

Every member of God's house an honored son*Isaiah 56:1-7*

Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. ² Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. ³ Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. ⁴ For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; ⁵ Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. ⁶ Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; ⁷ Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. 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.

Dear Christian Friends,

There are many people in this world who are despised and marginalized, and others who are well honored and respected. Some, reasonably enough, are despised because they are wicked and miserable people who rebel against authority and live only for themselves, killing or mistreating everyone and everything that stands in their way in spite of the laws of God and man. But whereas all men are equally selfish in their hearts, there are yet many others are despised for no fault of their own, because they were born to the wrong parents, the wrong social class, the wrong nation. Some of them are too young, babes even, whom men value little or not at all. Witness the millions of children which are aborted out of the coldness of men's hearts in our own and other countries. It is an inborn characteristic of the human heart to believe that some people deserve to live, and others to die. The result we see: wars, poverty, and oppression. It has always been this way, and it will always be this way, because this is the nature of man. We are born with this wickedness in our hearts.

But it is not to be this way among the people of God. In the Church which Christ has purchased with His own blood, there is no such thing as a an oppressed minority or despised majority, for every member of His Church is equally unworthy to appear within the walls of the Father's kingdom. Would that in every congregation that is called a "church" that this truth was recognized and put into practice, for then all men would always be welcome, and no one could lift himself up over

anyone else and despise his brother in the faith. May we all repent of our coldness toward our brethren in the faith, for in truth there is no such thing as a marginalized citizen of God's kingdom, for every member of the Father's house is more than a guest, more than a citizen, but as Isaiah declares, better even than a son or daughter.

[Today we bring before the Father in heaven young Josiah Bly.] If God's kingdom were a house were only the great and mighty need apply, we could not dare to bring our children [this child] to the Lord, for we would in no wise be worthy ourselves to appear before Him and ask His blessing upon them [this child]. But thanks be to God, especially our little ones are welcomed by our gracious Lord. Jesus blesses the little children while they are small, and have done nothing great at all. They are destined to be the honored sons of our Father because in Baptism God has ordained that they take hold on His covenant of Grace in Jesus Christ. Even so the Lord declared that the children of the foreigner who takes hold of His covenant, He will bring into His holy mountain, and make them joyful in His house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon His altar; for His house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.

Thus in the Old Testament, the little boy children were made a part of the covenant of grace by circumcision. While they were yet babes in arms, unable to reason for themselves, God ordained that this sacrament be given to them that all might know that they too, while yet so small, were saved by faith in Christ who was to come. Even so, in the New Testament God has given us baptism, so that we might make our little ones a part of the covenant of Christ, not by cleansing their flesh, which is all simple water *can do* all by itself, but by cleansing their hearts, so that they receive the righteousness of Christ, which alone has the power to cleanse the conscience (1 Pe. 3:11). Therefore, in Colossians 2:11,12 Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ, wherein we are raised in Him through the faith which God works in our hearts. As it was with the little children in Israel, so it is with our little children, who are saved not by the will of man, but by the power of God. What a wondrous blessing that even our little ones are not despised of our Lord! This house is also *their* house of prayer, for the Holy Spirit, who is in them according to the promise of God (Acts 2:38,39), lifts up wondrous prayers on their behalf. The waters of baptism and the preaching of the Word assure them also, though they yet cannot understand human speech, that God, in Christ has washed them from all their sins, and made them holy and righteous. In the waters of Baptism, by the

power of God, they are born again, for by the washing of regeneration He has saved us all (Titus 3:5).

May we learn well from this truth that Jesus receives little children and blesses them, to never again marginalize or despise *anyone*, but welcome all men to the house of the Father. For this house is a house of grace, not a house of race or works or any other condition of men.

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus, asking the question, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" how did Jesus respond? He said, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." In our lesson in Isaiah, and throughout the prophets, God has given us this promise: That no one will be turned away from His kingdom. The poor and maimed, halt and blind, the poor in spirit from every nation, our little ones, and men from afar. All of them have a place in the kingdom of God, for the kingdom of God is not made up of only certain kind of people, who have the right blood in their veins, who are holier than others, who are better at keeping the commandments, or who are whole and healthy in their bodies. No, not even the worst sinner is excluded from God's promise. There is only one thing that can keep anyone out of the Father's house. Jesus says, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." Whoever you may be, if only this is true, that you are not offended in Jesus, but receive Him as the God's Righteousness given for you, you have a place in His house. When you believe this, no matter how you came to the kingdom of God, you will be treated as one of His honored guests. He will not give to you some little obscure corner in the margins of heaven. He will not look upon those who appear before Him on the last day and say, "Now as for you who were truly worthy, I will give you the best place. But if you come late, or if you were but a child and did no great and mighty deeds in the world, you can enter, but you will always be a second-class citizen here." No, the Lord declares that you will have a house, a mansion within His walls, a place that is better even than that of a son or a daughter.

Before Christ Jesus came and fulfilled the words of the prophet, there were a few, the stranger, the foreigner, who came into the Kingdom of God. Why were they welcomed? In many cases, they were not, as they were not children of Abraham by blood. Yet, Isaiah declares, do not turn them away. Receive these others who have come early to the feast of salvation, for the day is coming, it is near, that men of every nation will flow into

Zion like a flood. "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.'" In the Jewish nation especially, where only those who could beget children could become an ancestor of the Messiah, a eunuch was the most marginalized of all. They could well say, "I am a dry tree." I can produce nothing for the Kingdom. Even then, the Lord declares: Not so! "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." Their name will not be cut off, for their measure in the kingdom of God is not based upon how much they can produce, in children or otherwise, but entirely upon the grace of Jesus Christ. In that grace, by faith, we have a tremendous inheritance, an eternal kingdom where our works *really will* matter, for we will be perfected from all our uncleanness, from every sin of the flesh which so easily besets us. Then, every word and deed and thought will be fruitful, giving all praise and glory to the God who redeemed us and washed us, and raised us up from the dead to a new and glorious life. How can anyone then think that they are cut off in the Father's house?

My friends we were once the stranger, aliens to the household of God. We were shut out by the covenant of Mt. Sinai while God prepared His people to be the vehicle by which Christ, His dear Son, would come into the world. But now that Christ has come, the floodgates are indeed open, and even as His Gospel has gone out into all the world, all the world flows into His Holy Mountain, Mt. Zion which cannot be moved, for it abides forever (Psalm 125:1). Jesus gathered the outcasts of Israel, and now He gathers into His people us also. Remember this the next time that your flesh tempts you to be cold to the stranger who knows not the Lord. Once you were an outcast too, but by Grace God has received you and given you an honored place behind His walls. Your little ones, while they were yet small and unproductive, He grants faith and makes them fruitful in their prayers of joy. God's house is a house of prayer for all people. Therefore may we welcome all men even as we and our children are welcomed. Together let us keep the sabbath of the Lord which is no longer just one day a week, but every day, for in Christ Jesus, our whole life becomes a sacrifice of prayer and praise. Amen.