

Where Will You Look for Happiness?

Isaiah 57-59

Main Idea

Isaiah calls us turn from our sin and self-righteousness by humbly coming to the Lord and delighting in our relationship with him, which is secured not by our faithfulness to him, but by his faithfulness to his son.

Overview

Rebellion or Refuge (ch. 57)

- Will you rebel against God or take refuge in God?
- The Israelites do not care that the righteous are perishing, that there are fewer and fewer righteous people (v. 1)
- God calls them the offspring of adulteress NOT the offspring of Abraham – physical lineage alone does not define true Israel
- From the valleys to the hill tops the Israelites are engage in pagan worship
 - Cf. Isaiah 1:29; 2 Kings 16:4; Jeremiah 3:6-9; Hosea 4:12-13
- The Israelites are seeking security in other nations
 - They make a covenant with another king (v. 9)
 - They journey far way looking elsewhere for strategic alliances (v. 9)
- Because of their rebellion they are left weary (v. 10)
- They forget the Lord and trust in idols that will not deliver (v. 11-13a)
- Despite their rebellion, the Lord offers refuge for those that come to him (v. 13b)
 - He prepares the way and removes the obstacles (v. 14)
 - Though the Lord is high and holy, he also dwells with the contrite (crushed) and lowly (humble) (v. 15)
 - This reminds us of Christ Jesus who became humble (cf. Phil. 2)
- The Lord heals and brings peace to those who trust in him, but those who do not will have no peace (v. 19-21)

Ritual or Relationship (ch. 58)

- Will you try to manipulate God with rituals or delight in him through relationship?
- Though it appears the Israelites desire to obey God, they are really trying to manipulate him
 - Notice the “as if” – their obedience is external (v. 2)
 - Notice the complaining (v. 3)
 - God clearly says they are seeking their own pleasure not his (v. 4-5)
- The Lord gives three patterns of obedience that is truly pleasing to him
 - Notice the “if/then” structure of verses 6-14
 - Obedience does not cause God’s blessing; it only puts us in the place where he’s already pouring out blessing
 - Religion that is truly pleasing to God is that which enjoys the mercy of God and extends mercy to others
 - If our faith does not help those in need, it’s not only unhelpful to others, it’s unacceptable to the Lord
- The Lord is the center of his promised favor (v. 9, 11, 14)
- Sabbath was a day (the form) focused on rest, renewal and reverence (the essence)
 - The day of Sabbath in Isaiah points to the person of Sabbath in Christ (cf. Hb. 4)
 - There is a direct connection between Sabbath and delighting in the Lord

Separation or Salvation (ch. 59)

- Will your sins separate you from God or your repentance bring you joyful salvation in God?

- Isaiah spells out the consequence for sin: separation and alienation (v. 1-2)
 - Cf. Numbers 6:22-23
- Isaiah highlights the pervasiveness of his peoples' sin (v. 3-4)
 - Paul quotes these verses in Romans 3 to show all people have fallen short of the glory of God
- Isaiah joins himself with his people and begins to confess (v. 9)
 - Notice the change from you/they to us/we
- Isaiah confess and repents without excuse or minimizing or blame-shifting (v. 12-13)
- The Lord will bring salvation (v. 16)
 - He will repay his enemies (v. 17-19)
 - He will save the repentance (v. 20)
- The Lord makes a covenant with "them" – that is with those who repent (v. 21)
- In verse 21 it switches from "them" (those with whom he is making the covenant) to "you" (him who is the covenant)
 - The servant of the Lord is God's covenant with his people (cf. 42:6; 49:8)
 - "My Spirit is upon you..." is found in Isaiah 61, which Jesus quotes about himself
 - In verse 21, we're overhearing the Father promising the Son his Word and Spirit forever for the benefit of his offspring (Is. 53:10)

Questions

Discussion Starter: Do you think most people understand the Christian life as the happy life? Why or why not? How has Isaiah been calling us to true, lasting happiness?

1. Read Isaiah 57:1-13. Why is Isaiah rebuking his people? Why is their behavior considered sinful? What do these verses tell us about the nature of sin?
2. Read 57:13-21. What do these verses tell us about the character of God?
3. In verse 15, what does it mean to be contrite and lowly in spirit? Why does God choose to dwell with people like this?
4. How do these verses point us to the gospel? How would you use this passage to provide hope to someone who feels they are so messed up God could never love them?

After highlighting the Redemption bought by the Suffering Servant (chs. 52-53) and holding out the benefits of that redemption (ch. 54-46), Isaiah turn his attention back to the sinful failings of the people. Take some time to describe the sinful behavior of the Israelites. Remember while this describes real situations, the language is also poetic. Discuss what these verses tell us about the nature of our sinful rebellion (e.g. it's personal against God; it leaves us tired; it does not deliver).

Move on to show the grace of the Lord in these verses. Despite Israel's sinfulness, the Lord promises to be a refuge for all who will humbly come to him. Notice they do not have to prepare the way and remove obstacles – the Lord is doing that. Try to tangibly apply these verses by talking about how these words could be used to comfort those who are hurting, those who feel guilty/ashamed, etc.

5. Read 58:1-5. Why is God not pleased with the behavior of the Israelites? In what ways might we be tempted to act like the Israelites? Why are we tempted to think our obedience obligates God to "bless" in the way we want?
6. Read 58:6-14. What is this passage saying about the connection between obedience to God and blessing from God? What is the main blessing of these verses? How does that connect to Sabbath?

In chapter 57, the Israelites rebel through irreligion; here they rebel through self-righteous religion. Discuss why the Lord is not pleased. And remember we are not "better than" the Israelites. Talk about how/why we're tempted to act the same way.

As you move into verses 6-14, remember the connection between the "if/then" is not causal. That is, our obedience does not cause or forces God's blessing. In this passage,

the Lord is describing the place of his favor and inviting us to join him there. Notice the Lord wants us to extend mercy because we have received mercy. Talk about the center of the blessing here – the Lord himself. As you discuss Sabbath, remember that this can take place on a day, but that is only the form. The essence – rest, renewal, reverence – should take place every day. Ultimately Christ is our Sabbath (Hb. 4). However, this does not mean we should neglect setting aside purposeful time for rest in God, renewal by God and reverence for God.

7. Read Isaiah 59:1-4. What does this tell us about sin? Why is it significant Paul quotes these verses in Romans 3?
8. Read Isaiah 59:9-13. Notice the switch from you/they to us/we. What do you notice about Isaiah's confession? What can we learn about true confession from these verses? How might we be tempted to offer a "lesser confession?"
9. Read 59:16-21. What do these verses tell you about the character of God?
10. Why is it important to realize the Redeemer comes "to those who turn from transgression?"
11. Explain verse 21. How does this encourage you?

At the beginning of 59 Isaiah circles back to the pervasive nature of sin, which Paul uses to show we are all sinful. Discuss the nature of Isaiah's confession (it's comprehensive; he acknowledges they rebelled against God personally; he realized sin is not just what they do, but part of who they are – coming from the heart). Use the latter part of the chapter to gaze at God – both his perfect justice and amazing grace.

User verse 19 to talk about the importance of ongoing repentance; talk about why repentance is not a rude instruction, but a lavish invitation into joy (that is, because it brings us to God himself!!). Regarding verse 21, here's a fuller explanation. Help the group see the amazing promises of this verse:

God makes a covenant to "them" that is to those who are turning from transgression; that's us Restoration Church. And what is that covenant? If you remember, in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is God's covenant. Jesus is God's promise to us, the new covenant.

That's why the pronoun switches to "you" in verse 21. Did you notice that? "My Spirit is upon you." This is the same thing we read in Isaiah 61, which Jesus quotes about himself.

So here's what we have in verse 21. We're overhearing God the Father promising God the Son his Word and his Spirit forever for the benefit of his offspring. And who is this offspring? Remember Isaiah 53:10 – the offspring are the ones the Servant of the Lord died for to make righteous. We, Restoration Church, are the spiritual offspring of the Servant.

Gods' promises to the Son are promises to us. God's pleasure in his Son is God's pleasure in us. In verse 21, God the Father makes a promise to his Son for our benefit, to bless us. Here's what this means: God's commitment to save us and satisfy us for eternity does not rest on our goodness to appease him or our determination to hold on to him. It rests securely in God's faithfulness to himself.

God has been fully pleased with the Son forever and his faithfulness to the Son will never cease. So it is with those trusting in the Son, Jesus Christ. God is pleased with you. He has given you his Word and his Spirit that you might enjoy him all your days and forever more. He guarantees our future heavenly hope. Isn't that good news?

Accountability: Are there areas in your life where you're looking for ultimate happiness other than in the Lord? How has the Lord been especially satisfying to you recently?