. **We** might experience it that way, but the ones He calls to Himself **don't** once they see Christ. Now in verse 2 where it says **Each one walking in his uprightness** is probably better understood as the righteous following through on the path they had always walked. They had faith in God. They will see God. For them it is a logical and predictable end to their path. If it seems early to the onlookers, so be it.

And look at the end of it all. Peace. Peace with God. Peace with others. And Peace with ourselves. What wonder of wonders that will be. That is what our **homelife** will be like in eternity. There is no **home** on earth like this. As long as there are sinners relating, there is going to be strife. But we have this hope that one day we will be in perfect lasting peace.

But scripture tells us that we don't need to wait until that day to taste of His peace. His Word says,

Isaiah 26:3 (NKJV)

**³ You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You,*
Because he trusts in You.**

We can get tastes of heaven now by how we think now. It all depends upon **our trust in God** and our **willingness to submit our thoughts** to His thoughts. Remember that His thoughts are always higher than our thoughts. So our text shows us that God is taking care of the righteous, even though the leadership has failed to lead in godliness.

Now we go back to the problem at hand. The people.

³ **"But come here, You sons of the sorceress, You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!**

⁴ **Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth *And* stick out the tongue? *Are* you not children of transgression, Offspring of falsehood,**

When God's people sinned God often sent His prophets to set the record straight. I think we all know that telling God's truth to people is not always received well. Sometimes even **we believers prefer the lies we tell ourselves** to the **truths that would require us to change**. So truth isn't the most chummy of friends.

What we see here is probably the response of the people worshipping other gods when the prophets come around. See how they react to God's truth. The word for ridicule here means to make merry at someone, jesting at them. They are making fun of the prophets. The prophets are bringing words from God, like our brother Steve emphasized several weeks ago. They are saying words **directly from the creator God**. And these people mock the prophets and stick out their tongues. They are making light of the prophets and what the prophets say.

Now we would never do this.... Out loud. But isn't that what we are doing when we **rush to do the thing that God forbids**? When we simply ignore that God has said anything at all on the topic of one of our passions or cravings? For most of us, our mocking stays where no one sees it and we don't have to admit it. But God looks at all the motives of our hearts. He knows the truth even though we don't have the courage to tell it to ourselves. He is never fooled. And He always knows how to take it.

Now in verse 3 we see the people called **You sons of the sorceress, You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!**

If we had been there we would have understood immediately what was meant. The worship of other idols involved sorcery and sexual immorality. But we know from all that Isaiah said that **idolatry** and **adultery** were often used as synonyms. **Idolatry** is spiritual **adultery**. In this instance the worship of other gods involved sexual practices but they would not have had to be called adultery.

Now we are not going to go into detail on the word by word study up to verse 9. It isn't necessary to get the point.

But a huge question arises here.

Now why does God choose the imagery he uses here? The prophet gets pretty graphic. It is even more so in the original language. In fact, the translators didn't seem to have the heart to use the graphic images in the original. And this text is not just a fleeting reference. Isaiah spends time painting a very promiscuous picture of the whoring of Israel. It is all painted as a very sexual experience.

I was raised that a Christian should never speak in a profane or graphic manner. I was taught that it was a bad witness. Good Christians avoid certain topics and words. But when you compare that to scripture you find that God Himself does not go by those rules. The Holy Spirit inspired some very graphic images that would not be fitting for young people to hear and would be unsettling for even adults to hear. So what is up here? Why would God do such a thing?

Also, we might also find some criticism here. Why is God so fixated on sex? Why does He bring that up so often in His word? Why make such a big deal about it? And why use sex to describe things that aren't even sexual, like idolatry. A large portion of scripture deals with sexuality, whether figurative or literal. What is with that?

Remember how we say that **we can never put God in our boxes**? We always have to get the boxes from God. We can't trust our perceptions about what **God ought to be** or what **we ought to be**. We just need to listen to what He says.

So why does the prophet speak so crassly in our text.

Now I cannot speak for women. And women who know me might heartily agree. But I **can** speak for us men.

How would you experience the sudden discovery that this is what **your wife** was doing **with another man**? Would you rationally reason out a thought-through response like you would if you found out she ran over your favorite fishing rod? No. It would be a gut punch that would never be forgotten. Your whole life would be rocked. You would feel betrayed in a way no one else could betray you. It would be tragedy of tragedies. And you would not have to **work up** to that feeling. You would not have to do a Bible study to realize its significance. It is such a big deal, such a close to the core issue, that your feelings would likely be **perfectly congruent** with the **seriousness of the offense**. You would not need to think about it to know what a big deal it was. You would fully experience it in all of its horror.

And the more brazen this woman's actions toward this other man, the more sick you would feel. Here is someone you have regarded as the most precious person to you, the one worth devoting your whole life for her welfare, she is that special to you, and she is offering herself as someone utterly common, as someone without value, as something cheap, with no honor or regard for you or your relationship with her.

And this woman didn't just fall into this sin. She was **committed** to it. She was focused on it. It was her ambition. She was going to have carefully laid out plans and carry them out.

This leads to the next question. Ok I can understand the prophet referencing this topic and making this kind of an illustration. But why does the prophet go into all the gory details. Think about this. This is where we might want to give advice to God. We might say, God this makes you look bad. The way you go into great detail about this sin.... Why are you so obsessed with this topic? Why expose all the gory details? Why not just say you adulterer? Remember this is God that wrote this. It is He who chose to emphasize this sin in just this way. We may want to be critical. But as always we would be the one who is wrong.

Someone said that the devil is in the details. In this case we see the literal devil in the details. The details are the facts. They are the truth. And the details often reveal the motives. They reveal the mindset. And they reveal the seriousness of the offense. **We learn about who we are by looking at what we did. And the details reveal what we did and why we did it.**

The **details** tell us the truth about **the sin** and **the sinner**. That is what facts do. And they are the fuel that can lead to proper repentance. If we were in Israel's shoes, we might say, I have really been struggling with idolatry. We might tell someone I really blew it with idolatry. We might say, I was stupid and I worshipped an idol. We might treat it the way we often treat our sins. We refer to them in a general way. But that won't do. God reveals the facts in such a way to promote **true repentance**, repentance befitting the evil attitudes and practices being committed. He exposes the sin in such a blatant manner so that the sin can be **repented** of accurately and thoroughly. Because if not, it will certainly be **damned** accurately and thoroughly. His case against these people is very serious and the details reveal His righteousness in their condemnation.

Now again, why does God compare this idolatry to sexual sin?

I think that God actually built into the process of Christian discipleship this understanding of **the specialness of a marriage relationship and the specialness of the sexual act**. We are supposed to get, down deep in our

souls, that it is to be exclusive. It isn't something we just understand technically. We feel it. We can't even explain our reaction, it is that deep seated. To imagine this exclusivity being violated makes us sick to our stomachs. And I think that this relationship, this strong compulsion, this marriage experience was created because **without it we would have never been able to have anything to compare to how strongly God feels about idolatry.** He wanted us to have something in our lives that He could appeal to that we **could really understand**, we could really **get**. And here it is. What we will see is not pretty. It is not safe. But it is absolutely necessary. God wants us to understand in **even an emotional way** just how repugnant, how disgraceful, how appalling, how devastating, how tragic, how hurtful, how disrespectful, how betraying, how hideous, how gut wrenching, how sorrowful, how comprehensive it is when we chose to serve another idol rather than worship Him. He wants us to experience in a way **that we cannot forget** how serious it is to God when we choose to love anything or anyone more than we love Him. I think he built all that into the way we regard the preciousness of the sexual commitment to each other in marriage. It might be the only thing He can appeal to that will really make us understand.

We have to stop here. We can't go on. What do you love? What will you not accept God's commands about? What must you have no matter what God says? What must you have no matter what the truth is? Where are you willing to spend **what God says** to have **what you want**? Is it a relationship? Is it a pleasure? Is it some fleshly reaction? If you will track it down you are likely to find an idol. Oh that we would grasp the seriousness of our sin. Oh that we would **regard it, experience it**, like how we would see infidelity in a spouse. That is the seriousness of what we are doing to God. Oh that we would truly repent of sin, repent in such a way that we will not accept any more failure, that we would call in the whole church if needed to get us turned around. This reprobate woman is given to us this morning to drive us to our knees. We are like her when **we will not submit to God,** when we **run after our other loves,** when we **must have our fulfillment or pleasure or satisfaction in a way that God forbids** and we **refuse to believe all of God's promises for our good.** May the Holy Spirit drive us to the kind of repentance called for by the seriousness of our sin.

And remember the details? It is interesting to me that when we see repentance in scripture, it is specific. And it goes clear down to the motives. The ones we most refer to get down to the heart of the matter. Remember

Isaiah's confession in Isaiah 6? He says **Isaiah 6:5 (NKJV)**

⁵ So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

Isaiah gets specific. He tells the truth about himself with clarity. Better yet is David's repentance. His is the gold standard of repentance. There is no "oops" in his statement. There is nothing that gets him off the hook. He takes the blow of the truth full on the chin. He gets to the heart of the matter. The **sin that he did** was a result of **the person that he was**. That is true repentance. And it is the details that reveal the sin that we did and prepares us to see the person that did it.

Psalm 51:1-19 (NKJV)

¹ Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. (Repentance realizes that we are completely reliant upon God's mercy and grace. There is no other line of pursuit to restore relationship. There is no strategy that will get us off the hook. Excuses or minimizing our guilt only gets in the way of repentance. If God does not do the forgiving, we will not be forgiven)

³ For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me.

⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight-- That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge.

(Notice the word evil that David uses to describe his sin. Last week we looked at this. When is the last time we looked at something we did and called it evil? When we see the sins **we commit** like Isaiah describes Israel's sin, we will respond like David responds here. When we really **get** our sin, it too is always before us until we do business with it. And even then, our sin's seriousness grows in our realization as we grow as Christians. Our **regret only grows** as does **our appreciation for God's grace**. The more deeply we grow to love our Savior the more deeply we despise our own sins. And the easier it becomes to see its evil.)

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

We like to think of our sins as being superficial. But David knew better. They stem from who we were at birth. They stem from the remnants of our old nature.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

Here is the hard and constant job of sanctification in the Christian life. It is the process of getting truth into areas of our lives that we haven't even looked at. It is going where we have never gone before **with truth** to replace the deep seated lies we believe that drive our sinful behavior and reactions. Do you want to know God's will for your life? Well part of it is to look at what you do or did, find out why, and replace the lie that drove that behavior with truth. We need truth in the inmost places that drive our godless actions and reactions.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

The beauty of the Christian life is that **we don't have to minimize our sin** because God's forgiveness is fully effective. There is no sin **that we did** that **what Christ did** is not able to cover. When we are washed in the blood of Christ, we are fully clean. Perfectly clean.

8 Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

A believer never has to run from their sin in order to be happy, or peaceful. **Repentance**, not **repression**, is the path to joy and gladness. We need not fear finding out anything about ourselves. We don't need to fear because we can be forgiven of it, no matter what it is.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

This is where true clear deep repentance leads us. Sin leads us to despair. Repentance leads us to hope. We **hope in God** to do what we cannot do. We **hope in God** to make those changes that we have proven we cannot do in our own strength. Here is another one of those prayers you can pray that are always in Jesus name, in God's will. Change me God from the inside out. Reveal the crud in me and help me to repent thoroughly and accurately. Don't let me stop at any point in this process. Renew that spirit in me that always wants to do business with you. Renew my courage to take on the stuff that I don't want to look at. Do your work in my heart so I am holding nothing back, so I am not giving myself away under every tempting tree of idolatry. Let me serve **no other God** than you. Let me **obey no other commands** than yours. Let me believe nothing other than your Words. If you are a believer and you pray that prayer, God will answer it.

Now back to the text. Trees and valleys and clefts and smooth stones and lofty mountains were all places of idol worship. So clearly the predominant sin is idolatry.

Isaiah laments how the people are **giving all this stuff** that should have been **given to God**. That is a hard pill to swallow. Again it is like a wife giving herself to someone else and is not willing to give herself to her husband. It is a double insult. Who **she is willing** to give herself to is a huge problem. Who **she is unwilling** to give herself to is a huge problem.

He makes mention that they truly were sacrificing their children to these idols. The first born were to be God's possession. But they were given to idols. Think about it. It is like **the best** was given to **their greatest love**. That is what we always do.

We see a picture here of a woman who will not be satisfied. She is wearing herself out chasing her idols. She must have them, but they are never enough. This is never unusual. That's what all our idols do. They keep promising stuff but they never deliver that which our soul needs, what our hearts truly crave. And in the end she follows them either to her grave or to hell. In this case both would be true.

Whatever is running your life **that isn't God in heaven** is leading you to hell. You cannot cling to any contrary way or belief and have any degree of assurance of your salvation. Idols are designed to drag your soul to hell. Never get comfortable with them in your life.

¹⁰ You are wearied in the length of your way; Yet you did not say, 'There is no hope.' You have found the life of your hand; Therefore you were not grieved.

How long will a person cling to a way of life that does not work?

In many cases, they will cling to it until they die because they feel they must have whatever they keep trying to get. And they wouldn't be doing it if it did not have some kind of appeal.

What are you doing that is not working? What are you doing that has never brought about the result you hope for?

Do you see the **futility** oozing out of verse 10. And along with that we see the **stupidity**.

Have you ever noticed it is far easier to see someone else's futile efforts than it is to see your own?

Mike used to always say if you do what you always did you will get what you always got. But it seems that is very hard for us to believe. We usually think we have simply not tried that way **hard enough**. The thing I liked about Mike's approach is, if something isn't working, shake it up a little. Try

something different. At least you will get a different result. In IT work I often find when diagnosing a problem, if I can get a different error than the one I started with, I am likely having progress. It is still an error, but I am getting movement.

Look at the state of the people in verse 10

¹⁰ You are wearied in the length of your way; Yet you did not say, 'There is no hope.' You have found the life of your hand; Therefore you were not grieved.

They are wearied, hopeless but won't admit it, trusting the strength of their own resources, and not grieved over any of it.

Now remember that this is referring to this harlot who is choosing a life of absolute disgrace. It isn't like some top executive that is having some personal problems.

It is amazing how good we are at **dignifying our shame**. When we look at our own lives, our stuff looks perfectly reasonable. No one should look down on me or my choices. Actually I think I am doing pretty good considering. In our text it would be more like, actually I think I am doing pretty good **considering that I have a preference for other gods**. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob doesn't really suit my taste. I like the gods that provide me a little more fun, a little more fulfillment. And I especially like the ones that give me the stuff I want.

We can do the most shameful things and think that none of that should be used **as evidence in my evaluation**. I should get the benefit of the doubt. My faithlessness and disobedience is really not who I am. I actually have a wonderful heart for God. It is just the stuff He commands me to do I really don't trust.

Look at verse 10.

Would someone looking at how you respond to life say you are wearied?

If so, do you look at your life and think, you know what, **my way isn't working**? You know what, there really isn't any hope in the decisions I am making?

And when you look at the decisions you are making, **where are they coming from**? Can you quote verses that you are basing your actions on. Or do you have to say **"yes, but"** to the verses? Is your life being lived based on your strength of wisdom and reason? Or is it being lived based on what a Savior, who has sacrificed His life in your stead, says? Is it based on **your** strength or **His** strength?

And at the end **if** what you are doing is defying what God has clearly said, are you **grieved**? Or is what grieves you is **having to deal with people** who don't think how you are living is just fine?

That is a direct application of our text. How do we fare up? Are we more like Paul who says, to live is Christ and to die is gain? Or are we more like the harlot who is not satisfied by God, and we resist His commands and go out and get what we want by our own strength without really feeling any gut level grief?

I hope, if nothing else this morning we have grasped the seriousness of infidelity against God. We can use our imaginations to understand how bad our sin and idolatry is in God's mind. He has given us the capacity to experience the seriousness as He experiences it. And actually the more we love our spouse the more we can understand how that infidelity would be experienced. God has given us that and made it such a big deal inside of us so He has something to compare sin to. We would do well to have a mental shift that puts **our lack of faithfulness to God** under that umbrella. That is how God says to view it. And may that drive us to our knees in confession and drive us to get whatever help we need to change in repentance.

Prayer

Change me God from the inside out. Reveal the crud in me and help me to repent thoroughly and accurately. Don't let me stop at any point in this process. Renew that spirit in me that always wants to do business with you. Renew my courage to take on the stuff that I don't want to look at. Do your work in my heart so I am holding nothing back, so I am not giving myself away under every tempting tree of idolatry. Let me serve **no other God** than you. Let me **obey no other commands** than yours. Let me believe nothing other than your Words.