

“Keep from Defiling the Sabbath”

Isaiah 56:1-12

Sunday, April 7th, 2024

In 1970, David and Barbara Green took out a \$600 loan to begin making miniature picture frames out of their home. Two years later, the fledgling enterprise opened a 300-square-foot store in Oklahoma City, and Hobby Lobby was born. Today, with more than 1,000 stores, Hobby Lobby is the largest privately owned arts-and-crafts retailer in the world with over 46,000 employees operating in 48 states.

Hobby Lobby’s values include: “Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating in a manner consistent with Biblical principles.” Such values led to the decision to close all stores on Sunday allowing associates time for family and for worship.

How many of you like Chick-fil-A?

In 1967, Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy founded and opened the first Chick-fil-A restaurant in Atlanta. Today, Chick-fil-A is the largest quick-service chicken restaurant chain in America. Comedian Tim Hawkins has a YouTube video: “Chick-fil-A” to the tune of the Beatles’ “Yesterday”.

Chick-fil-A...

I could eat there 7 times a day
Where the people laugh and children play
Oh I’m in love with Chick-fil-A

Suddenly...

I need waffle fries in front of me
With some nuggets and a large sweet tea
Oh Chick-fil-A, you set me free

Kids get in the van

So we can go there today
But their stores are closed
Oh I know, ‘cause it’s Sunday...

Chick-fil-A!

What a dirty rotten trick to play
Now I’ll have to settle for Subway
Oh I’m in love with Chick-fil-A!

Besides really good chicken sandwiches, Chick-fil-A is known for its hours, or lack thereof, on Sundays. All 3,059 stores are closed all day on Sundays, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day so associates can be with their families.

We have made it to the final part of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Looking backward, in chapters 38-55, Isaiah predicted the Babylonian captivity of God’s people and foresaw their return from exile. Beginning with **Chapter 56**, which we begin today,

Isaiah looks further forward into the circumstances and the experiences of the returnees.

In **2 Peter 3:11-12**, the apostle asks “what manner *of persons* ought (we) as we await the coming of the day of God?” That is exactly what Isaiah is concerned about in **Chapters 56 through 66** which make up the last section entitled, “Responsibility Toward and Certainty of the Glorious Kingdom.”

In **Chapter 56**, Isaiah lays “enormous emphasis on keeping the Lord’s Day.” (Motyer, *Isaiah by the Day*, 275). That will rise up again in **Chapter 58**. For now, we look to chapter 56. In reverence of Him Whose Word this is, please stand as God’s Word is read.

Isaiah 56:1-12:

56:1 - Thus says the LORD:

“Keep justice, and do righteousness,
for My salvation *is* about to come,
and My righteousness to be revealed.

2 - Blessed *is* the man *who* does this,
and the son of man *who* lays hold on it;
Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

3 - Do not let the son of the foreigner
who has joined himself to the LORD
speak, saying,
“The LORD has utterly separated me from His people”;
nor let the eunuch say,
“Here I am, a dry tree.”

4 - For thus says the LORD:
“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,
and choose what pleases Me,
and hold fast My covenant,

5 - Even to them I will give in My house
and within My walls a place and a name
better than that of sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

6 - “Also the sons of the foreigner
who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him,
and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
and holds fast My covenant—

7 - Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
and make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

will be accepted on My altar;
for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

8 - The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
“Yet I will gather to him
others besides those who are gathered to him.”

9 - All you beasts of the field, come to devour,
all you beasts in the forest.

10 - His watchmen *are* blind,
they are all ignorant;
they *are* all dumb dogs,
they cannot bark;
sleeping (dreaming), lying down, loving to slumber.

11 - Yes, *they are* greedy dogs (strong of soul)
which never have enough (don't know satisfaction).
and they *are* shepherds
who cannot understand;
they all look to their own way,
every one for his own gain,
from his *own* territory.

12 - “Come,” *one* says, “I will bring wine,
and we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink;
tomorrow will be as today,
and much more abundant.”

Look again with me at verse 1 - “Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation *is* about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.”

This first verse of **Isaiah Chapter 56** is a summary of **Chapters 1-55**. “Keep justice, and do righteousness” echoes the ideals of **Chapters 1-39**; “for soon my salvation will come and my righteousness be revealed” sums up the promises of **Chapters 40-55**.

Scripture is packed with teaching about justice. Christian journalist Lynn Vincent notes, “Deuteronomy tells us that all God’s ways are justice. In Job, we learn that God has established His throne for justice. Jeremiah (asserted) that Jesus would execute justice and righteousness in the land. Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would proclaim justice to the Gentiles and that His very throne would be upheld by justice.” (Vincent, “Seeking Justice”, *World Magazine*, March 23rd, 2024)

Three times this chapter mentions the Sabbath (Verses 2, 4, and 6). *What, exactly, is the Sabbath?* Ray Ortlund helps us here - “The Sabbath is not keeping our hands from doing any *activity*. The real Sabbath is keeping our hands from doing an *evil*. A true Sabbath rest is busy with justice and righteousness. It’s a paradox - busy rest. *Can that really work?* Sure, because true justice and righteousness aren’t driven and perfectionistic but are received by grace. Christ Himself is a living Sabbath for people

who would be compulsively self-righteousness without Him. His justice and righteousness are not burdensome but a joyful relief.

What was the Sabbath? It was a weekly celebration of God's perfect creation in the beginning. It was a foretaste of God's renewed creation at the end of time. In other words, the Sabbath was a weekly dress rehearsal for Heaven.

(Bruce Ray notes) "In the Sabbath, God gave us all a holy day (or holiday). When the government gives us a holiday, we rejoice. That's good news! We don't have to go to school or the workplace! We can relax! *Do you know anyone who complains about not having to work on the Fourth of July or Labor Day?*

However, when God says, "I am going to give you a holiday," people actually grumble and complain. They don't want a holiday. They would rather work. Suddenly, "time is money," and we don't want to lose all that Sunday business. We don't want to waste our time resting, relaxing, and enjoying the Lord and His works. We have our own work to do!"

Verses 2 and 6 speak of "not defiling the Sabbath" (the title I've chosen for this sermon). To **defile** something is to spoil it, to mar it, to desecrate it, or to pollute it. *How was the Sabbath defiled or spoiled then?*

The Sabbath was defiled when God's people did not remember the Sabbath, nor keep it holy. They did their own things on God's one day every 7.

In the New Testament the church comes together on the Lord's Day, which is the first day of the week, for corporate worship. We have a clear mandate in the New Testament not to forsake the assembling of the saints (**Hebrews 10:25**). In other words, the New Testament's simple language says that Christians are supposed to be in corporate worship on the Lord's Day. That means we're supposed to go to church. That is usually seen as one of the ways in which the Sabbath is to be observed. All Christians I know of who believe that the Sabbath is still in effect agree that on the Sabbath we should be worshiping, and also that on one day in seven there should be rest from unnecessary commerce and labor. There are still provisions for commerce that must go on--hospital work, pharmacies, and such. But commerce just for the sake of merchandising ought to cease on the Sabbath.

"To keep the Sabbath meant that you served the God who created the world and cared for everyone and everything in it. The Sabbath rest was a sign of the final rest which all God's people will enjoy in the new heavens and the new earth. The Sabbath was viewed as a sign that the whole of life was to be lived in submission to God (Webb, 221).

The last 4 verses of **Chapter 56** concern Israel's leadership (or lack thereof). Isaiah calls the leaders blind (v. 10); ignorant (v. 10); dumb dogs (v. 10); sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber (v. 10); greedy dogs (v. 11); shepherds who cannot understand (v. 11).

Isaiah here condemns such men. If we are seeking the Lord and trying to understand His ways, we will want pastors and teachers who know the Word and communicate truth

to us no matter how hard it is for us to hear. We will want men who love the Word and want to proclaim it boldly to the church. Conversely, we will not want pastors who study little or propagate error. A good pastor serves his people sacrificially. He does not seek His own gain or the advancement of reputation. He is humble and meek, thinking of others as better than himself. Such a man will be a blessing to the people he serves because they will be able to trust him, and they will know that he is looking out for their best interests.

We've discussed, briefly, God's justice and righteousness, His people keeping the Sabbath, and the poor leadership of God's people. It almost seems as if Israelites leaving exile in Babylon were arriving in Jerusalem with too many problems to handle. But, when that seems to be the case, God always comes through for His people.

Dr. Robert Rayburn once told the story of a man who was approached by a beggar on the street. The man reached into his pocket to see what he had. Finding \$7 and feeling somewhat sorry for the beggar, he held out 6 bills and said to the beggar, "Here you go."

Not only did the beggar take the \$6, but with his other hand he struck the man across the face and grabbed the 7th dollar, too.

What do you think of the beggar? Don't you think he was a jerk? Then what do you think of a sinner, saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, who insists on taking 7 days a week - or even 6 ½ - for himself? The way to avoid this scandal is to remember the Lord's Day by keeping it holy.