

8/10/11

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON - Isaiah 56:1-2, 6-8

(The Lord will gather people from other lands to His people.)

1 This 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. 2 Blessed 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."

6 And 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--7 these 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." 8 The Sovereign LORD declares-- he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 15:21-28

(A Canaanite woman's prayer is answered.)

21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." 23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." 27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

THE SERMON

"Yes, Even Foreigners!"

Isaiah 56

In recent years Moslem extremists have changed the politics of our world. Innocent people have been attacked all around the world. Often these people have come from Saudi Arabia or areas in that part of the world. Now we know God has sent us to make disciples of all nations, but we also know that God is against murder, and there is only one God. Do you ever wonder if God really loves these people?

In recent years America has had a challenge with illegal immigrants, mainly from Mexico and Central America, but from other places too. Again, we know God loves all people, but not only are these people flooding our country and our schools, they are often bringing drugs that hurt our people. God wants us to keep the law and to love others. Does God really love these illegal immigrants?

A number of years ago Japan was a real force economically in the world. In fact they were buying companies and property around the world. People said that Japan had

lost the military war, and was now trying to win the economic war. God wants us to make disciples of everyone, but most Japanese are not Christian and some of their efforts to seemingly take over companies and areas seemed cutthroat and unethical, at least by American standards. Does God really love these economic marauders?

The Jews had these kind of questions. There are many verses that say that God is a God of all nations. Abraham was blessed so that all nations would be blessed through Him. The Father of Israel was not only there for the Jews, but for all people. In Isaiah, there are many references, including Isaiah 42, just a couple of chapters before this one. Speaking both about Israel and the coming Messiah, the suffering servant, God said in verse 6 **"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,"**

But, the Gentiles often worshiped false gods. Their behavior went against the laws God had established. There were even ceremonial laws that if a Jewish person came in contact with a non-believer they were ceremonially unclean for worship. So, could God really love these foreigners?

Listen to a seemingly New Testament thought from God in the Old Testament, in Isaiah!

6 And 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--7 these 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." God will bring these foreigners to His Holy Mountain as they turn to Him in faith and obedience. God says His House is **a house of prayer for all nations**. Imagine that!

When we are led to wonder if God loves others, if He loves foreigners and unbelievers and people who act contrary to God's law we are making a number of mistakes. First, we are forgetting our own sin. Do you know that your rebellion against God, your lies, your grudges helped to put God's Son Jesus on the cross? When we look down on others we forget our own sin. But God loves us and sent Jesus to take our punishment.

When we are led to wonder if God loves others, if He loves foreigners and unbelievers we forget that the church started in the Middle East with Jewish people. It is a good thing that Jesus is a **"light to the Gentiles"** or we wouldn't be children of God.

When we are led to wonder if God loves others, if He loves foreigners and unbelievers we forget that while God does not love the sin, He loves the sinner. And that is a good thing, because God loves and forgives us. He wants everyone to have the opportunity to believe in Him and to follow Him.

God's plan may be even bigger than we think. Look at verse 8, **8 The Sovereign LORD declares-- he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."**

If you are a parent you know that there are times that your children do things that horrify you. But, you still love them. You want to help them see the wise and godly way to live for their own good. God wants us to share God's love and God's ways with others. This is not easy. It takes wisdom only given by the Holy Spirit. But, the bottom line is this, if God loves someone, we are called to reach out to them with faith and love. **And, Christ died for ALL.**