

A Big Enough House

¹This is what the LORD says:

“Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand
and my righteousness will soon be revealed.

²Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast,
who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

³Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say,
“The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.”
And let not any eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.” – Isaiah 56:1-3

Isaiah addresses the life of God’s chosen nation before, during and after the Babylonian captivity. Chapter 56 describes an era of great restoration in the short-run (after the Jews are allowed to return from Babylon), but also in some era of God’s kingdom in a more distant future. The great promises of Isaiah would never find perfect fulfillment in Judea after the exile, but in an altogether new kind of community. Bondage in Babylon would end, but some foreigners had come to faith in the one God of Israel and Isaiah did not want them to think that they would somehow be forgotten.

Time and again, God had warned His chosen people not to compromise themselves with the Gentile nations around them, but to remain God’s unique and set-apart people. However, part of the objective behind their status as chosen and their call to be unique was that they might serve as a “light to the Gentiles.” Unfortunately, they often missed this and they would miss it again in the days after the exile.

The very fact that Jesus’ public exchange with a Samaritan woman bordered on the scandalous testifies to the racial distrust that existed between Jew and Samaritan. That Jesus would cast another Samaritan in the role of His proper example of “good neighborliness” was provocative to say the least. The most orthodox of Jews believed that God had no use for anyone besides Jews. In short, God’s people usually missed this “Light of the world” aspect of God’s calling and, instead, grew to think of themselves as the sole object of God’s love. They refused to associate with foreigners at all. But, Isaiah 56 paints God’s attitude toward the nations in a different light:

⁴For this is what the LORD says:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant –

⁵to them I will give within my temple and its walls
a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.

⁶And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him,
to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant –

⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” – Isaiah 56:4-7

The truth is that every man is a foreigner to God in the sense that God is uniquely holy while every man, woman and child has sinned and fallen short of His glory. It is only now, in the Kingdom of Christ, that our “foreignness” has been remedied. Jesus bore away our foreignness on a cross.

That is part of the joy of the Gospel. None of us are excluded – not for our pasts, not for our bloodlines and not for the weaknesses of either our bodies or our characters. Sinners are made righteous by His blood. All who are baptized into Him are declared “clothed in Christ” “dead to sin” and “circumcised in heart.” And, by the grace of God, as recipients of this remarkable grace, we can learn to see others differently as well.

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