

ISAIAH

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Isaiah chapter 57 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Isaiah chapter 57 focuses on two groups of people, the righteous and the wicked. Now keep in mind that both these groups are found in God's people, the Jews. And there is one word you might say for both these groups of people, and that word is "*peace.*"

In Isaiah 57:2 and 57:21 we see this word used. For the righteous, they will enter the rest of God, that Sabbath rest; they will have the peace of God in their lives. For the wicked, there is no peace for them, none at all, no peace of God because they have not made peace with God. With that as our background, let's begin reading in Isaiah chapter 57, beginning in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word this evening.

ISAIAH 57**VERSES 1-2**

1. The thought here is carried over from Isaiah 56:9-12 that dealt with the people of God who turned from God and followed after wickedness. Now we see these wicked people coming against those Jews who love the Lord, persecuting the righteous. And as this is done, no one seems to care.

Now we see this played out today even in our own country. When the righteous by faith stand up for the things of God, the wicked come against them. The light exposes the darkness that they are living in and they try to extinguish the light. It is as Jesus said in John 3:20, **“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”**

2. Now this does not seem fair, it does not seem right. How can God allow that? Keep in mind that even though the righteous were persecuted, they were ignored by the wicked leaders in Judah; God was not going to forsake them. Remember what we read, **“... the righteous is taken away from evil [or from the face of evil]. He shall enter into peace; They shall rest in their beds, Each one walking in his uprightness.”**

Yes, from a human standpoint no one may care but God cares and He brings them into His peace and His rest. In Psalm 95:7-11, a verse that Paul quotes a few times in Hebrews, we are told, **“For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: ‘Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, “It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.” So I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest.””**

The Psalmist is speaking of the children of Israel as God brought them out of bondage in Egypt, through the Red Sea, destroying all the Egyptian soldiers. Then, in only a short time of traveling in the wilderness they began to complain because they were thirsty. The “**rebellion**” is speaking of the waters of Meribah in Exodus chapter 17. Instead of trusting God and worshipping Him they were not trusting Him and complaining! The result of that is that their hearts were hardened towards God.

Don’t miss all that God did here. You see, the problem was not that they did not have water to drink, but what they did about not having water to drink. Instead of asking God to quench their thirst, they complained, they tested God. They did not trust God.

All that murmuring and complaining hardened their hearts and we need to be careful because that can happen to us! And look at the result of all of this. Because they refused to trust God, because they refused to walk by faith, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until that generation of people, from 20 years old and up, died out. They did not enter **HIS REST!**

The rest is a place of faith, of trust, of walking in the Spirit. Many Christians live their lives in the wilderness, not walking by faith, and in that they have not entered the Promised Land, which is a life of the Spirit. Yes, they are saved, they have been delivered from the bondage in Egypt, which is a type of the world, but they never enter that walk in the Spirit. What a lesson we need to learn. Don’t murmur and complain, worship the Lord, bow down before Him, kneel before our LORD and Maker!

The Psalmist gives us a choice and basically says, “**Today, if you will hear His voice . . . walk by faith or you will walk by sight. Fill your life with the worship of God or you will fill your life with murmuring or complaining!**” Murmuring is like cancer - it just begins to spread and take over. How can we keep from murmuring? What is the cure for murmuring? Worship!

Now this rest can also mean death here in Isaiah chapter 57. You see, even in death we don't lose, we go to be with the Lord! That peace can also mean during times of intense persecution. The idea here is that God's people will have peace regardless of what may come to them! Never forget that. Enjoy the peace that God has for you because you have made peace with Him through Jesus Christ! (Romans 5:1-2)

VERSES 3-10

1. Now we see the wicked and remember they were mocking, persecuting the people of God. They were going around flaunting their sinful ways. They became very arrogant in their rebellion against God. And now the Lord calls them on this. The thought is basically, "Who in the world do you think you are? Do you know the people you are mocking, persecuting? You are wicked and you are persecuting the righteous!" And in the end, they will not get away with any of this!

2. Keep in mind that the Lord looked at the nation of Israel, specifically here the Southern Kingdom of Judah, as His bride. Isaiah 54:5 says, "**For your Maker is your Husband.**" But they were not faithful in their relationship with God, they went after other gods, committing spiritual adultery!

Hosea 4:12 says, "**My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God.**" They were not only involved in these things, but they were teaching them to their children so they would follow in their ways!

3. Now when you read of the groves understand that these were pagan worship sites, which are nothing more than wooded areas that were high in the mountains, or on an elevated area so they could be close to their gods, or so they thought. And many of these gods and goddesses were fertility gods and their worship would culminate with all kinds of sexual promiscuity. In other words they degenerated many times into orgies. They would also have phallic symbols carved out of wood or other objects that were designed to excite you sexually. Obviously this helped to get their flesh worked up so they would then engage in these behaviors.

Now what is one of the results of this promiscuous or immoral sexual activity?

CHILDREN and many times they were unwanted children. Now what do you do with all these unwanted children? You offer them as a sacrifice to the god Molech, whose image was made of brass and was heated up in a fire pit, and then this little child was placed in the outstretched arms of this god to be burned to death. This, they thought, would give them success in life.

Keep in mind that God's people were involved in these wicked practices. Jeremiah 32:35 tells us, "**And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.**"

We have evidence of this activity in Judah as archaeologists have dug up numerous earthen jars in which were skeletons of newborn babies. During these dark days of apostasy in Israel, a person would place his newborn baby in a jar and entomb it in the walls of his house in hopes of pleasing the god, Molech.

4. I do realize that there are many Bible critics out there that like to say that Isaiah was written after their Babylonian captivity because of the accuracy of the prophecies that were made in this book. But here is some great evidence to show that it was written before. The sins that we find described in this chapter did not happen after they returned home from their captivity, but before.

Bultema put it like this, “All in all we prefer to think of the reign of Manasseh, for the abominations of this king are all found in this chapter.” And another writer said, “There is no evidence of corresponding post-exilic practices. A prophet in the post-exile could not have written like this.” (Motyer)

5. As you read of these atrocities that the people of God had done I bet you are outraged, I am. And yet, are we any different today? We have a society that looks at sex as free with anyone and everyone they want. The result of those immoral sexual encounters is *CHILDREN* and many times unwanted children. And we give up our children by murdering them in the womb to the god of pleasure, the god Molech, yes he is still around and worshiped! Let me give you the number of abortions that have occurred from 1973 to February 18th 2014 at 2:45 PM in the United States alone – 57,129,922! We are no different today, are we! We sacrifice our children to the god Molech!

6. In verse 6 they began to worship these “smooth stones” and even poured out drink offerings and grain offerings to them. Why they did this we are not sure, it is possible that they used these stones to fashion them into a god that they worshiped.

Here's the thing. You can't reduce God into some image that you worship, and that is what it seems they were doing here. If you do it is just as bad as worshiping false gods! Both are condemned by God. You must come to God and worship Him in spirit and in truth, and not any way that you want!

7. The Lord is speaking of Judah committing spiritual adultery, they were to be married to the Lord and yet they were going after other gods! Bultema puts it like this in regards to how far they had moved away from the Lord. He wrote, "According to the presentation of verse seven, the whoredom of Judah is compared to that of an adulteress who has become so impudent that she no longer commits her sins in secret but publicly and shamelessly. She acts without any restraint and refuses to blush with shame."

And once again we see the same atrocities going on in our society today. Sin is flaunted and good is looked down upon and God is mocked. There is no more blushing in regards to sin, just an unabashed, a brazen, a shameless display of sin that begins in our government that makes laws to allow it and sin fills the land!

8. Now in verse 8, what does it mean when the Lord says, "**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 hand.**"

Remember what we were told in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, that God told His people, Israel to inscribe His name and His Word on every door post. Here, there is a perverse twisting of that - they remember their pagan gods behind the doors and their posts instead of the true and living God!

9. Now let's face it, sin must be fun or no one would do it and we see that here with Judah. They enjoyed what they were doing, the sin they were committing for a time and then the spiritual adultery of God's people wasn't rewarding to them any longer. After the initial thrill of their spiritual adultery wore off, they were wearied. The sad thing here is that they did not repent as verse 10 shows us, **“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.”**

Not only that but verse 9 tells us that their walk with God had deteriorated so much, it had degenerated so much, it had fallen so low, to such a depth that it was likened to Hell! And God is not done with their rebuke!

VERSES 11-13

1. We read of the things that they were doing and we wonder how they could continue down that path. The reason is simple; God showed them mercy and did not punish their sin immediately. Because of that they felt they were getting away with it, that there were no consequences to their actions.

Yes God is gracious and merciful but He is also a righteous judge and no one will get away with anything, they were very wrong about this! You see, they had mistaken the longsuffering of God with God not caring about what they were doing, or that God can't do anything about it, or even worse, that God condones their sinful behavior. What a foolish mistake.

We see this same thought in Isaiah 51:12-13 where we are told, **“I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid Of a man who will die, And of the son of a man who will be made like grass? And you forget the Lord your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth; You have feared continually every day Because of the fury of the oppressor, When he has prepared to destroy. And where is the fury of the oppressor?”**

They have feared man, they have feared all kinds of things but when it comes to the Lord, there is no fear. That is where our fear needs to be, either in reverence to Him or fear of Him because outside of Christ we are going to be judged by our own righteousness, which is like filthy rags!

2. But that does not stop man. They tend to be very religious but there is no relationship with the true and living God. Thus, what is manifested in their lives is a false righteousness that is born out of their religious activities or out of their own imaginations and God is telling Judah and us that this kind of righteousness is empty, it is meaningless, it will profit you nothing!

3. God will not force you to come to Him. You can continue down that path you are going and when you find yourself in trouble what are you going to do? Are you going to cry out to these false god's that are nothing, that will not be able to help you? The foolishness of turning away from the Lord is seen here.

Now in contrast to that foolishness, for those that turn to the Lord, we shall receive an inheritance. And it seems like the Lord is speaking of the Kingdom Age here, His holy mountain, Jerusalem!

Notice the comparison or contrast in Psalm 37:9-11 regarding the wicked and the righteous, "**For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.**"

The choice is obvious, trusting in the Lord will make you secure but if you want to trust in self, if you want to trust in idols, it will be your ruin!

VERSE 14

1. What we see here is a picture of how to come back to God. Will there be obstacles in the way, you bet but they can be removed. You see, when a King or dignitary came to a town they would fix it up, clean up the streets, repair the roads, and-so-on.

And God is calling out to have those obstacles that are hindering your relationship with Him removed. He is calling for someone to step forward and prepare the way.

Remember back in Isaiah 40:3-5 we read some of the words that John the Baptist echoed to prepare the way for the Lord. We read, "**The voice of one crying in the wilderness:**

'Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'"

God is calling for His people to return to Him and that is what the rest of the chapter is about, the road to peace for those who want to travel on it and the road to destruction for those who refuse!

VERSES 15-19

1. Here is what needs to be done if you want to return to the Lord, You have to *understand His great majesty*. If you don't acknowledge who He is then you are not going to have that reverential fear of Him. We respond to Him because of who He is, Almighty God, "**the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.**"

Once you understand who He is and where you stand, then you need to *humble yourself before Him*. What that means to me is that you acknowledge your sins before Him and you ask Him to forgive you of your sins and that is only accomplished through Jesus Christ, receiving that free gift of faith!

And as we look at this we see that God's presence not only fills the universe. It not only inhabits eternity. But it fills the hearts and lives of people who humbly come to Him and receive Him!

2. Yes God did chasten His people, brought them into captivity, with the desire to see them return to Him. And that is what God is saying here, that His judgment will not last forever. If it did, we would be in trouble! And keep in mind that God did not create man to destroy Him but to have fellowship with Him and that man would worship Him out of love. Do you see the grace and mercy that God extends to us even though we don't deserve it! I guess that is what grace and mercy is all about, we deserve none of His grace or mercy but God freely gives it to us because He loves us!

And that is exactly what we see as we read through verses 16-18, we saw God's great love for us. God wants to restore, to comfort His people. God is so longsuffering and His hand of forgiveness is extended to all and that forgiveness will be appropriated into all those who desire to receive it. What a loving God we have.

3. As God's people return to Him, as they make peace with God then what flows from our lips will be praise unto Him. It is as Paul said in Hebrews 13:15, "**Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.**"

VERSES 20-21

1. For the righteous, they will have peace, the peace of God in their lives. But not so for the wicked! And we have this vivid picture of what the wicked are like. We are told that their lives are like the sea whose waves are violent and they cast up all kinds of mire and dirt. There is no calm, no peace for them, only being tossed back and forth. But, as we have said, there is glorious peace for those who are in Christ!

Poole put it like this, “Their minds are restless, being perpetually hurried and tormented with their own lusts and passions, and with the horror of their guilt, and the dread of Divine vengeance due unto them, and ready to come upon them.”

2. Now here is the love of God for sinful man because man does not have to be restless, hopeless. It is a choice on their part because Jesus said, “**Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**” Matthew 11:28-30. Never lose sight of that fact, He is calling to all who are weary and heavy laden, all that man must do is come to Him!

ISAIAH 58

VERSES 1-3a

1. The Lord starts out by telling Isaiah to expose the sins of the nation, let them hear what they are doing wrong. Why didn't they see their sin? Because they were doing all the religious activities but there was no relationship. They had all the motion but there was no real emotion and that activity caused them to feel comfortable in their sin, that God condoned their sin or some foolish thing like that.

Going to church does not make you a Christian. Going on mission trips does not make you a Christian. Giving to the poor does not make you a Christian. Being an elder in a church does not make you a Christian. God is looking at the heart, have you surrendered your life to Him, is Jesus your Lord and Savior? If not, then you are not a Christian and you can do all the work you want, but if your heart is not with Him, then you are dead in your trespasses and sins like Judas was!

2. Notice that God does not just look at the outward actions, which in this case was superficial. They seek God daily, they delight to know His ways, but they don't obey the Lord so are they really seeking God, are they really delighting in the ways of God? Of course not! James reminds us, **“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”** James 1:22-25.

A person who is only a hearer of God's Word and not a doer will look at himself briefly, not carefully in the mirror and say, “Looking good!” The reality is, when compared to the holiness of God, he is a miserable sinner and he refuses to see it. Yes, he may know the truths of God, have the head knowledge, but he is not applying it to his life so it can be manifested in his actions!

We are to allow God's Word to remind us who we are, sinners saved by grace and apart from God we can do nothing. We are not to just admire the image we see but allow God's Word to cause us to do something about it, to be conformed to His image not ours! What good is a mirror if you see that there is some broccoli between your teeth and then do nothing about it? You see, it is of no value and the same is true with God's Word, if you don't do what God is calling you to do, then it is of no value to you!

That phrase "**looks into**" means "to stoop down" in order to have a good look, to look intently into, not just a casual glance! As we study God's Word we are to apply it to our lives and it is not just a quick glance and then we move on, but we search the Scriptures and let them affect our lives by the power of God's Spirit! It is as the Lord said to Joshua in Joshua 1:8, "**This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.**"

But for many, religion is just a façade of their relationship with God, there is no true relationship and their actions, the things they say are a reflection of that. And you can clearly see this as people today are involved in many religious activities but God wants that deep relationship with us! They were all talk, all show and no true relationship and God calls them on it.

Yes, on the surface it seemed that God's people loved Him and were devoted to Him. They had the reputation of a nation that did righteousness and they looked like people who would take delight in approaching God. But they were far from God!

3. So these people were doing all this work for God and yet they felt God was not happy with them and they are upset with God because of that. “We have done all these things for You, fasted, gone to Temple, offered sacrifices and yet we get nothing from You! It is like You don’t even see what we are doing for You! Hey, this is costing us something, pay attention!”

They are calling God out on this one and God is going to respond to the accusations that they have made against Him by showing them what was in their hearts, what they were really doing. You can’t hide anything from God, He sees all. And this spiritual veneer is going to be removed by God, exposed by God. Let’s read on and see what God has to say.

VERSES 3b-5

1. Instead of grieving over their sins and getting right with God, they are fasting to show people how spiritual they are. Instead of stopping their work, as Leviticus 16:29 says, they forced their servants to work for them so they would not lose any money during this time. They even got a bit cranky when they fasted. Fist fights broke out, arguing with people, all in the name of the Lord. And then they wondered why God did not hear them, why He didn’t acknowledge their actions!

You see, the reality here is that they did not have the right heart and fasting became an empty ritual. Adam Clarke hit this hard back in 1823 when he wrote about those that called themselves Christians and were involved in slave trading. Listen to what he wrote, “How can any nation pretend to fast or worship God at all, or dare to profess that they believe in the existence of such a Being, while they carry on the *slave trade*, and traffic in the souls, blood, and bodies of men! O ye most flagitious [criminal] of knaves [scoundrel], and worst of hypocrites, cast off at once the mask of your religion; and deepen not your endless perdition by professing the *faith* of our *Lord Jesus Christ*, while ye continue in this traffic!”

We can apply that today. Remember after the 9/11 tragedy and how congress came together, both democrats and republicans and they sang “God bless America!” Really, when you legislate all kinds of immorality and then you are asking God to bless this nation, that is hypocrisy!

2. Let me say this. Yes, our faith needs to first of all be inward; it has to come from our heart. There needs to be that deep relationship with the Lord, but it does not stop there. What God has done on the inside of our lives then needs to overflow into our actions, the things that we do, the things that we say. They had it wrong. They were all outward and there was nothing deep within. And thus, their outward activities were for show and what was truly in their hearts was manifested in the things that they said, the things that they did as we have seen. They went against the Word of God and yet they felt comfortable with their religious activity!

We, as Christians, need to let our light shine in this dark world. Jonathan Edwards wrote regarding this,

Christian love disposes a person to be public-spirited. A man of a right spirit is not a man of narrow and private views but is greatly concerned for the good of the community to which he belongs, and particularly of the city where he resides.

- Johnathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 169

This is not very complicated. As a Christian we love the Lord with all our being. That is what we need to do. And it is out of that love for Christ that we live as He desires us to live. The things that He loves we love. And He loves the people of this world; He died for them so we too must love them with the love of Christ bringing to them the Good News of Jesus Christ as His ambassadors. Bringing the Gospel message to the people of this world. And we are not only to love the things He loves but also hate the things He hates, like sin! You see, not very complicated unless we let self get in the way and cause us to say and do things that are contrary to what the Lord desires. Christianity is not a part time hobby; it is our entire life, every moment of every day! May we not forget that!

3. Now don't come to the conclusion that fasting is wrong or bad, it isn't. They were doing it for the wrong reasons and God called them on it. You see, fasting is good, and both the Old Testament and New Testament speak of fasting. It is a time of denying the flesh and just spending time with the Lord to praise Him and to make intercession regarding some issue, to hear God's instructions, His direction for a situation you are in.

But it had degenerated into an outward activity where when someone was fasting you could tell by the way they looked and acted. Notice what Jesus said regarding fasting in Matthew 6:16-18, **“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”**

In other words, this is between you and God, don't use it to draw attention to yourself, as they were doing. True fasting is not a matter of physical posture or of outward display of mourning; it is a matter of the heart between you and the Lord!

VERSES 6-7

1. They had their own idea of what fasting was all about and now God is going to correct them on this because it is a matter of the heart and not the outward appearance of a person. J. Vernon McGee puts it like this,

This is tremendous - it gets right down to the nitty-gritty, right down where the rubber meets the road. God says in effect, "If you really want to fast, let Me tell you what to do: Instead of fasting and going around with a pious look, stop your sinning. Stop your gossiping. Stop the things that reveal the wickedness and the evil in your hearts. Demonstrate your faith in Me by your conduct. Start being honest in your dealings. Be truthful in what you say. Instead of seeing you in sackcloth and covered with ashes, I'd like to see you clean on the inside."

My friend, I am of the opinion that the Lord could stop many church services today and say, "Listen, let's cut this out. Why are you going through this form? You are not getting close to me. You are not pleasing Me. When you leave this service, you gossip, you have bitterness in your heart, you are not moral in your conduct, and you are living loose lives. You think you are pleasing Me by your religious form. I want you to know that you are not pleasing Me. That is the reason I am rejecting you."

- J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible, Vol. III, p. 328

That is what God is telling His people here and us as J. Vernon said, “If you want to fast the way that pleases Me, begin with getting right with your brothers and sisters. Stop oppressing others, and reach out to help others.” Getting right with God begins by stopping the evil we do towards others. And then, getting right with God continues by doing loving things for other people. This is all born out of our relationship with the Lord and not apart from Him!

2. Now some don't see fasting as an important thing in our own lives, that it is only to minister to others. That is not what is being said. What the Lord is saying is that if you want to fast make sure your heart is right and the evidence of a right heart will be seen in how you treat others, how you get along with others, how you minister to others.

The Lord is not putting down fasting, but He is saying don't bother to fast when you don't share with the poor your food, and shelter, and clothing. And with your own family that needs help you hide yourself from them. When I first got saved I had a hard time understanding these verses in James, but it is very clear to me now.

In James 1:26-27 we read, **“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”**

This is not a works salvation but a salvation that works. It is born out of a right relationship with the Lord, loving those things that He loves and hating those things that He hates as I have said. This is what God is looking for in our lives, true faith that is manifested in the carrying for the poor, the fatherless, the widowed, for God is concerned for those that are less fortunate and so should we be.

So what is fasting all about? We talked about it but it is putting aside the flesh, staying away from food for a period of time or whatever you are fasting from and drawing closer to God. And sometimes it is to seek direction from Him. Maybe something has you in bondage, there are heavy burdens upon your life that you can't deal with, you are feeling oppressed and the yoke is heavy upon you, then fast and bring it to the Lord. It is a spiritual battle we are in, use your weapons wisely!

VERSES 8-12

1. Listen carefully to what the Lord is saying here. We need to live our lives in righteousness and love. I am not saying that we will be perfect, we are not! But that should be the passion of our life. The Lord says when you do your prayers will be answered, your lives will be full of light and healing, you will be full of the glory of the Lord! When you do those things your life will radiate the love of God. You see, when you have a real relationship with God it will be manifested in the love you extend to others.

What is interesting today is that we see angry Christians that speak hateful words towards sinners instead of the love of God that they need. Please understand I am not saying we condone sin but look at the life of Jesus as He came to minister to sinners, those who were sick, not condemn them because they are already condemned. Listen to what one writer wrote regarding this issue,

How do you behave with and toward unbelievers? Do you like them? Do you hate them? Do you tolerate them? Are you concerned about their salvation? Do you act like them when you aren't in Christian company? Do you snub them if they aren't holy? Some Christians think that being kind to unbelievers is like throwing pearls before swine. Then there are Christians who stand on street corners, in malls, and in front of abortion clinics to witness to unbelievers. Others just don't care one way or another. Where do you fit in? Do you share your faith using hugs or headlocks? Honey or a hammer? Or do you even share your faith at all?

- <http://carm.org/christianity/sermons/colossians-45-6-proper-conduct-towards-unbelievers>

So what do we do? Listen carefully to what Paul said in Colossians 4:5-6, **“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”**

Who is Paul speaking about? He is speaking about the unsaved, **“those who are outside.”** What are we to do with the unsaved? We are to **“Walk in wisdom”** we are to redeem the time we have.

That is so important for us to understand today because many times when you see Christians on the news they are hateful, vulgar, they are not very nice. But Paul says that when we minister to the lost our speech is to be with grace. That means what we say to them they don't necessarily deserve it but we speak forth grace because God has told us to.

Don't go up to someone and tell them, “Turn or burn!” Don't go up to someone and tell them, “Eternity, smoking or non-smoking?” There is a web site called, godhatesfags.com which is wrong and now they have more web sites that are just as obnoxious, like, jewskilledjesus.com. That will really make Jewish people want to come to the Lord.

I again am not saying we condone the sin, but we do love the sinner. Some may say, “Pastor Joe, why are you so hard then on the church and church leaders?” The reason is simple, they should know better. Jesus was the hardest upon the Jewish religious leaders, exposing their distortion of the truth and that is all I am doing. I am not coming against the person or their character, but their doctrine and that is Scriptural.

But in regards to the lost, Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** John 3:16-21.

May we have that kind of love for the lost because we were once where they are at now and our desire should be to show them the love of God that is found in Jesus! Some need a stronger motivation and Jude put it this way, “**And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.**” Jude 22-23. Some need to hear what awaits them outside of Christ, but others, and for most people, they need to hear the grace of God. Let’s face it, there is so much negative things out there, to hear that God loves them and died for them to save them from their sin by receiving Jesus by faith is a great blessing to them and to us. May our words be filled with the grace of God towards others as God has extended His grace to us!

Also, our speech is to be seasoned with salt or we are to make people thirsty for Jesus. Salt is also a preservative and we are to be a preserving force as we converse with people, don’t let it deteriorate into ungodly speech. You have control; you can tell them to stop talking like that and if they don’t you can move on. And sometimes salt burns as it is placed on a wound and as the wound of sin is exposed and salt is applied, it may burn but that needs to happen before there is healing. The key is to do these things all in love! Be ready; redeem the time for the days are evil!

And we see here that God is saying that if you do these things the nation will be restored. Blessings will flow once again. Are there things in our hearts like bitterness, anger, envy, covetousness, and-so-on, that are hindering the work of God in us and through us, hindering the blessings of God from flowing? We need to do a heart check individually and see! God called Judah to do a heart check and He is calling for us to do the same so our hearts don’t become hard and cold towards the lost and even towards our brothers and sisters in the Lord!

VERSES 13-14

1. The Lord talked about their empty fasting, that He rejected it. And the chapter closes with the Lord telling them that their Sabbath had become an empty religious observance for the Jewish people of Isaiah's day. God calls them to take a delight in the heart and in the purpose of the Sabbath - to honor Him, not doing your own thing.

Are we so busy in our life that we don't have time for God? I realize that the Sabbath day was given to the Jewish people and it began on sundown Friday and ended on sundown Saturday. It was a symbol of the covenant that God made with Moses. We are told in Exodus 31:16-17, **“Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. ‘It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’”**

Now there are some who say we should keep the Sabbath and go as far to say that if you don't worship on the Sabbath you are taking the mark of the beast and you are damned to Hell! We have just seen that this was given to Israel and it is not the mark of the beast, that is just foolish! Remember what Paul said in Colossians 2:16-17, **“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”** All those things in the Old Testament, including the Sabbath, were a picture of Christ, who is the substance! Our rest or Sabbath is in Christ, but if you have not accepted Him into your life, you will not enter His rest!

Also, if you study the history of the early church you will see that they got together on the first day of the week, which was Sunday and not on Saturday. Now let me also say this. It doesn't matter what day of the week you come and worship the Lord on, every day we should be worshiping Him. We come together on Sunday's and Thursday's but one day is not more important or special than another.

2. What we see here, the rebuke here by the Lord is that many were doing their own thing on the Sabbath, enjoying themselves with other activities, satisfying their own desires instead of worshiping the Lord. And God is saying that should not be the case. You should delight coming before Him and worshiping Him as a body of believers. Too often self does get in the way, and we would go through all kinds of difficulties to get to a sporting event, watch a television show, go to the movies, or whatever, but when it comes to worshiping the Lord, if there is a snowflake in the sky, it is much too dangerous to go out, or too cold, or too hot, or whatever. And God is saying that we need to put Him first, make Him the priority in our life. He deserves it, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings!

Paul even made that point in Hebrews 10:24-25, “**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**” God desires us to come together as a body of believers to worship Him and encourage each other, to stir each other up to get involved in the work of the ministry and-so-on.

3. The conclusion in verse 14 is that God wants us to honor him in truth, according to His Word, and not according to our man-made ideas of what worship and a relationship with Him is all about. If we do, God says that He will lift us up so high in the Spirit that it will be like being on a mountain top. The focus though is a relationship with God and not just empty rituals, which God won't accept. As Jeremiah 17:5-8 says, “**Thus says the LORD: ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.’**”

You see, delight yourself in the Lord, it is the most precious treasure in the world and it opens everything else up to us.