

## **The Great Invitation** **Isaiah 57: 1 – 21**

Our sermon text this morning is Isaiah chapter 57. We're going to look at the whole chapter. Before we read that chapter, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, we pray now that as we hear from your word, you would give us worshipful hearts, that we would receive your word for what it is, the very word of God, and that we would be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 57, starting at verse 1: “<sup>1</sup> The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity; <sup>2</sup> he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness. <sup>3</sup> But you, draw near, sons of the sorceress, offspring of the adulterer and the loose woman. <sup>4</sup> Whom are you mocking? Against whom do you open your mouth wide and stick out your tongue? Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit, <sup>5</sup> you who burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree, who slaughter your children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks? <sup>6</sup> Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they, are your lot; to them you have poured out a drink offering, you have brought a grain offering. Shall I relent for these things? <sup>7</sup> On a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed, and there you went up to offer sacrifice. <sup>8</sup> Behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your memorial; for, deserting me, you have uncovered your bed, you have gone up to it, you have made it wide; and you have made a covenant for yourself with them, you have loved their bed, you have looked on nakedness. <sup>9</sup> You journeyed to the king with oil and multiplied your perfumes; you sent your envoys far off, and sent down even to Sheol. <sup>10</sup> You were wearied with the length of your way, but you did not say, ‘It is hopeless’; you found new life for your strength, and so you were not faint.

“<sup>11</sup> Whom did you dread and fear, so that you lied, and did not remember me, did not lay it to heart? Have I not held my peace, even for a long time, and you do not fear me? <sup>12</sup> I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, but they will not profit you. <sup>13</sup> When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you! The wind will carry them all off, a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain.

“<sup>14</sup> And it shall be said, ‘Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people’s way.’ <sup>15</sup> For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite. <sup>16</sup> For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would grow faint before me, and the breath of life that I made. <sup>17</sup> Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, I struck him; I hid my face and was angry, but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart. <sup>18</sup> I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, <sup>19</sup> creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will heal him. <sup>20</sup> But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. <sup>21</sup> There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’” Amen. May God bless His word.

The common theme that runs through our passage this morning, chapter 57 of Isaiah, is “Peace.” There are those who have it, and there are those who don’t. Some have it, they keep it, they remain in it, and even death cannot separate them from it; and some simply do not have it, they have never had it, they will never receive it.

The peace that I’m speaking of is not necessarily the absence of conflict—and that’s usually what we think of these days when we talk about peace—“Oh well, no one’s fighting.” The peace that I’m speaking of is the peace that a person has when they are reconciled to God, when they have a right and proper relationship with God, when mankind who has been created bearing the image of God, gives glory to the God whose image we bear. That’s when men are at peace. That’s what Isaiah chapter 57 is getting at.

Isaiah 57, it could be said, tells us two things. It tells us about humanity, and it tells us about God. Humanity, left to itself, is without peace. Humanity, left to itself, is filled with sin; filled with every kind of idolatry, every kind of lust—thieves, liars, pretenders, religious hypocrites—that’s humanity.

And God, Isaiah tells us in Isaiah chapter 57, verse 15, is “high and lifted up.” He “inhabits eternity,” and His “name is Holy.” He dwells “in the high and holy place.” God is transcendent, to use a theological term. He’s transcendent. He’s great. He can’t be reached through human effort. Why? Well, because mankind, as I’ve already told you, is a sinner. Mankind is an idolater. Mankind is filled with lusts. Mankind does the things that God hates. Mankind, by very nature, is wicked.

And so we have to ask the question: If God is transcendent, if He is Holy, if He is other, if He is cut off, can mankind reach Him? Can mankind get anywhere near to Him? Well, isn’t it interesting, looking at Isaiah 57, verse 15, the first half of the verse tells us that God is high and holy, high and lifted up, He inhabits eternity. And yet the second half tells us that He dwells with “him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” God is transcendent—transcendent, meaning beyond our reach, far away; and God is imminent, meaning nearby, coming towards us. He is both.

RC Sproul used to like to tell the story of when he was a first-year theology student, he was taken to Westminster Seminary and there they went to hear a seminar on preaching being given by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. And at one of the lunch breaks, Sproul was seated and eating, I think he said it was a bowl of soup. And on the other side of the table from him was some professor from Westminster Seminary. He never named the guy that I know of. I’m sure he knew who it was, but he never gives his name. And Sproul said he had a mouthful of food when the professor sitting opposite said to him, “Young man, is God transcendent, or imminent?” And Sproul said his mouth dropped open, and the soup dribbled out of his mouth, back into the bowl, and he said, “I don’t know. I don’t know.” And apparently the professor said to him, “God is both. He’s both! He’s both transcendent and imminent. He’s both far from us and near at hand.” And that’s what Isaiah is telling us.

The passage itself divides itself into four portions, and the pattern that it follows we’ve seen with Isaiah before. In verses 1 and 2, he speaks of the faithful—the faithful who are preserved even through death, to rest in peace. And then in verses 3 to 13, he speaks of the wicked—the wicked who are driven and driving themselves to destruction, the wicked who do not know peace. Then

in verses 14 to 19, he speaks once again of the faithful and their relationship with YAHWEH, who gives them peace. And then finally in verses 20 to 21, he speaks once again of the wicked, and leaves with the emphatic statement, coming direct to us from God via Isaiah saying, “‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

So on that basis, let’s have a look at our passage, Isaiah 57, verses 1 and 2. “<sup>1</sup>The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity; <sup>2</sup>he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness.”

What is Isaiah saying? What’s he saying to the people of Judah who surrounded him? He’s saying that “Yes, sure, everyone dies. Everyone comes to death. Even the faithful hearers who hear my teaching and who obey my teaching, they come to death. And you might say, “We’re a tiny remnant in the land. How can we be right?” And how often do you hear that argument? How many evangelical Christians are there in the world—2%, 3%, 4% in this nation? Not many. “The numbers are against you. How can you be right? How can it be true?”

Isaiah says, “Yes, certainly the numbers are small. And what’s more, we’re perishing. We die. But you don’t understand.” Look at the second part of verse 1 in chapter 57: “No one lays it to heart.” No one takes it to heart. No one observes. No one pays attention. “The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity; he enters into peace.”

What he’s saying is that for the faithful who die before the Babylonians come to take Judah into captivity, it’s better for them. It’s better for them. We tend not to think that way. We tend not to think that it’s better for us to die. But Isaiah is saying that it’s better for them. It’s better that they died before the Babylonians came. It’s better that they died before Jerusalem was destroyed. They entered into peace. They rest. “They rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness.” It’s better for the righteous to die when God calls them. It’s merciful. They’re being preserved from the judgment of God.

Smoothly and quickly, then, the subject changes. From verse 3 through to verse 13, Isaiah describes the wicked. Look at what he says of them. Now he’s speaking to Israelites, he’s speaking to the people of Judah: “Draw near, you sons of the sorceress, you offspring of the adulterer and the loose woman.” You couldn’t get much more insulting. The technical word for what he’s saying is, “You are bastards.” That’s the literal meaning of the word “bastard”—someone of illegitimate birth. He’s saying “You are of illegitimate birth.”

Now he’s not actually speaking about who their father and their mother is. He’s not speaking about whether or not their names are recorded in the genealogies in the temple. He’s saying that they’re of illegitimate birth because they practice an illegitimate religion. They are if illegitimate birth in the eyes of God because they have not been born of God.

It’s very similar to what Jesus says in John chapter 8, where He tells the Jews, “You’re not the offspring of Abraham; you’re the offspring of the Devil. You’re sons of the devil. He is your father, and I know he is your father, because you do the things that he did.”

Isaiah is saying a very similar thing here to the people of Judah. “You’re sons of sorcerers, witches. You’re sons of adulterers. You’re sons of loose women. You’re sons of whores.” And yet, looking at verse 4: “You dare to mock? Whom are you mocking. Against whom do you open your mouth wide and stick out your tongue? Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit?”

Then he describes them, and he speaks of adultery and sexual uncleanness. And what he’s speaking about is their religion, which has turned aside from loving and obeying and serving the one true God, revealed in God’s word. They were each-way gamblers. They’d have a bit of money each way. They’d bet on one horse and another. They figured the more money you could put on different horses, the more certain you were to have the winner at the end of the race.

So there’s a bit of time given to Yahweh. “Let’s say we’re the people of Yahweh. Abraham is our father. Let’s attend. Let’s do the things that we ought to do, but at the same time, that god of the storm, that Baal who brings to us the rain, who brings to us fertility, we’d better lay a bit of money on Baal. And that goddess, Ashtaroth, we’d better lay a bit of money by her temple, too. And then, of course, there’s Moloch, who demands the payment of a baby. We’d better look after that, too. You don’t want to upset the Gods, do you? After all, they might bring you bad luck. You don’t want to have back luck.” And that’s what their religion amounts to.

Look at how he describes them. Verse 5: “You burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree, who slaughter your children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks.” You slaughter your children. False religion—always, always, false religion ultimately comes to death. It speeds to death. Its solution is death. False religion always leads to death. It cannot and it does not give life.

Verse 6: “Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they, are your lot; to them you have poured out a drink offering, you have brought a grain offering. Shall I relent for these things?” Do you hear what God’s saying? “You’ve made gods out of smooth rocks that you’ve picked up from the creek beds. You’ve gone and taken a rounded stone from a creek bed, and you’ve made to that stone a drink offering. You’ve given it a grain offering.” And God says, “They’re your portion. You want to worship them? Okay, you can have a stone. You want a rock? The rock can be yours. I’ll give it to you. Shall I relent for these things?”

Looking at verse 7: “On a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed, and there you went up to offer sacrifice.” What he’s saying is, they’re not even ashamed of the things that they do. They’re like people who commit sexual acts in public. They’re like people who don’t know modesty. Verse 8: “Behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your memorial; for, deserting me, you have uncovered your bed, you have gone up to it, you have made it wide; and you have made a covenant for yourself with them, you have loved their bed, you have looked on nakedness.”

Notice that progression there—“You, you, you, you”—it keeps coming. “<sup>9</sup> You journeyed to the king with oil and multiplied your perfumes; you sent your envoys far off, and sent down even to Sheol. <sup>10</sup> You were wearied with the length of your way, but you did not say, ‘It is hopeless’; you found new life for your strength, and so you were not faint.”

Why is He doing that? He's giving us the impression of people who are driven, people who are almost manic with their lusts, with their desires, and with their idolatrous religion—people who do not know peace. They just keep pushing themselves further and further, lower and lower. They've publicly become unclean, and that they're not even ashamed of it. In verse 9 he says, "You journeyed to the king with oil and multiplied your perfumes; you sent your envoys far off, and sent down even to Sheol." God is likening the nation of Judah to prostitutes.

Basically, what Isaiah is getting at is that those faithless kings of Judah who were making covenants and treaties with foreign nations, they were like attractive prostitutes who were doing all that they possibly could to attract the attention of a king. They're anointing themselves with oil, putting on their best outfits. "You'll even go as far as hell. You'll even go down to hell to find an alliance. And when you found that it was hard to do and it was a long way, you didn't give up, but you pushed yourself even further. You did not allow yourself to be worn out."

And so God asks the question at verse 11: "Whom did you dread and fear, so that you lied, and did not remember me, did not lay it to heart? Have I not held my peace, even for a long time, and you do not fear me?" Whom did you fear? You see what God is saying is, "You certainly did not fear me. You certainly did not give me the glory. You certainly weren't ashamed to break my commandments. Who were you fearing? Who were you serving?"

We know the answer, don't we? I mean, there in the darkness, in the dim darkness, there's the Evil One himself. We're told in the Scripture that sacrifices made to idols are made to demons. Whom did they fear? Whom did they give glory to? The Devil himself. And God says, "Have I not held my peace even for a long time, and you do not fear me."

What's He saying? Well, he's pointing to the fact that His prophets have been warning the people all along: "Repent, or be destroyed. Repent, or be destroyed. Repent, or be destroyed." What's the message of the prophets? They take God's law, they apply it to the people around them, and say, "You are breaking God's law. The penalty for breaking the law is death. Repent, or come to your death. Repent, or be punished. Repent, or be put to death!" And the only reason that it has not yet happened is that God is, for the time being, holding His peace. For the time being, He is being merciful.

We live in the same kind of world, don't we? The warning's come. Things happen, and no one receives the warning. No one takes it to heart. No one fears. No one trembles. God holds His peace. God holds His peace. The Apostle John tells us in the book of Revelation that that comes to an end, one of these days, sometime, in my lifetime, in the lifetime of my children—who knows when? A hundred years, a thousand years, ten years—who knows when? But there's a day coming.

There's a certain number to be saved. There's a certain number to be called into eternal life, and when we get to that last saved sinner, God calls "Time," and Jesus returns. And He doesn't come as the meek Saviour. He doesn't return as the one who is condemned to death. He returns as the one who has life eternal, the one who has conquered death. He returns as the King, seeking His tribute, seeking faith in Israel, seeking the ones who will give Him the glory, and punishing those who do not.

Verse 12, God mocks these idolaters, these fools. There's irony here. "12 I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, but they will not profit you." You see what He's saying? He's saying, "You think you're good. You think you do well. You think you're faithful. You think you're okay. I will declare your righteousness and your deeds."

I don't really have a problem with saying that people who are sinners can do things that are right. Of course they can. But God's saying, "Even though you do things that are right, they will not profit you. They will not profit you." Why not? Why is that people who are sinners can do things that are right, but not to their profit? Well, they're sinners, and they don't do the right thing for the right reason.

For something to be considered a truly good work in the sight of God, it has to be done for the glory of God, in obedience to the word of God, from a heart that is reconciled to God. The good works that people look to are of no profit to them. Our righteousness is as filthy rags. None get to boast in the presence of our God. None get to speak of having saved themselves or contributed to their salvation. God is rejecting them wholesale. He's rejecting everything about them, even the things that they think are good, God is saying, "They're not good enough for me. Not interested. No credit from me for them."

Verse 13: "When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you! The wind will carry them all off, a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain." "When it all goes wrong, ask your idols to save you. Ask the things that you've given glory to to save you. See how that works out—your idols of stone and wood and metal."

In Isaiah 14, God speaks of the fact that people are like the grass of the field. The breath of the Lord blows on it, and they're gone. Well, now here in Isaiah 57, the idols are the same. They're like grass in the field. The wind will carry them off, and a breath will take them all away. These things that people waste their lives serving and worshiping, claiming that they're going to get protection from them, sacrificing children to them, making offerings to them, celebrating their gods through public evil and uncleanness—they will not deliver them. There is no deliverance.

But at the end of verse 13, "He who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain." Isaiah just keeps coming back to the theme of the holy mountain, where the people of God meet in the presence of God, where the nations are called to worship God. The one who takes refuge in God shall possess the land. That's the same one who dies at the start of Isaiah 57: "The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity; <sup>2</sup> he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness." They're the ones who take refuge in God, who possess the land, and they inherit God's holy mountain.

The third section, verses 14 to 19, speaks of God rescuing His people and giving them the gift of peace. Verse 14: "And it shall be said, 'Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way.'" Now we should here turn back to Isaiah chapter 40, so please turn to Isaiah 40. If you remember back to Isaiah 40, when we looked at this passage, this passage is basically the start of the synoptic gospels. This passage essentially gives us the text of the preaching of John the Baptist. We'll start reading at Isaiah 40, verse 1, and just read the first five verses:

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

Remember, John the Baptist started his preaching ministry preaching from the book of Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." And it tells us that John the Baptist was preaching a gospel of repentance—a gospel of repentance. Notice that repentance was preparing the way of the Lord and making straight in the desert a highway for our God. God was coming to the people. John was saying to the people, in applying Isaiah, "Throw away everything that holds back your relationship with God! God is coming to you. Make a highway through the desert for the approach of our God, for He is coming, and He's coming to reveal His glory!"

Well now have a look at what God is saying. Turn back to Isaiah 57:14: "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way." The same way that God is coming to His people, God's people are going to God. And God says, "Remove every obstruction! Make the way smooth. Prepare the way. Build it up. Fill in the low places. Make the way to me smooth. Make it straight. Make it like a highway. I'm coming to my people and I'm revealing my glory, and my people in response will be coming to me. Let every obstruction be taken away."

What are the obstructions? The same evil that all the others are guilty of. These ones who have been called are being called from the same nation as the ones who have been condemned—from the same general population. But they're being called to repentance. They're being called to humility.

Let's read on. Verse 15: "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place.'" This is Isaiah 6 again, isn't it? This is the one whom Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6, on a throne, high and lifted up. And always remember that the servant was high and lifted up. "Behold, my servant shall be high and lifted up."

"For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place.'" How did Isaiah see YAHWEH enthroned, as the Apostle John tells us, he saw Jesus enthroned, he saw the glory of Jesus revealed? He saw it because God lifted him to Himself. God took him by His Spirit into His very throne room in heaven. There Isaiah saw the glory of God revealed.

And what was its impact upon Isaiah? "Woe to me, I am undone. I am a man of sinful lips. I dwell in the midst of a people of sinful lips." Those who know the glory of God, those who know that God is high and lifted up and that He inhabits eternity, they know something about themselves. They find out something about themselves. In knowing the true God, you can't help but have yourself revealed to yourself.

Notice what it says, verse 15: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite”—that is, the one who is of a lowly spirit, the one who is humble, the one who is repentant. How does a person get to that place? They get to that place because God reveals His glory to them. They get to that place because God lets them know who He is, and when we know who God is, we know who we are. We find out what we are like.

If a person is not convicted of their sinfulness, if a person is not convicted of their own wickedness and the darkness to be found in their own heart, they’ve never met God. God has never revealed Himself to them, whatever their words might say. They may say they believe, they may claim to be Christians—if they do not know their own heart, you can be sure that they do not know the God in whom they claim to believe. They don’t know Him. They’ve never realized and understood that He inhabits eternity, that He is holy other, that we can’t get there, that we can’t reach Him, that we’re divided from Him, we’re made separate to Him. He cannot look upon sin. He cannot dwell in the presence of sinners. He’s perfect—absolutely, utterly perfect, without sin, beyond our comprehension. All we know is, what He is, we are not, though we bear His image.

God has to reveal Himself to a person. He has to crush a person. The word that’s being translated there “contrite” means basically “crushed.” Crushed. God has to reveal Himself to a person, and in revealing Himself to a person, crush them. And then—and then, then we’re ready. Then we’re ready to receive grace, having been crushed. Then we have a lowly spirit. And then God revives the spirit of the lowly and gives life to it.

What did it say there in Ephesians chapter 2? In my studies this week, I’ve become convinced, and was tempted to try and constantly draw these links throughout the sermon, but decided that in a way, it was too hard. But I’ll give you some advice. Go home and read Isaiah 57, then read Ephesians chapter 2. Then read Isaiah 57, then read Ephesians chapter 2. Then read Isaiah 57, then read Ephesians chapter 2.

I’m convinced that the Apostle Paul had Isaiah 57 in his mind as he wrote Ephesians chapter 2. He’s describing exactly the same things in Ephesians 2. He speaks of people who are dead in their sins, serving demons, serving the gods of this world, separate from God, with no hope in the world. He even quotes or refers to Isaiah 57 later on in Ephesians chapter 2, at verse 17, speaking of this calling of the people from the near and the far.

When a person has been truly exposed to the pure goodness and holiness of God, he becomes a person with a contrite, or a crushed and lowly spirit. And then God gives the gift of life. He revives their spirit, He revives their heart. Isaiah 57: 16: “For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would grow faint before me, and the breath of life that I made.”

Next God describes the sinners whom He saves. <sup>17</sup> “Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, I struck him; I hid my face and was angry, but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.” Who’s God speaking about there? He’s speaking about the people He saves. Notice, they’re not righteous; they’re not good; they don’t have their own goodness to speak of. God says they are iniquitous. They have unjust gain. They are backsliding in the way of their own heart.



But then God says, verse 18, “I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners,<sup>19</sup> creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the LORD.” That’s the reference from Ephesians 2:17. Jesus came and “preached peace to you who were far off and you who are near.” “And I will heal him.” God knows that they’re sinners, yet He sets His heart upon them. He knows that they’re wicked, yet He sets His love upon them. His purpose is to transform them.

Looking at Isaiah 45, verse 19, God is speaking of people who are now transformed. Notice that the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 2, speaks of people who are God’s workmanship, “created for good works in Christ Jesus.” What does it say here in Isaiah 57, verse 19, where God speaks of how He restores His people? He creates the fruit of their lips. “Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will heal him.’”

I think that where God says He’s creating the fruit of the lips, He’s basically saying, “I’ll give them the right things to say.” They’ll no longer be sinners, speaking wickedness, with no hope in the world. They’ll be speaking of the goodness of God. They’ll have a good message, a gospel of good news for the world. No longer will they be like the idolaters who commit sexual impurity in public. They’ll have good things and they’ll say good things. They’ll be healed.

And then notice verses 20 and 21 now, the final section. Notice that these don’t know peace. Verse 19 tells us that those whom God saves, they have peace. But verses 20 and 21: “But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt.<sup>21</sup> There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

The Hebrews were never a sea-going people, and so you often find in their writings, in the Psalms, in the book of Job, that fearsome things come up from the sea. They’re thinking of a storm-tossed sea, where flooded rivers have turned the sea. It’s not a nice sun-lit blue—or some of you see green. You know, I’m colorblind. I don’t a green sea, I see a blue sea, a nice sun-lit sea, where the water’s clear, and as long as it’s not too deep, you can see the sandy bottom.

No, the picture here is the sea that has been turned brown by a flood—a flooded river washing silt into the ocean as the storm swell surges up against the beach, and stirs this dirty brown water up, and you get that brown-flecked foam that blows on the wind. Have you ever seen a beach in that kind of stormy condition, and the foam? It looks almost like the foam that you’d see in an old-fashioned washing machine, but it’s brown, and it’s horrible looking, and you really don’t want to touch it. You don’t really want to walk through that stuff, and the sand and the silt just getting blasted by the wind. And that’s the picture that Isaiah is giving us of sinners. That’s what they’re like—dirty brown water, flinging itself against a beach, churning up muck and rubbish. That’s what they’re like, and ““There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’” They live out this crazy, evil-driven life, pursuing their lusts. You have gone up to it, you have made it wide, you made a covenant for yourself with them, you loved their bed, you looked upon nakedness, you journeyed, you sent, you wearied—you do these things,” and God says that they never stop. They just pursue it to the end. They chase it to the very end, and they never know peace. They never know God’s sabbath rest. They never know being able to rejoice in the presence of God. ““There is not peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

I think that's one of the reasons that the wicked, as they express themselves through political power, they've never got enough, and they never stop the fight. People who think the way we Christians think, when it comes to politics, basically our thoughts concerning politics are more or less: balance the books, mind your own business, make as few changes as you need to make, and leave us alone. That's what we want from government. That's what we ask for. And we want a rest. We don't want to hear the political news every day. We don't want to see all the nonsense that goes on every day.

But the wicked, who want change, the wicked, who want to call evil "good" and good "evil", every day they wake up and they don't know peace, and they're driven to try and think of a new way to get their agenda enacted, to get their agenda put in place. They never rest. Every day, they bring the fight to us. Every day, they come to the gates. They bring the fight to us. They don't know peace. They're like the filthy storm swell that's bashing up against the beach. They don't know peace. They can't rest. They've got an agenda, and they're going to push it.

Well, my friends, we the church have an agenda. We also have something to push. It's called the gospel. We have an agenda: to preach the gospel to the glory of God for the salvation of sinners. There's something we should be pushing back with.

Now, we can fight political battles. We live in a political system where we can be involved. We can send letters off to members of Parliament, etc., etc. We can sign the petitions, we can try to influence the legislation. But the real battle, the real point of the spear, is the proclamation of the gospel. That's the real battle. That's what they want to silence. That's what they want to stop.

But this gospel that we find in all of Scripture, and this gospel that we find here in the book of Isaiah, that's the thing that we must be proclaiming and owning. That's the thing that turns back the wickedness—hearing the truth.

Now, all of these things come to us in the providence of God. And in a way, for us, it's not really to worry too much about how things go. What's our biggest concern? Personal obedience. What's our biggest concern? The church's obedience, being built up in the church. If the world falls down around us, the world would fall down around us. That's the will of God. If we're proclaiming the gospel, those whom God intends to save will be saved through our proclamation. The fruit of our lips will bring peace to the far and to the near.

Fight the good fight, by every means, fight the good fight. But my friends, we've got to be preaching the truth. That's the pointy end. That's what the world wants silenced. That's what our enemies don't want to hear. That's what they have to hear. Let them hate us. In a way, the more they hate us, the more that we know we're speaking the truth—in a way.

That doesn't mean we're supposed to go out and try to make enemies. We're supposed to go out and try to make friends for the gospel. But in preaching that gospel, there will be enemies, and they will turn against us. And we've got to face up to that. We all want to be liked, we all want to be loved, and Scripture tells us, No, you won't be. If you want to live godly in Jesus Christ, expect persecution. That's what the Apostle Paul said. Expect to have enemies made by the gospel. And that's just the way that it is.

Let's sum it up. Isaiah speaks of the wicked, he speaks of the faithful. The faithful are the faithful because God who is far off, God who inhabits eternity, God who dwells in a high and holy place and cannot be approached by human works—because God comes to the ones to whom He chooses to reveal Himself, the ones whom He chooses to make of a contrite and lowly spirit, the ones to whom He chooses to give life. And we, His people, are in this world at this time, sent out to be His mouthpieces with this one gospel message. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you that you indeed have spoken peace to your people, that you have given us peace in the Lord Jesus Christ. Once we were at enmity with you, once we were wicked, once we followed after our own lusts and desires and served the fallen spirits of this world. We gave offerings to idols. We were wicked. We have no righteousness of our own, and we have nothing of which to boast.

But you intervened. You revealed yourself to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. You gave us life. We thank you and we praise you, and we pray, Father, that we would ever be a people of a contrite and lowly spirit, that we would ever be a humble people, who boast in nothing other than your grace, and your mercy, and of your glory in Jesus Christ our Lord. And in His name we pray these things. Amen.