

Isaiah Chapters 56-58 Summary - John Karmelich

Title: Who is saved, and how can we tell?

Jesus once said we can tell the "saved" the same way we can taste fruit and know if it's good by how it tastes. (Matthew 7:16-20). That leads to the question of how does one know one is saved based on the Old Testament? In effect, these three chapters cover that topic. Since Isaiah's writing to Jewish readers one could wonder if a Gentile (anyone non-Jewish) is saved or even a Jewish person who isn't allowed to be part of their society? I realize we Christians know that answer, but as believers we should be able to explain the salvation of Jewish outcasts to let's be honest, "A Jewish God". I love the expression that the biggest mistake Jewish people make is a failure to see Jesus as God. The biggest mistake Christians make is we tend to forget we worship a Jewish God. Yes, I realize the text says the Temple is there for all nations and God wants all people to come to Him. Just saying a lot of this text talks about things we associate with being Jewish, and Christians have debated those topics for 2,000 years.

I'll get the tough topic out of the way first. One way Isaiah said the Israelites can be a good witness for God is by keeping the Sabbath. In essence it's about taking one day off a week to focus on God. Of all the 10 Commandments, this is the only one NOT repeated in the New Testament. Do I have a problem with Christians taking a full day to honor God? Of course not. I know Christians who believe we must honor the Saturday Sabbath. My response (if I want to argue) is what about medical people or those in the military? To me, Christians are called to honor God every day. With that speech out of my system the point is these chapters use observing the Sabbath as one way to tell believers from non-believers. It doesn't mean everyone who does a Sabbath ritual is saved. It just means one who cares about God will care about honoring Him. Keeping the Sabbath (honoring God on Saturdays) is their way of proving it within their community.

Realize the text in these chapters go back and forth saying in effect, "Those who care about God do the following and those who don't honor God do the following". Jesus' statement of the taste of bad fruit is an obvious way to tell if fruit is good or bad. In effect the examples given in these three chapters are all examples of the same thing. OK John, I believe Jesus is God and I use my life for His glory! Why read further? Just about every New Testament book warns of the dangers of false prophets. Realizing what to look for is a requirement for all believers. Of course, no one knows who will be saved. The point is we are to watch for "signs" to make sure we stay on the correct path.

OK enough of that, time to discuss the text itself! The key issue here is salvation. Isaiah explained the cross in Chapters 52b-53. Chapters 54 and 55 focused on how great life will be once Jesus starts ruling from Israel. It logically leads to the question who gets to enjoy this? It leads here to Isaiah's sermon on who gets saved over these 3 chapters! The text doesn't say "Just believe the Messiah died for your sins and that's that!" Don't get me wrong, I fully believe salvation is by faith alone. The issue is evidence of our salvation in these three chapters. That's why Isaiah opens with (in effect) with "Do what's right and don't forget to keep the Sabbath!" My loose translation for Christians, "Regularly think about living as God wants us to live and take time to honor Him as God". That's evidence of our salvation! Of course, many can fake that and that's discussed in this text!

Then Isaiah focuses on those that religious Jewish people would look down upon. Examples given are eunuchs (one that can't have children) and non-Jewish people (again, "Gentiles"). Isaiah states here the eunuchs who keep the Sabbath (speaking to a Jewish audience) are welcome in heaven. Verse 7 states

that God's Temple is for ALL people, which is stated a few times in the Bible! Verse 8 says that just as God gathers Israel together again, so He will also gather others who believe in Him!

Then Isaiah gets negative in Verse 9. A common theme in the Bible is to beware of false teachers. It is mentioned in almost every Bible book as I mentioned earlier, so be "Fruit Inspectors" of what teachers say about Jesus! Bottom line Verses 9 to 12 of Chapter 56 tell us what to be aware of. Isaiah continues his rant against non-believers in Chapter 57. (For newcomers, realize no chapter breaks existed in any of the Bible books but were added roughly the time of the printing press!)

Chapter 57 opens with a statement that the length of one's life is no indication of salvation! (Of course, I'd argue children who don't reach an age of accountability are saved!) By Verse 3, Isaiah moves into a condemnation of those who are "faking it". God isn't impressed with people going through the motions of worshipping Him, but their hearts aren't in it! It is not a condemnation of when our minds wander in church. The point is God knows who are sincere about caring about Him as opposed to those who go to church because "it's good for business" (I met people like that). Some people go to church to "blend in" but truly don't care about God! In effect God's reminding Isaiah's readers God knows all things and we can't fool Him by faking it! Verse 11 says that God's patient wanting people to repent but there's a limit to His patience. Only God's aware of when He'll say, "Tired of your games, and I'll allow you to suffer to draw closer to Me!" Verse 16 says He will not strive with man forever! That is why the "Revelation show" will happen one day (to prove God is in charge), let alone life's tragedies! Chapter 57 teaches us non-believers will suffer for "faking it" and only performing the right rituals. The reminder is behavior matters as God desires that we use our lives as a witness for Him with our lives!

I realize this is painful to hear and I realize almost all my readers are devout Christians. Remember it's also a matter of what to say to someone who goes to church regularly but still is stealing or cheating in some significant fashion! I've personally been involved in situations where a person was confronted in that regards! That's why Matthew 18 gives a model of how to deal with such situations. I'm not saying we must be perfect. At the same time, we know we are always "on the clock for Jesus" and strive to be a good witness for Him. When we sin, confess and turn from it. Yes, that's old news, but we all need a reminder of that every now and then!

Meanwhile Isaiah is still not done insulting those who are "faking it". Remember Isaiah is telling us in effect who will and won't be saved and here's how to tell the difference! Chapter 58 opens on the topic of fasting for the wrong reason. The basic idea of fasting is not eating and use the hungry time to focus on God. The verses here focus on fasting for the wrong reasons. It'd be like fasting for God to give us money to spend on our own pleasures (versus necessities and helping others)! Remember God is a God of justice as well as a God of love! Jesus taught fasting means doing it where no one is aware of it but God! I also realize all too well, we can't force God to do anything, but it's ok to ask!

Bottom line, Isaiah gets on a role in the middle of the chapter about those who don't care about helping those in need (people in need of basic food and clothing) but again fast for self-seeking purposes! The last section focuses on those who are doing the right thing. In effect, it is about using our lives to make a difference for God. If we help the less fortunate and use our lives to glorify God, then we will have a lot more than we every desire. God promises NEVER to forsake us! It means trusting Him when all is falling apart. It means helping others when we're hurting. God desires we use our lives to glorify Him, even when things are falling apart around us! A great eternity awaits those of us who use our lives for His glory and again He promises never to forsake us, even at the worst of times. On that pleasant note, I'll call it a week! Bottom line, pray for guidance and let God guide our lives for His glory!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!