

Series: Isaiah
Title: Lay it to Heart
Text: Isaiah 57: 1-2
Date: January 15, 2015
Place: SGBC, New Jersey

The title of our message is a command, “Lay it to Heart.” At some point or another, I suspect every preacher feels what I have felt from time to time, “Is anyone laying this to heart?” I pray God make us lay it to heart this very hour.

Isaiah 57: 1: The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth *it* to heart: and merciful men *are* taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil *to come*. 2: He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, *each one walking in his uprightness*.

This was the text from which Brother Don Fortner preached my grandfather’s funeral. You may have heard it preached at the funeral of a believer. Indeed, our text applies to the death of the Lord’s people. Also, in context, it applies to God’s saints while in the earth. Whether it be in this life in grace or in the day we die, God graciously delivers his saints from the evil into his peace.

GOD’S DESCRIPTION OF THE PEOPLE

First, notice how the description in our text is like the time in which we live. In the closing verses of chapter 56, the LORD said the land of Israel would be invaded by foreign armies because of the evil of the religious and civil rulers. God would send ravaging beasts to devour the wolves in Israel. Their watchmen were spiritually blind, unfaithful, giving no warning, loving falsehood and pleasure, greedy and covetous. They were drunk on the wine of Babylon’s fornication—“I will and we will”—presuming they would continue day-after-day in the same vain way.

After our text, the Lord continues to describe the evil of the people. It was probably, when Manasseh was king. Under his reign, idolatry reigned and public service was profaned throughout the land. God’s saints were persecuted, even put to death. So God sent his prophet to declare God was sending judgment to devour the nation.

Brethren, God’s saints are not being persecuted unto death, at least not in this country, yet. But with that one exception, this description fits our country very well. God’s judgment is upon this nation. A day is coming when God shall judge this entire world. This people were evil and marked for evil to come.

GOD’S DESCRIPTION OF HIS SAINTS

Secondly, we see God’s description of his saints, “The righteous...merciful men.” (Is 57: 1) True believers have been made righteous in Christ by God’s grace. By Christ being formed in us we have a new man within created in the “righteousness and true holiness” of Christ. (Eph 4: 24) The sure and certain fruit produced when Christ is formed in us is that we cease looking within for righteousness and we look only to Christ our Righteousness.

Christ is our eternal Righteousness.

Isaiah 45:24: Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come;

2 Corinthians 5: 21: For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Also, by God's grace, believers follow after righteousness in our lives.

Romans 6: 11: Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. 12: Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 13: Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. 14: For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. 15: What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 16: Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17: But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18: Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

Believer, suppose a killer broke into your house, murdered your father. Would you let the murderer move in and live in your father's house? Sin is the murderer. Christ our Everlasting Father suffered unto death because of our sin. We are his house now! Shall we let sin that put our Father on the cross move into our Father's house and love the cruel murderer? No! Believers hate sin and love that which God says is right. We look only to Christ for righteousness. But we do love to pursue righteousness in our lives!

Also, by experiencing God's mercy, God's saints in this world are merciful. "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth." (Ps 37: 21) Believers are kind, generous and hospitable; forgiving, forbearing and gracious; we love brethren and we do our best to love even our enemies. We know we did not earn salvation. God was our enemy in our minds. Everything God has given us has been grace. So we seek to be merciful to others, even our enemies.

GOD'S HAND OF PROVIDENCE

Thirdly, we see God's hand of providence upon his believing child, "The righteous perisheth,...and merciful men *are* taken away." (Is 57: 1) This refers to the believer's death. But also, in context, this applies to God's hand upon his sanctified children while we live in this earth.

God gather's his child away from the evil of the wicked, gathering us unto his people in his church. We saw in chapter 56, verse 8, "The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him." And God keeps us gathered unto Christ and away from the evil. Our Advocate intercedes for it to be so. He said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (Jn 17: 15) Nor shall anyone separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Romans 8: 35: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Then our text also refers to the death of the believer. It refers only to the death of the believer's body because believers never perish eternally. Christ said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (Jn 10: 28)

Believer, be sure to lay to heart the great blessing in this verse. The death of the believer is by the hand of God. "The merciful man is taken away" means God's saint is gathered away from this life to glory by the hand of God. God ordains the time of our death, even numbering our months, "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." (Job 14: 5; Acts 17:26) He ordains the place we will die. God even ordains the means of our death.

Some of God's saints die young, some old; some at home, some in a hospital; some by disease, some by the hand of malicious men. But here is what matters most to the believer, that we die "in faith" in Christ "and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Php 3: 9) The believer can truly say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Php 1: 21)

GOD'S DESCRIPTION OF THE HARD HEART

Next, we consider the hardness of heart in the unregenerate, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering." (Is 57: 1)

When God gathered his saints from the idolaters to his own people in his church: they did not lay it to heart; none considered. God calls his people to save them from vain religion. They were too busy with their vain religion to notice. When God gathered his saints to glory—even using the self-righteous—the vain idolaters did not lay to heart that it was God saving his people from them.

Every time someone has left our congregation, God used it to make me lay it to heart, to make me consider, to make me more diligent to make sure my gospel is according to the scriptures. Every time God takes one of his saints home to glory, God makes his child lay it to heart, to consider what God has done.

But according to God's own word, our text says that is not the case with will-workers. When God takes his saints out of religion, will-workers do not view it as a loss. They certainly do not view it as a warning from God. When God takes his saints home to glory, few look upon it as a public loss and fewer view it as a public warning. Even worse, God says vain religionists speak evil of them. But it is God they are speaking evil of. He says, "But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, *and* draw out the tongue? *are* ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood, Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks?" (Is 57: 3-5)

If God has made us wise then we will look upon the death of anyone, especially, God's saints and lay it to heart.

First, consider, when the righteous are taken, their influence is removed, only the malicious are left. David said, "Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak." (Ps 12: 1-2) Then, consider, if the righteous and merciful die then the unrighteous and the unmerciful shall certainly die also! "*It is* better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that *is* the end of all men; and the living will lay *it* to his heart." (Ecc 7: 2) Also consider when God has separated the last of his elect into Christ in faith—then judgment shall come upon the whole world. (2 Pet 3: 9, 15) Each time a new believer confesses faith in Christ, we should consider, this may be the last one!

GOD'S END FOR HIS PEOPLE

Lastly, remember God's end for his believing child, "the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." (Is 57: 1-2)

First a warning, for those who reject Christ—evil is sure to come. In this life, you will never have peace with God only a fearful looking forward to judgment. It is because vain men rest in the bed they made, "Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed:...thou hast discovered thyself to another than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee a covenant with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it. (Is 57: 7-8) It is because vain men walk in their own uprightness rather than Christ. But God says, "I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee." (Is 57: 12)

So death will be the beginning of eternal, never-ending woe, torment, everlasting wrath of God. Fire is used to describe hell because it is the worst pain we can think of. Hell will be far worse than fire! Sinner, lay this to heart! Are you ready to die? Are you ready to meet God?

But it is not so with God's saints. When God removes his saints from the vain religion of this world and then at last when he takes them home to glory, they are taken away from the evil to come. We shall not see judgment because Christ bore our judgment on the cross. Before the flood, God put his elect in the ark. Before judgment fell on Sodom, God gathered Lot out of their midst. So it shall be for each of God's saints. It "shall be well for the righteous; but woe for the wicked."

For each saint that God gathers to himself in this life, "He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." (Is 57: 2) In this life, God shall gather each of his saints into Christ our Peace. "Therefore being justified [by God in Christ], by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom 5: 1) We rest in our beds at night in peace. We walk by day in Christ our Uprightness, following his command.

At last, when God gathers us through death, we shall enter into a brand-new world of peace with the God of peace, the Spirit of peace, the Prince of peace, the angels of peace and the children of peace. Our bodies shall rest peacefully in our graves, like they rest in our beds, till the day Christ raises them anew in glorified perfection. But immediately, when we die, we shall be gathered to walk in Christ, our Uprightness, and with Christ in uprightness, forever!

Believer, lay this to heart. There will be no sin, strife, sorrow, sickness, or death, only infinite riches of grace and glory, always and forever with God our Father and Christ Jesus our Savior! Believer, consider being united with Christ perfectly; consider the whole church of God singing his praises triumphantly at rest in glory; consider what it will be like to know Christ even as we are known!

When I die, do not weep for me! Lay it to heart! Consider! And rejoice!

Amen!