

God the Gatherer – Isaiah 56:1-8

Introduction – The people of God are a gathered-people. God has gathered us so that the world might know Him, His covenant, redeeming, personal, relational, gracious character. And so we bear the image of God more and more as we reflect that character; we become not only a gathered-people, but a gathering-people in God's name. Isaiah is a world-saving prophetic book.

Righteousness – We begin the seventh and final section of this prophetic book, this fifth gospel of the Messiah. Chs 1-39 have declared the unrighteousness of Judah, of all of Israel, and of all the nations. There is none righteous. Throughout those chapters, God has promised to make a holy people for Himself out of that mess, and in Chs 40-55 Isaiah has declared God's comfort: God Himself will send His Messiah who will be a righteous Servant, rejected by unrighteous Israel, but will carry their sin and bring the warfare between God and His people to an end. He will bear their iniquities and many people will be accounted righteous; in fact nations and their kings will stream to the house of God. These final chapters reveal God's plan to accept and then to renew – to justify and then to sanctify – many peoples to Himself and through them to gather the outcasts of the world. We find ourselves in the middle of this story – and the agents of this story.

Gathered Unto Righteousness (vv1-2) – Jonathan Edwards wrote, *“There is given to those who are regenerated a new supernatural sense that is as it were a divine spiritual taste...”* The one who has been made new in Christ finds something they never had before: a growing love for the things of God and a growing hatred of sin. And so to *“keep justice and do righteousness”* is not throwing cold water in the face of the glowing promises of free grace in Chs 54-55 – not for those who have the Spirit of Christ. These things can now be done because *“salvation is at hand.”* In other words, obedience is to be lived out as a response to salvation – and not as a debt, but as a result of a changed heart. There certainly remains the battle between the flesh and Spirit (Gal 5:16-17), but a redeemed person finds that he is no longer a slave to sin (Rom 6, esp vv1-4, 18, 20-23). The Gospel of Grace is not freedom to sin, but freedom from sin. The man who does this is blessed (v2, Matt 5:3-10, Psalm 1); that is, he finds himself in a content and fulfilled fellowship with God and more and more so with brothers and sisters here. That life expresses itself in two related behaviors: form and content, ritual and life (formal worship which then issues forth a life of glad-hearted obedience). There is a new man in us who walks *“according to the Spirit”* (Rom 8:4). The obedience in our lives comes from a confidence not only in our present salvation but in our future and final salvation – not in order to merit it but in hope to receive it. Think of waiting all day for that Thanksgiving feast when you were a child.

Gathering the Outcast into God's House (vv3-7) – The Servant of the Lord (the Messiah – chs 40-55) will radically change who can be servants of the Lord. Deut 23:1-8 was explicit in its ban on foreigners (especially the Ammonites and Moabites who had attempted to keep Israel from the Promised Land) and eunuchs (made such through pagan-rituals that denied God's definitions and intentions of sexuality) from coming into the holy place of God. The Lord intends, through His Suffering Servant, to save the sexually immoral, the idolaters, and those who hate Him and His people. Those most hardened to the Gospel, people and nations, are going to be brought to Him. The eunuch who turns to the Lord (v4), who would have otherwise had no future name, no place in God's home will have better than sons and daughters and a place (v5). The foreigner who joins himself to the Lord in faith will be brought to the holy mountain and be accepted (vv6-7).

What the Servant Has Done – What does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved? It means to be crucified with Christ and to be raised up in a new life in Christ (Gal 2:20). It means that all immorality including all sexual deviancies can be forgiven and any sinner can be restored and brought near God now through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11). It means all nations, all races, all peoples can be reconciled to one another at the Cross (Eph 2:14-18).

What is this House of Prayer for All Nations – The door is wide open for any and all who *“keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant”* (v4). Jesus said at the heart of this, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He sent”* (John 6:29). Out of that transforming faith, righteous works flow – *“who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants...”* (v6). God gathers these and He makes them joyful here, in *“the house of prayer for all nations”* (v7). This gathering is fundamentally a gathering of joy that is found nowhere else. You were far away from God – and He has brought you near. All things are new and He will never leave you nor forsake you.

God the Gatherer (v8) – God gathers to the New Israel, the church, others. More and more outcasts have come and are coming. The Ethiopian Eunuch was one such example (Acts 8:26ff). How will God use you, how will He use your family, how will He use this church, to carry out His gathering in?