

Review

We are in the 56th chapter of the book of Isaiah...

56:9-12 The Watchmen Are Blind

In ancient times, the watchmen were the guys responsible for alerting people to danger. Their job was to stay up on the city wall (2Sam. 18:24) and look (1Sam. 14:16), keeping their eyes open (2Sam. 13:34), which meant staying awake (Psa. 127:1).

As the watchman made his rounds (Song 3:3), he was to tell what time it was when people inquired of him (Isa. 21:11). He was also supposed to blow the trumpet (Jer. 6:17) and alert people when something eventful was going to happen (2Sam 18:25), telling what he saw (2Kings 9:17), and continuing to explain what was happening to those who didn't have his vantage point (2Kings 9:20).

It was a vital job - lives were depending on him.

In the same manner, God appointed the spiritual leaders of the people as watchmen over their souls. But in Isaiah's day, God said that His watchmen were blind, ignorant, and unable to shout a warning. They were drunkards who were constantly asleep, greedy, and unjust. And it was only going to get worse.

Since there were essentially no guards on duty, the wild beasts were invited in to kill and eat the people inside. Following the spiritual metaphor, these would be the false prophets, who, Jesus said,

Matt. 7:15 "...come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

Or the devil, who...

1Pet. 5:8 ...prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

You can see why God valued watchmen who did their job, and why He was so frustrated when the watchmen He appointed got drunk and fell asleep.

Shepherds With No Understanding

Their absolute failure at being watchmen is why the Lord also

called them "shepherds who have no understanding" (v.11).

A good shepherd knows the reason he's there. His job is to protect the sheep from predators. Jesus said,

John 10:11-13 "...the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep."

The shepherds in Isaiah's day had no concept of this, and as a result had left God's people open to predators of all sorts.

And sometimes those predators were the shepherds themselves. Since they were also greedy dogs themselves, they were often the ones who preyed on the sheep. God told Ezekiel,

Ezek. 34:2-10 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shep-

herds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them."'"

57:1-2 The Righteous Man Perishes

Because there was no spiritual leadership, the people were never challenged to live rightly before God. Righteous and devout people were becoming so rare they were nearly extinct. Those who walked uprightly before God were dying off with the previous generation.

57:3-6 Children Of Rebellion

The next generation to arise was super-carnal. God calls them, "sons of a sorceress, offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute, children of rebellion, offspring of deceit."

When parents walk away from the Lord, the children they produce don't even have a form of godliness. They were a crass lot, laughing and joking at righteous ideas, sticking out their tongues at God and His ways. They were idolaters, practicing the immoral ceremonies of their false gods. God says He won't change His mind regarding the judgment He has planned for them.

57:7-10 You Have Made Your Bed

The people had gotten bored with worshipping God at the temple, and had gone after other gods, worshipping them at the high places.

They had gotten tired of writing the Law upon their doorposts (Deut. 6:9), and instead set up memorials (sign: **zik-RONE**) of their false gods.

God had made coverings for His people (Gen 3:21), but they had uncovered themselves.

The Lord had said He would be their ally, but they had sought alliances with nations like Egypt.

And even when God made things difficult for them so that they would turn back to Him, they just increased their resolve.

57:11-13 Your Deeds Won't Profit You

Instead of fearing God, they were afraid of their enemies. And no matter whether God sent prophets to rebuke, or had long periods of silence, nothing turned their hearts back to Him.

And in case they began to think that their nation's history of righteousness and devotion to God was going to help them, they needed to know that it would not profit them.

It doesn't even profit in our own lives. The Lord told Ezekiel,

Ezek. 18:24 “...when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.”

Since the righteousness of previous generations won't help them, God sarcastically suggests that when trouble comes upon them, that they call out to the gods of their idols. Of course, there is no god to take refuge in other than the Lord.

The great news is that when someone does take refuge in the Lord, they become inheritors of God's promises. And ultimately will dwell with God, as He is about to elaborate...

57:14-19 Peace For The Contrite

When Jesus Christ returns to the earth, He will establish the center of His kingdom on the mountain of Jerusalem (Mic. 4:1). And the Lord has been telling the Jews that there will be a roadway in the wilderness (Isa. 43:19) that leads to His temple.

Here, He is saying that one day people are going to be told to clear

the way to Him. This could be speaking of that roadway, or it could be speaking metaphorically, as John the Baptist quoted from Isaiah 40:3, saying,

**Matt. 3:3 ...“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDER-
NESS, ‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS
PATHS STRAIGHT!’”**

The Lord calls out in love because He knows that if He had continual, unrelenting anger over sin that we would all become dispirited. And so He calls out a message of peace to those who would come to Him.

57:20-21 No Peace For The Wicked

Unlike the peace that is offered to the contrite of heart, God says that there will never be peace for those who wickedly reject Him.

And so we are yet again presented with a choice: God's way, or the way of destruction.