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Sermon Notes

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Humble Outcasts Welcomed In

Isaiah 56:1-12

As we resume our study in Isaiah, we come immediately to two marvelous chapters—Isaiah 56-57, that show the variety of responses to the grace of God in this world... this week, we will focus on the way the New Covenant was anticipated and humble former outcasts are welcomed in... we will also see the wickedness of evil leaders who live for their flesh; next week, we will continue probing the mixed responses to the gospel in Isaiah 57

I. Life in a Mixed World: The Wheat and the Weeds

A. Jesus' Parable

Jesus told a parable describing the mixed nature of life in this world as a member of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13:24-30). He described a man who sowed good seed in his field, but that at night, while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. When the wheat sprouted and produced grain, the weeds also appeared. The landowner's slaves offered to pull the weeds up, but he refused, saying they might also root up the wheat with the weeds. He commanded that both be allowed to grow up together until the harvest, at which time he would separate the wheat from the weeds. In the interpretation of the parable (Matthew 13:36-43), Jesus said the field is the world and the wheat are the sons of the kingdom, while the weeds are the sons of the devil. The wheat and weeds live life in close proximity together, but in the end, they will be eternally separated: the wheat gathered into the barn (heaven) and the weeds thrown into a blazing furnace (hell).

This mixed existence is part of what makes life in this world so difficult for believers, but it is hardly a new phenomenon. Isaiah saw the same issues in his day, and foresaw that life in the new world made by the Suffering Servant would also be mixed. Isaiah 56-57 describes in a back and forth rhythm the two classes of people – the wheat and the weeds – in powerfully vivid terms.

One of the great challenges of these chapters is to set them in Isaiah's context.

Isaiah is looking ahead with prophetic vision to a day in which eunuchs and aliens, excluded from the temple in the Old Covenant will be welcomed in the assembly, and God's house will be a house of prayer for all nations. But he also speaks clearly about the great wickedness of Israel's watchmen living self-indulgent lives of feasting, and the Jews as sons of a sorceress, adulterer, and prostitute who pursue idolatrous worship practices taken from Canaanite religions. These things happened much more clearly before the exile, during the days of Manasseh, and were the very practices that led to the exile. So Isaiah looks immediately to his own day and right after, but also to the centuries beyond in the days of the church, when outsiders will be welcomed. The most powerful image in these chapters is the contrast between the lowly of spirit whom God heals of sin and welcomes into his high and holy dwelling place to live in peace with him (57:15-19) and the self-indulgent and wicked who will never know that peace. (57:20-21)

B. Our Decaying Orbit with the Surrounding Culture

1. The "wheat among the weeds" experience is getting stronger and stronger in our culture these days
2. The church in America has had an unusually comfortable relationship with our surrounding culture for over three hundred years
 - a. Government was openly supportive of Christianity
 - b. Public officials often sought prayers or days of fasting
 - c. Christianity was generally held in honor in the public schools and marketplace
 - d. "Judeo-Christian values" (so-called) were taught in school as such
 - e. There was a Christian ethic behind most of the laws of our country
 - f. Even misguided laws like Prohibition had a strong Christian basis and originated in the church
3. However, we must realize that the documents which established our nation (Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and Bill of Rights are in no way overtly Christian... none of those documents mention Jesus or Christ or Christianity or the Bible or the Trinity or salvation from sin or any overtly Christian doctrines...); the anti-establishment clause meant the nation could never be overtly Christian... yet we are well aware that Christianity was the religious backdrop of the Revolutionary War and the founding fathers of our nation...

4. Yet the general esteem which Christianity enjoyed in the popular culture is eroding fast; America is becoming more and more SECULAR

Alan Cooperman, the Pew's Director of Religious Research: "Overall, there are more than four former Christians for every convert to Christianity."

Newsweek poll: The rise in the unaffiliated, sometimes called religious "nones," is due in part to millennials. This age group, which includes many people who were too young to be counted when Pew last did the survey in 2007, forms the least religious generation in American history, with more than one-third, or 35 percent, saying they are religiously unaffiliated. For baby boomers, that figure is 17 percent.

But it's not just the young who are eschewing churches, synagogues and mosques. Since 2007, all age groups have become increasingly irreligious. Two percent more of those in the Silent Generation (people over the age of 70) are now unaffiliated, compared with 2007, while 3 percent and 4 percent more baby boomers and Generation Xers, respectively, now count themselves among the ranks of the unaffiliated. [Douglas Main, 5/12/15]

5. Divisive issues like abortion, gay marriage, and transgender bathrooms have revealed the decaying nature of his relationship between biblical Christianity and American culture
6. The church is in for the same ROCKY RIDE that our brothers and sisters in non-Christian nations around the world have known for centuries
7. The wheat is surrounded by weeds and it's going to get worse

C. Review of Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52-55

1. Key figure in the latter half of Isaiah: the "Suffering Servant" who we Christians know is JESUS CHRIST
2. Isaiah 42: Introduced as a quiet, humble King who
3. Isaiah 49: Jesus a "light for the Gentiles"... taking God's glory to the ends of the earth
4. Isaiah 50: Jesus a "Suffering Servant" who did not shrink back from offering himself to be beaten
5. Isaiah 52-53: Jesus our substitute, whose blood would cleanse sinners to the ends of the earth, and who would rise from the dead

6. Isaiah 54: the worldwide spread of the gospel... Zion's "tent" would have to get much bigger
7. Isaiah 55: a rich banquet of salvation spread for the poor and needy... God's word descending like rain and snow on a parched earth

Not everyone is going to want to sit at the banquet of salvation Jesus Christ offers... but a countless multitude from every nation on earth WILL...

We will be surrounded every day by people who are not yet seated at the banquet table of salvation... some of them will NEVER COME... they will live like weeds their whole lives and will make life miserable for the believers; BUT other outcasts will humble themselves and repent of their sins and be welcomed to a prime spot at the banquet table of salvation in Christ!!

II. The Wheat: Humble Outcasts Welcomed In (vs. 1-8)

A. God's Timeless Saving Plan for the World

1. From before the foundation of the world... God had a plan for the redemption of sinners... as we just got done studying in Ephesians

Ephesians 1:4-7 [God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

2. This plan began when Adam and Eve fell into sin... in Adam, the whole human race fell into rebellion... we were all CAST OUT... all of us outsiders, not welcome into heavenly dwellings
3. Major step forward: the promise to Abraham

Genesis 12:2-3 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

4. The Jewish nation: a launching pad for the salvation of elect from all over the world... God unfolded a powerful history through that chosen nation to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth

Exodus 19:5-6 if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Psalm 67:1-3 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, ² that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. ³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.

We have seen that salvation unfolded in Isaiah 42, 49, 52-55... the free banquet of grace in the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ

5. Isaiah 56:1: Salvation DRAWS NEAR!!!

Isaiah 56:1 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.

Immediate context: Isaiah 55-66 seems to be predicting the circumstances of the Jews' restoration from exile to Babylon

Isaiah the prophet has plainly predicted the exile and the return of the remnant to the Promised Land

But as often happens in these chapters, his language soars far above this event... the Jews that made their way back to the rubble-filled, desolate city of Jerusalem seventy years after the Exile to Babylon were only few in number and very weak... this event, however significant, cannot be called "God's salvation" or the revelation of his righteousness

Rather it set the stage for the infinitely greater work of Jesus Christ on the cross and at the empty tomb!!

The Jewish nation would continue in the Old Covenant... laboring under the Mosaic Laws, and under the animal sacrificial system, for five more centuries before Christ would come to fulfill it and make it obsolete.

B. Godly Jews Described (vs. 1-2)

Isaiah 56:1-2 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."

1. The call here is to the people of God... the godly Jewish nation... to live godly and upright lives under his law as they waited for his redemption

2. The nation had been wicked before the exile... disobeying God's laws, plundering the weak and powerless, shedding innocent blood, taking widows' homes and acting immorally
3. Here God calls on his people to live godly and upright lives under his righteous laws
4. For us as Christians, we read these words and YEARN to live godly and upright lives as we wait for the end of the world...
5. WAITING for the final act of the salvation drama:

2 Peter 3:11-12 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

2 Peter 3:14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

6. aa

C. Godly Outcasts Welcomed

Isaiah 56:3 Let 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."

1. Foreigners and Eunuchs

- a. This text speaks of people who were EXCLUDED from the assembly of God under the Old Covenant
- b. Certainly eunuchs were excluded with no exceptions

Deuteronomy 23:1 No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.

- c. So also many specific Gentiles were permanently excluded or excluded to the fourth generation

Deuteronomy 23:2 No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation

Deuteronomy 23:3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.

2. Formerly Aliens and Strangers... Excluded

- a. Paul picks up on these exclusions in Ephesians

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

- b. The Law of Moses kept such people OUT of the assembly of the Lord... it was what Paul called a "barrier, a dividing wall of hostility"
 - c. Yet through Isaiah the prophet, even centuries before Christ was born, came the hope and the promise that formerly excluded people might have the right to enter the assembly of the Lord
3. Now: Bound to the Lord by Covenant and Heart Transformation
- a. God doesn't allow these outsiders in without transforming them... they have become radically different people
 - b. God has cleansed them of all their pagan defilements; he has washed them clean by the blood of Christ... they are made new in their hearts
 - c. John the Baptist: God can raise up children of Abraham out of STONES

Matthew 3:9 I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

- d. So in the New Covenant, all these OUTSIDERS have been transformed by the Spirit and brought NEAR in Christ

Ezekiel 36:25-27 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Ephesians 2:13-15 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,

D. The Rewards of Inclusion

- 1. Rich blessings for those humble, transformed outsiders the Lord now brings near
 - a. Each of these are carefully described before the blessings are listed

b. NOT EVERY eunuch is blessed... NOT EVERY foreigner is brought near and given a rich inheritance!

2. First, to the eunuchs:

Isaiah 56:4-5 For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant--⁵ to 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.

- a. Conditions: covenantal language... those who meet the stipulations of the covenant... Isaiah speaks in covenantal language Jews of his time would understand: pleasing the Lord by Sabbath observance and covenantal obedience
- b. BUT in the New Covenant, the only requirement is repentance and faith in Christ!! Christ has become for us our SABBATH REST, and to hold fast to him in faith is to walk in the Covenant
- c. Rewards are lavish: a PLACE IN GOD'S TEMPLE... a spot within its walls... a secure, permanent place of HONOR... an everlasting name that will never be cut off!!!
- d. VERY SIMILAR to the promises made to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:

Revelation 3:12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

- e. This MUST refer to the spiritual temple that Paul and Peter described

Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

1 Peter 2:5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you

are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In heaven, there will be a vast multitude from every nation on earth continually worshipping God for their salvation... these are depicted as carrying on a ministry in God's heavenly temple:

Revelation 7:9-10 *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

Revelation 7:13-15 *Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple*

So much for the lavish blessings of the eunuchs who were formerly excluded, but now are transformed and saved by Jesus Christ!!

3. Second, to the foreigners (Gentiles, outsiders):

Isaiah 56:6-7 *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."*

- a. Again, the conditions must be met... these blessings are not universally given to formerly excluded people... not ALL Gentiles, but the elect!
- b. They BIND THEMSELVES to the Lord by faith... they yearn to serve him, to love the NAME OF THE LORD, and to worship Him... again, the Sabbath and covenantal language is fulfilled by faith in Christ
- c. Their rewards are LAVISH:
 - i) God brings them to his holy mountain: again, as is often the case in Isaiah, this refers to "Mount Zion" which we know is the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God
 - ii) They are welcomed in God's house of prayer, and there they are eternally FILLED WITH JOY

iii) They will offer those eternal sacrifices of praise, thanking God for their salvation in Christ

4. House of prayer for all nations!!! Jesus understood this plainly in reference to Herod's Temple in Jerusalem... God's saving plan is eternal, and the physical temple was a TYPE and a SHADOW of the final, perfect heavenly temple of the worldwide assembly of the people of God offering pure sacrifices of praise... Jesus was deeply angered by the way the moneychangers and those selling animals were missing the whole point for the temple... he made a whip of cords and drove out the animals, overturned the benches of those selling things and of the moneychangers...

Mark 11:17 He said, "Is it not written: "'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

5. Isaiah 56 clearly depicts the consummation of the worldwide SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL of Jesus Christ... of formerly excluded people now welcomed it through the blood of Christ!!

E. New Exiles Gathered In

Isaiah 56:8 The Sovereign LORD declares-- he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

1. Isaiah predicted the EXILE of Jews to Babylon... he also predicted the REGATHERING of the exiles back to the Promised Land, back to Jerusalem
2. This PHYSICAL REGATHERING was also a type and shadow of the true regathering... the spiritual regathering of lost sinners scattered all over the face of the earth

Isaiah 11:12 He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

John 11:51-52 Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

So... verse 1-8 show the delights of the plan of salvation for humble people once excluded, and for exiles scattered all over the earth... RICH BLESSINGS of fellowship with God... an eternally secure place in God's eternal temple in heaven

This is the joy of the gathering of God's harvest... his wheat gathered into his barn:

BUT NOW, we turn to the weeds... as John the Baptist predicted of Christ:

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

III. The Weeds: Self-Indulgent Leaders Devoured (vs. 9-12)

A. These "Weeds": Self-Indulgent Leaders

Isaiah 56:10-12 Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. ¹¹ They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. ¹² "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better."

1. The final paragraph of this chapter is a JUDGMENT on the WATCHMEN of Israel... the leaders—kings and prophets and warriors who should use their positions of power to serve God's people
2. "Israel's watchmen": these are the guardians of the nation... those who stand on the walls to protect her from danger and slaughter in the night
3. They are called on to deprive themselves of sleep, to deny themselves for the sake of the city
4. They are called on to be ALERT, COURAGEOUS, WISE, and SELF-SACRIFICIAL
5. Sometimes Prophets are called "watchmen"... like Ezekiel

Ezekiel 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.

6. The rules for watchmen are clear... when God calls on you to WARN you must WARN the people

Ezekiel 3:18-19 When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ¹⁹ But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

7. In a sense, all the leaders of God's people are watchmen, seeing danger coming and warning the people
8. BUT these watchmen are DEPLORABLE

- a. Isaiah calls them BLIND... they cannot see the danger coming (what good is a blind WATCHman???)
- b. Isaiah calls them IGNORANT... he says they lack knowledge
- c. Isaiah calls them MUTE DOGS... they cannot bark. So what good is a watchdog that cannot bark and warn the people?
- d. Isaiah calls them LAZY DOGS... who lie around and love to sleep; like the sluggard, they can barely lift their hands to their mouths, they can barely rouse themselves out of bed
- e. Isaiah calls them DOGS with MIGHTY APPETITES... they are living for the next feast, the next drunken, gluttonous evening

Philippians 3:19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

- f. They are GREEDY... the never have enough; implied, they are feasting on the people
 - g. They are LIVING FOR THEMSELVES... their lusts and appetites and comforts are all that are on their minds
9. These false watchmen could also be the KINGS of Judah and Israel... because they failed to shepherd the people, they were scattered, they were exiled:

Ezekiel 34:2-6 Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

God holds these shepherds accountable for the health of the flock

- 10. They think the feast will NEVER END!!

Isaiah 56:12 "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better."

No fear of the Lord, no fear of judgment... just a complacent, lazy, comfortable expectation that these days of wine and roses will go on forever.

B. Summons to the Beasts: "Supper's Ready!!" (vs. 9)

1. Ironically, the judgment from the Lord is a call to yet another FEAST... an invitation to a vast BANQUET
2. Only this time, they are not the honored guests, but rather the meal itself:

Isaiah 56:9 Come, all you beasts of the field, come and devour, all you beasts of the forest!

3. Just like the final act of the history of the world... at the Second Coming of Christ

Revelation 19:17-21 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." ¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰ But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹ The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

At the end of the world, the wheat and the weeds will be separated out and the wheat will be gathered into the BARN of heaven... to sit at the banquet table of the Lord and feast with Christ

BUT the wicked, including all

IV. Applications

A. Come to Christ... while there's time

1. This chapter gives us again the sense of the LAVISH BLESSINGS of the gospel
2. Look again at the things that are promised to those allowed to enter in:

Isaiah 56:5 to 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.

Isaiah 56:7 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."

B. Understand the MIXED NATURE of Life in this World

1. Contemplate the fact that we are called on to live life in a world surrounded by unbelievers who live out their rebellion against God
2. For the rest of our lives, we're going to be sharing elevators and crowded malls and airports with people who do not love Jesus Christ
3. Most of them will never embrace the gospel... but some of them will
4. Because SOME OF THEM WILL... because before they are converted, the elect look just like WEEDS, we have to let them develop and live lives of rebellion against Christ until they are finally converted

Acts 8:3 Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

5. The weeds make up ISIS as they slaughter Christians... antichristian college officials who issue edicts and rules that keep Christians from freely sharing the gospel on the campus... non-Christian government officials ALL OVER THE WORLD who use their positions of power to retard the spread of the gospel or even to crush Christianity overtly
6. The mixed-up nature of the world is a constant grief to us who love Christ... but it is TEMPORARY... Christ will get it all sorted out when he returns
7. In the meantime, we have to bear with the suffering that comes from sharing a common space with people who do not love Christ
8. And we have to be moved with compassion for them and share the gospel with them... this is OUR MISSION FIELD... this city of Durham, NC
 - a. Understand Paul's deep compassion for the lost

Romans 9:2-3 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race

- b. Understand how Jesus wept for the lost

Luke 19:41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it

Ask God to make you LESS ANNOYED with lost people and more willing to suffer to bring the elect to Christ:

2 Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

C. A Warning to Leaders... WATCHMEN... to be faithful

1. First and foremost: ELDERS... Hebrews 13:17 says “those who lose sleep over the flock”
2. We are called “overseers” because we are to watch over the safety of the flock... we are to be watchmen on the walls, protecting the sheep from the wolves
3. Richard Baxter warns pastors not to live in sin

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when you have done, dishonor him as much as others? Will you proclaim Christ’s governing power, and yet contemn it, and rebel yourselves? Will you preach his laws, and wilfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it if it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? if it be not, why do you tell men so? If God’s threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? if they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men, with them, and put them into such frights without a cause

4. A warning also to civic leaders: political leaders... Presidents, Congressional leaders, elected officials...
 - a. God will not take it lightly if our leaders use their positions to slow the gospel or pad their bank accounts
 - b. These warnings are for our age as well!!

D. Biggest Lesson: God’s Amazing Grace to Us Former Outsiders

1. In the OLD COVENANT: We would have been excluded as Gentiles from entering the assembly of the Lord
2. BUT NOW:

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

3. Give thanks for your salvation!!

4. Look at the blessings of eternal joy and feasting and worship listed here
5. Be a person offering regular sacrifices of praise to the Lord

E. Missions

1. FBC needs to be a “house of prayer for all the nations” as Isaiah and Jesus both said

Isaiah 56:7 for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

2. Home Fellowships: make praying for Unreached People Groups a regular feature of your time
3. FBC: let’s gear up for a great Lottie Moon Christmas offering; also Great Commission Fund
4. Let’s support our church members who are missionaries in 2017 better than ever before
5. Young people: challenge yourselves to think about Unreached People Groups and how God wants you to give your life to reach them