

1. To explain these three chapters, I'd like to explain them in perspective of the last few chapters. In the last part of Chapter 52 and all Chapter 53, Isaiah laid out the essence of the Gospel message in about 15 Verses. Then the last two chapters essentially said, "OK, since we're now aware of God's game plan, develop our life around His plan and use it to be a witness for Him to be a part of it." All that leads to these three fairly short chapters. My "now what" of this lesson is to get practical. It's God saying, "Now that you understand the big picture, let Me tell you some practical ways to live as part of how I expect all of us to live as a witness for Me."
 - a) I call this lesson "practical". That's because it focuses on practical ways we're to be a good witness for God. It's will cover some debated issues within the Christian community such as how is it we should be honoring the Sabbath and fasting. This will be a lesson where no matter what I say I'm going to offend someone. Just remember that it's just my opinion on these topics and other bible scholars will argue for a different interpretation. All I request is a little grace as to my view on these topics and take what I say with a "grain of salt".
 - b) With that disclaimer out of my system, Isaiah is going to be doing some lecturing in these three chapters. He essentially condemns the Israelites for ignoring the Sabbath rituals that they were commanded to obey. The Israelite leaders fasted on occasions. However, when they did fast, it was for the wrong reasons. They made their employees (and slaves) work harder while they themselves looked all sorrowful by going without food.
 - i) If that wasn't bad enough, Isaiah gets on the case of the religious leaders for being a bunch of drunkards and ignoring what they were called to do. It gets worse, but I'll spare you the details until I get into the text itself.
 - c) One of the hard things to accept about Christianity is we're required to obey Him the way He wants us to and not any old way we feel like. As a simple example, God does not say to us, "OK, you're saved, pray to Me once in a while, and go do whatever you want." We are called to live in obedience to Him not to earn His love, but only out of gratitude based on He has done for us and so we can be a good witness for Him. Christians aren't "under the law" as I will explain in detail in this lesson. We should be differently enough so that if we were arrested for being a Christian, there should be enough evidence to convict us!
 - d) Therefore, as we go through this lesson and we get into issues such as observing one day of the week as a day of "Rest in God", I'll give my opinion of what I believe that means for us Christians and how we should observe it. I'll state my opinion on fasting for believers and how and when we should be doing that. Again, on debatable topics like this I do ask that you remember that opinions vary on that topic even among believers. The important thing is that we do live as a witness for Jesus and live differently enough that people near to us realize that we're living as God called us to live as a witness for Him.
2. A quick word to those of you who are new to my lessons. I call my bible studies "now what"? As best I can figure God didn't call me to preach to nonbelievers although I sneak in the Gospel basic message every now and then. What I figured out over time is that God called me preach to those of you who believe Jesus is God on the topic of "now what"? I'm very aware that I'm in the same boat as everyone I'm preaching to, and as the classic saying goes, "Physician heal thyself".
 - a) Let me explain it another way. A lot of Paul's letters in the New Testament have a pattern of spending chapters essentially saying, "Here's what God's done for you and now here is what God expects from you and me in response to what He's done for us."
 - b) Therefore, these chapters fall into that "practical" aspect of teaching what God does expect of us based on what He has accomplished in the world and what He will still do when He accomplishes His Second Coming. In other words, "Here is what God's done, now let me tell you what you should be doing based on what He's done." With that said, I ask you to follow along as we get into the practical aspects of what God demands of us.

3. OK John, what about the saved by grace stuff? I though we're only saved by God's grace and we don't have to do anything over and above that? I'm not arguing with that. Of course I believe we are only saved by His grace and there is nothing we can do to earn His love.
 - a) The issue isn't about earning His love. It's about being a good witness for Him. We were not saved to just sit here and kill time until we die or Jesus returns. We were saved so we can be a good witness for Him based on how we live out our lives. Hopefully that's why you're reading these studies to encourage you and me how to be a good witness for Him as we do try to use our lives for His glory.
 - b) Now that we understand why we're saved, let's get "practical" and read of Isaiah's issues he brings up on how we can be a good witness for God.
 - c) With that said, time to start on the verse-by-verse commentary.
4. Chapter 56, Verse 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.
 - a) The first topic of this "reality checklist" is to maintain justice and do what is right. There's an old joke that when religious Christians think of God, we think of a God of love. When religious Jewish people think of God, they think of a God of justice. The truth is both. We need to realize that God's always interested in us doing the "right thing" in life and doing what is fair to all parties involved. It's more than enforcing laws and making sure that the criminals serve their fair sentence. It's the idea that in our own dealings, we always strive to do what is right in life. I admit that all sounds "high and noble", but in reality we fail to live up to that standards. We consider sin as a violation of one of His commandments. A way to sin that we don't always consider is failing to do the right thing in any situation. It is just as much a sin to fail to do what is right than say to steal or murder someone.
 - b) With that tough thought in mind, keep in mind why this is first: God is going to judge all of us whether we like it or not. For us Christians, that should make us that more grateful that we're forgiven of our sins and our judgment is only based how we've used our lives to make a difference for Him, not based on what sins we've committed. So if we're saved by grace alone, why be concerned with justice? The issue is always about doing the right thing in life and doing justice can be just as critical as doing a good deed.
 - c) That leads me to the second part of this sentence that says, "My salvation is close at hand". If Isaiah wrote this over 700 years before Jesus First Coming and it's now been 2,000 years since that event, how is it God can say through Isaiah that His righteousness will soon be revealed? One can argue that if God is God, time is "meaningless" and the world is going to last as long as He says it does, not a minute more or less. As Peter put it, "A thousand years is as a day and a day is as a thousand years" (A rough quote of 2nd Peter 3:8). All I am saying is we don't see time as God sees time.
 - i) A better way of looking at this verse is to realize how short our time is that we will live in these bodies. Even if we live to 100, how long is that versus eternity? If you ask elderly people on their deathbed, how fast it went by, they'll probably respond that it was like a blink of an eye. My point is life is short and we need to make the best of our time. My point as it relates to this verse is we'll know soon enough of God's plans being revealed for this world as this life will be over before we know it and we will soon enough see it from God's eternal time perspective. What all that means is to make the best use of our time and use it to glorify Him by using it for His glory. That includes doing the right thing (think "justice") as well as using it to tell others of His return and help others draw close to Him. That's what Christians are called to do in life. In the meantime, Verse 2:
5. Verse 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.
 - a) The short version is we're blessed in this life if we seek Him, and use our time to make the difference for Him that He desires. If we do that, no matter how long we live, it's worth it.

- b) That leads to the second "practical" aspect of this lesson, keeping the Sabbath.
 - i) This is a complicated topic and I know that I have Christians from a lot of different backgrounds reading this with lots of views on how to keep the Sabbath. Realize I am just giving my opinion here and the topic of how Christians should keep it has been debated since the church started.
 - ii) Let's start by realizing that keeping the Sabbath is one of the 10 Commandments. As the old preacher's joke goes, "It's not one of the 10 suggestions, it's a command."
 - iii) The basic purpose of the Sabbath is that we take one day out of seven to rest from any activity we consider to be work. My favorite comment on this issue is, "Is it ok to mow our lawn on Sunday? My response is, it depends if we make our living as a gardener! The basic idea is to give our body a chance to rest from whatever we consider to be work. Yes we can take it to extremes and of course there are things that have to be done even on our day of rest.
 - iv) I also understand that there are policeman, fireman and soldiers that have to work when other people are resting. Therefore, I consider the idea of simply taking one day a week to rest to be more important than what day of the week that actually is.
 - v) As far as going to church one day a week, remember that resting is more than just sleeping in. Resting is about trusting in God and learning of Him. A professional pastor may not think of Sunday as a day of rest, and most of them take Monday as a day of rest. The point is simply that our "rest" is our trust in Him to guide us for His glory.
 - vi) Consider when the early Christian church met to discuss the issues of how should non-Jewish Christians act. There was no discussion about keeping the Sabbath or any of the Commandments for that matter. They only asked that Gentiles not do certain activities that were very offensive to Jewish Christians. Of course the early church wanted all believers to be good witnesses for Jesus and that would include getting together with other believers to observe a "mass" together. All I'm saying is the issue of non-Jewish Christians getting together on a particular day of the week wasn't brought up as a church-wide issue. (All of this is covered in Acts 15.)
 - c) OK, so is the Old Testament "contradicting" the New? If it says here in Isaiah that God is expecting us to "Keep the Sabbath" and the early Christian church didn't "push that" on a world of non-Jewish Christians, how do we reconcile that? The connection is that God is interested in our physical health. That's why He commands us to rest one day a week. As to the issue of when to go to church, I'm not going to solve that 2,000-year old debate. I'm just going to say that I do believe it's essential for Christians to gather with other believers on a regular basis. Whenever I meet "really weird" Christians my first thought is that they are not gathering together with other believers and that's what's causing them to "live out in left field". It's not always the case, but it is often the reason.
 - d) Believe it or not, we're not done with Verse 2. The short version of this verse is that God commands us to 1) Do the right thing 2) Observe the Sabbath and 3) Keep from doing any sort of evil. I've beaten point 1 and 2 to death, so all I should add here is the obvious fact that God cares about our behavior and being a good witness for Him. That would argue why we should avoid any sort of evil as at the least, it makes us a bad witness for Him.
6. Verse 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." ⁴ 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) These verses get into other practical matters. They are about what is it we should do with people who are not like us? The examples given are foreigners and eunuchs. I'll explain:

- b) I should start with the big picture idea that Christianity was never meant to be any sort of an exclusive club. If that were true, only those from Jewish backgrounds could even have a chance of being saved. I remember talking to a young relative who was struggling with the idea of liking people of a different skin color. I asked him, when you get to heaven, do you think there will be one neighborhood for people of your skin color and another one of people of a different color? He shook his head and realized how silly that was. Therefore if people of a different color are part of God's creation as well as yours, why should we act as if they are inferior? Of course there are people who act badly and we have to be careful how we act. At the same time, God desires all be saved, regardless of what they look like.
- c) As to the specifics given in these verses, we get the "foreigners" (non-Israelites) and we get a few comments about eunuchs. For those who don't know, "eunuchs" refer to any person who cannot have children. We can probably expand it to include those who choose not to have children. Unfortunately bigotry exists in all aspects of society, and we can easily look down on people who are different from us. That's why outsiders and anyone who doesn't have families can be shunned at even church gatherings. Even if you consider something as simple as "fashion trends", one can see how easy it is to look down upon someone who is not conforming to a certain look within one's church group. A generation back, I saw a growth of a few new denominations simply because they were willing to accept people to trust in Jesus that "respectable" churches wouldn't help. All I'm saying is that to let those we consider different to be a challenge for any church.
- d) With that said, let's discuss the specific's for the moment. We only get a brief line about a person who's a foreigner. The short version is such a person should feel welcome around us despite any background difference. The mistake we make is we may say to them, after you've done "this and that" we will welcome you. I'm not taking about sin issue, but just on the way one acts or looks. Christian groups exist were those of specific "backgrounds" get preferential treatment and that's what to be avoided in Christian communities. Even among the early church believers, problems arose where those from Jewish backgrounds were getting preferential treatment that had to be dealt with. (See Acts 6:1). Of course it is a challenge we all have to face in life, and every church community should do their best to avoid such situations, as Christianity was never meant to be an exclusive club. It's been many a century for even churches of different "races" to blend, but progress is being made even if it's not fast enough for some people.
- e) Next, a few words about eunuchs, be it people born that way, made that way, or choose to not have children. The text here in Isaiah promises that they'll be blessed more than those who have children. So does that mean I should choose to be single to get that blessing? It is not the issue. The issue is one can feel like an "outsider" if one doesn't have a family of their own. They can feel like they don't relate to others in that church group. All Isaiah is saying is that you've got a family "here" even if one doesn't have one's own family line or if one had run away from one's family for one's own safety. I have to admit, sometimes I do consider a good church to be a collection of "misfits, world rejects and those who don't fit well into society" getting together to honor the God that created them. All I'm saying is if you think, "I can't join that church, they're a bunch of "rejects", examine yourself if you'd think that you're something better!"
- f) An unfortunate reality of life is often a group has to form their own church as they are not accepted in other churches. I'm not saying a "first church of eunuch's" existed, but that is not to far off from how many people have had to get accepted into the world of Christian believers by first starting off with their own group. The good news is once others see one is willing to commit their lives to being a Christian, "over time" such outsiders usually get accepted. Therefore, be it a "eunuch" or a "foreigner", of course we must accept them even if they are different. At the same time, the way to overcome it is to first make the effort to be a believer, and overtime, I find that people have to accept you.

- g) The really good news about that little lecture is one "can't lose" if one doesn't feel welcome in any given church. God is saying through Isaiah that He will accept you just as much as any other believer and be eternally blessed by them. Speaking of God welcoming any and all outsiders into the church I present the next few verses:
7. Verse 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."
- a) My loose translation: Even if others won't accept you as is as a believer, I (God) will!
- b) The greatest mistake too many churches make is we say, "OK, if you're willing to change these aspects of your life, we'll accept you in our club!" I'm not talking about sin, as much as I'm taking of a way one looks. If we know someone is living in a way that God doesn't approve of, what we should do is invite him or her to church and let God convict them of whatever He wants to change and not us. The great mistake that we make is we think it's our job to fix people. Our job is to invite them to join us as we worship God and let God work on convicting their hearts.
- c) Let me talk a little about "burnt offerings and sacrifices". To state the obvious we don't do burnt offerings to God anymore. God Himself paying the complete price for our sin is the only burnt offering we have to consider. A burnt offering, (outside of all jokes about how one cooks) should also be about our complete commitment to live our lives, as He desires we do. That's in effect a "burnt offering" as we dedicate our life to His desire.
- i) As to a sacrifice, that's the idea of giving. I'm not impressed with those who claim they are Christians. I'm impressed with those who do something about it! That is why we should give at church as it's "putting our money where our mouth is!"
- d) Finally, notice the last phrase, "my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."
- i) Jesus Himself quoted that line in Mark 11:17 when Jesus was condemning those in charge of the Temple at that time as they were taking advantage of people who do want to please God by charging high prices for "official sacrificial animals".
- ii) As we joke in Southern California, "They are charging Disneyland prices to be a part of the action."
- e) For what it is worth, when I was at the "Temple Mount" in Jerusalem last year, the Jewish priests who are there regularly were very kind to the Christian visitors. Even though they knew our view of God is different, they understood that the Temple Mount was supposed to be as a place of worship for all nations and their kindness to Christians was noticeable.
- f) OK, now that I've beaten to death the idea that God welcomes everyone and we shouldn't look down on those who are different, it's time to get back to Isaiah and "practical" stuff.
8. Verse 8: The Sovereign LORD declares-- he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."
- a) This is the last verse on this section. It's essentially a reminder to the Israelites that God is reminding the Israelites that God is calling others to worship Him "on His terms".
- b) Unfortunately throughout much of history, the traditional religious Jewish view is they'll welcome converts to Judaism on "their terms". If one is willing to live like them, they will welcome you into their fold. The mistake they make is the same one too many Christians also make which is "If you change this and that aspect of your lifestyle, then you can be a part of our club."
- c) It's sad to realize that if a verse like this was not in the Old Testament, the Israelites would not welcome non-Jewish people to come and worship with them. More importantly to us, this verse is a reminder that Christianity was never meant to be an exclusive club. Realize what God wants is a relationship with all people. That's why we're called to tell others of His love for people and ask others to be a part of our community of believers.

9. Verse 9: Come, all you beasts of the field, come and devour, all you beasts of the forest! ¹⁰ 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."
- a) As we finish Chapter 56, we switch from the good news of "Everyone is welcome to come and worship God" to the bad news that the religious leaders are failing to help foreigners as well as people in their community draw close to God.
 - b) Of all things, this reminds me of how Jesus treated people. He never said, "OK, you there go clean up your act and then you can follow Me." Instead Jesus was always interested in helping people with their problems just as they were. The key exception were the leaders of the religious community. Jesus held them to a higher standard as they're responsible to lead people to Him. The bad news for us bible teachers is God holds us to be accountable for what we teach as well. James 3:1 is a warning that if we desire to be a bible teacher at any level, God is going to hold us accountable that we accurately teach His word and help others to draw closer to Him.
 - c) That little warning leads me right back to these verses. For the moment skip over Verse 9 and let's look at Verses 10-12. The condemnation is directed at Israel's religious leaders as they have failed to lead people closer to God. Instead of having a servant's heart, they are guilty of living as if they don't care about anything but themselves. The accusation is they oversleep, guilty of only working on increasing their wealth and getting drunk.
 - i) The specifics aren't as important as the fact they were failing to do what was told of them to do. In effect, it's the same type of warning that James 3:1 says to those of us who are called to be bible teachers: That is, if you fail to use the gift that God has given you, we are in big trouble! Christians are still saved if we fail to use our gifts for His glory, but I'm convinced we'll lose rewards in heaven, and worse yet, we can suffer in this lifetime if we fail to do what God's called us to do.
 - ii) Which leads back to Verse 9. Isaiah's essentially saying wild animals are going to eat up those teachers. I don't know how literal that was, but I suspect it was true. Realize that about hundred years after Isaiah wrote this, because the Israelites who lived in that land still refused to trust in God, that's when the Babylonians came to wipe out that land. The religious leaders fell as well, and I don't know how literal these verses came true, but it's an ugly reminder of the responsibility we're given.
 - iii) Yes of course these verses can apply to other professions as well. If God's called us to say some sort of political leadership role, then He holds us accountable for us to be a good witness for Him in that role. If we run a business or a household, God is expecting us to represent Him in that function.
 - iv) Bible teachers and church leaders are all the more accountable as God wants us to accurately share the Word with others and we'll suffer either in this lifetime or lose rewards in the next one if we fail to live as God desires we live.
 - v) OK, I've beaten that point to death. Time for Chapter 57.
10. Chapter 57, Verse 1: The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. ² Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.
- a) For the sake of my newcomer's, realize there are no chapter breaks in the original text. I'm giving that reminder here, because Isaiah is continuing his thoughts from where he left off on the topic of religious leaders and teachers failing to lead people closer to God.
 - b) To paraphrase, "Hey all you people who are failing to live as I commanded you to live, let me give you the epilogue of you're lack of effort. It will cause many good people to either die or be taken into captivity. Those that trust in Me are still saved, but they'll still suffer."

- c) OK, that's confusing. Let me explain it better. The good news is no one is ever sent to hell that didn't deserve to be there. No one will be in heaven that didn't deserve to be there. I am convinced the issue isn't salvation, but about using the time we've been give to make a difference for God. The last few verses of Chapter 56 were condemning "bible teachers" of that day because they failed to do what God called them to do, to help lead people closer to God. Instead of doing what they were called to do, they were going about their lives as if one's eternal life and eternal rewards don't matter.
- i) That little speech leads to these verses to start Chapter 57. These verses are giving us the consequences of when people fail to do what God calls us to do. People are going to their grave or suffering badly without knowing how He wants them to be a witness for Him. In other words, those who believe in God will still be saved but suffer unnecessarily in this lifetime because people fail to learn what God wants of them to learn. That is to be obedient to His laws, not to prove our worth to Him as His people, but just to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) The shorter version is, "If we did what God called us to do, many would not have suffered due to our lack of doing our responsibility."
- d) Let me explain this one more way, and then I'll move on. Ever stop to consider, what will happen if I fail to live as God wants me to live? Won't someone else "pick up the ball" as God always finds a way to communicate what He desires of people? If I fail to do what I believe God desires of me, won't He just use someone else? Yes He will. However, we're the one's who suffer when we fail to use our life to make a difference for Him, as we will realize in hindsight how much of our life we've wasted by not using some of our time to make a difference for Him. That's the underlying point of these verses.
11. Verse 3: "But you--come here, you sons of a sorceress, you offspring of adulterers and prostitutes! ⁴ Whom are you mocking? At whom do you sneer and stick out your tongue? Are you not a brood of rebels, the offspring of liars? ⁵ You burn with lust among the oaks and under every spreading tree; you sacrifice your children in the ravines and under the overhanging crags. ⁶ The idols among the smooth stones of the ravines are your portion; they, they are your lot. Yes, to them you have poured out drink offerings and offered grain offerings. In the light of these things, should I relent? ⁷ You have made your bed on a high and lofty hill; there you went up to offer your sacrifices. ⁸ Behind your doors and your doorposts you have put your pagan symbols. Forsaking me, you uncovered your bed, you climbed into it and opened it wide; you made a pact with those whose beds you love, and you looked on their nakedness. ⁹ You went to Molech with olive oil and increased your perfumes. You sent your ambassadors far away; you descended to the grave itself!
- a) Yes this is a big hunk of verses, but I wanted you to see all of this in context. I wanted you to see what God thought of those Israelites at that time. Not only did they ignore how He wanted them to live, but they even turned to other gods. To put this in context, remember that this was a tough time for the Israelites. They were threatened with extinction first by the Assyrian Empire and then by the Babylonian Empire. Because life was so hard at that time, I suspect many were thinking God had let us down, so we'll seek other gods to see if that makes it any better. That's why the text mentions a local foreign god called Molech.
 - i) Realize that to prove one's loyalty to Molech required one to sacrifice one's own children, which is what Verse 5 mentions.
 - b) From God's perspective, not only were His people turning from Him, but they also made the innocent suffer for their sins by sacrificing their children. If you think child sacrifice is not an issue today realize that abortion is the most common medical procedure performed in the world today. Millions of innocent children are sacrificed because those children are inconvenient to the lifestyle people have chosen. What makes us think we as a society are exempt from God's judgment? If God made the Israelites suffer that badly for their sins as a society what makes us think we in our society can avoid His judgment?

- c) John you're "preaching to the choir again". Most of us reading this are well aware that the society we live in ignore God and effectively "stick their tongues" at Him. We're all aware of how most people living around us at the most give God lip service or at the worst, turn from Him as described in these verses. How does any of that affect those of us who desire to use our lives for His glory? The way I describe this situation, is God calls on all of us to be a "watchman on the wall". If we were a guard on a wall, our job is to warn people of a danger approaching from the outside. Our job would not be to stop say an army coming at us, but just to fire a warning signal. I'm not saying we each have to say stand on a local street corner and start preaching Jesus. I'm saying we each should use the gifts God gives us to make a difference for Him. As I like to say, what are you good at and what do you enjoy doing? Find a way to use those things to make a difference for God? If you have no idea what to do, try different things and see what fits. There are multitudes of ways one can use one's time to make a difference for God. The key is to just start and see where we can be used by God to make a difference for Him.
 - d) That little lecture leads us back to Isaiah. He was called by God to preach to the Israelites living around him of how much they as a society have turned their backs on God. Notice Isaiah didn't go try to fix everybody. He was just a "watchman on the wall" warning of a great judgment by God if we fail to live as He desires. The issue for you and I as believers in God is always, "How are we using our lives to make a difference for Him and warning others of the danger of ignoring God?" We can't fix all the evils of this world, but we can be a "beacon of light" of the danger of choosing to ignore God.
 - e) The short version of all of this is He desires we use our lives to make a difference for Him in some fashion. God may not expect us to clean up the whole world, but He will hold us accountable for "our little corner of it", in terms of doing the right thing and using our life for His glory. How we make that difference is a prayer request away! I'm convinced God can't resist a prayer request of "Heavenly Father, I give my life to You. Now make it very obvious to Me of how it is You want Me to use My time for Your glory!" If you've never prayed a prayer like that, it's amazing how God will make it obvious to us how He desires we use the time we have for His glory.
 - f) Meanwhile, I left Isaiah on a roll as he was condemning the Israelites for doing everything but trusting God for their future.
12. Verse 10: You were wearied by all your ways, but you would not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint. ¹¹ "Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have been false to me, and have neither remembered me nor pondered this in your hearts? Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear me?"
- a) Going back to the big chunk of verses I copied and pasted on the previous page, as well as these here, notice the pattern that the Israelites did "everything" but turn to God. The text even said in Verse 9 that they sent ambassadors to other countries for help. Here in Verse 10, the point is the Israelites never gave up hope trying to fix their problems by any means other than God Himself. I suspect most of us know people who will try every thing they can think of before turning to God. I've seen people get to such a low point where they'll think, "OK, time to pray, everything else has failed." As most us Christians are well aware God will often do His best work when we've exhausted all our options so that we He will get the credit for helping us without sharing that credit with anyone else!
 - b) Verse 11 makes an interesting point. It says that people fear God because He's been quiet for a long time. It's the idea that we don't see God working in our lives and we think He's lost interest or doesn't care about us. God often "goes silent" just to see how it is we'll act when we don't see Him work in a blatant way. It's almost like God's asking us do we still trusting Him in this time of silent testing? For those Israelites, they figured God has gone silent so let's try everything we can to remedy our problems since God's not helping us on "our timing" to fix our problems. That's the essence of these verses.

- c) OK John, so what do we do when life goes badly and God goes silent? First, we continue to trust Him despite that silence. Then we still make the effort to live as He desires we do so that we make a difference for Him. Then we make the best decisions we can given the circumstances without violating God's desire for our lives. It's not a sin to do whatever it is we can to remedy a tough situation. The mistake is to ignore God while trying to help in that situation and not seek His guidance through it.
 - d) I'll be the first to admit, these chapters are "tough sledding". It's never easy to be lectured to on how we should be living our lives and what is our responsibility. The reason God is giving us this tough love lecture here is to remind us of our responsibilities before Him. It is to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Speaking of "tough sledding", let us come back to Isaiah and get through this the best we can.
13. Verse 12: I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you. ¹³ When you cry out for help, let your collection of idols save you! The wind will carry all of them off, a mere breath will blow them away. But the man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain." ¹⁴ And it will be said: "Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people."
- a) It may help to remember that Isaiah's lecturing a bunch of people who should know what is the right thing to do, but we're not doing it. Instead of trusting in God as they're called to do, they were trusting in foreign gods (think anything other than God Himself) to help them through their problems.
 - b) Realize that Isaiah is being sarcastic in Verse 12 as he declares the "righteousness" of those Israelites. That would make sense reading the verse in context of the surrounding verses. It is like Isaiah is saying, "You think you're so right in how you're acting, you have no idea how much trouble your actions are causing you right now! You've working your way to an eternal life in hell even if you don't realize it right now!"
 - c) In fact, notice the change in the middle of Verse 13. When Isaiah says, "but the man..." he is saying there is hope for those who turn to God. In other words his condemnation of the people turning from God stops in the middle of Verse 13, and now Isaiah's saying, for the people who are willing to listen to Him, it's not too late, use the time you have left to live to go make a difference for God. That's what "prepare the road and remove the obstacles" means in Verse 14: In summary, these verses are saying those who use their lives turning from God will suffer the eternal consequences but those who are willing to use their lives for His glory will make a difference despite the damage done by those who ignore Him.
 - d) OK John, once again, you're preaching to the choir! Assume most of us are already using part of our lives for His glory. Why remind ourselves that are society "is going to hell in a hand basket" here? The issue isn't them, but us. It's the reminder that it's worth the effort to make a difference for God despite all the damage done by a society of nonbelievers. It's a call to not give up and keep gong forward despite whatever is happening around us.
 - e) On that tough note, let me take on the last group of verses of this chapter here:
14. Verse 15: For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. ¹⁶ I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me-- the breath of man that I have created. ¹⁷ I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways. ¹⁸ I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, ¹⁹ creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near," says the LORD. "And I will heal them." ²⁰ But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."
- a) The short version of all of this, "Life as we know it, will not go on forever like this. There's coming a day when those who trust in God win, and those who don't will lose, period!"

- b) I can just hear you saying, but there have been wicked people on this planet as long as life has existed. How can Isaiah possibly say this "won't go on forever"? Again, we need once again to remember how short this life is. Even if we live to one hundred or longer, how is that time span compare to all of eternity? A lot of people do get away with a lot of stuff in this lifetime, but this lifetime is all the joy they'll ever get. The efforts we do make for God are worth the trouble despite how the world around us acts, and the amazing thing is you and I as believers, we will experience far more joy than those who ignore God ever will in this lifetime or in the next one.
 - c) The general tone of these verses says how angry God's been at man's sin. That makes me want to bring up something most people don't think about: How can God be both loving and angry at the same time? The way to view God is that He is perfect. That means He is perfectly angry and perfectly loving at the same time. A lot of biblical expressions of His love or angry is based on what's happening at that moment. There is a difference between what we may see of God's reaction to a situation as opposed to God's attitude about issues about those issues as opposed to His reaction and judgment to acts that people do.
 - d) Notice the final verse, "There is no peace for the wicked". Try to think of the worst person one can think of in human history. Think of someone who's murdered multitudes. Will a person like that ever have peace? Will they ever be happy even in this lifetime? I doubt it as they usually continue to harm innocent people more and more as they are never happy with what they've accomplished so far.
 - e) OK, one more chapter to sneak in. I wanted to include all three as they tie well together.
15. Chapter 58, Verse 1: "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.
- a) In the first verse of this chapter, we get a "dialogue" between God and Isaiah. Here we do get a glimpse of what God called Isaiah to do. In other words, it wasn't just write down a bunch of things I want people to know and then go do whatever you want to do. Isaiah is also called to declare God's word (speak out loud) to whoever's willing to here what God does want Isaiah to say. By the way, that's a subtle reminder to you and me that we're not to just believe the bible, but put into practice what we believe. Speaking of putting things into practice, let's look at the next few verses.
16. Verse 2: For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.
- a) What is to be noticed here is that there were Israelites in Isaiah's day that were seeking out God. They were asking for God to help and to work on our timing. Realize nothing is bad about seeking God out. There's nothing wrong with asking God to help us with decisions we have to make in life. The problem is near the end of Verse 2. They didn't want to obey God's commandments but at the same time wanted His help with their issues.
 - i) Now there is a lesson for us. God expects obedience. Again, not to earn His love, but because it makes us a good witness for others. To state some simple examples, if we were saying stealing or having an affair and then seeking God for help, why should He help us if we're being a bad witness for Him? All I'm saying is if it does seem like God's gone silent on us, take some "inventory" or ask God if some aspect of our life needs to be changed in order for Him to draw closer to us. Yes of course there are times when God goes silent just to test us, but there may be issues in our life where God is effectively saying, "You want to draw close to Me, go deal with that issue as best You can, trust Me to help you (and me) through that issue. Then we can "talk" about other areas of your life as a witness for Me."
 - b) I suppose the key point here is we want God to be a "Genie in a bottle" to grant our wish. He responds by saying, "Yes I love to help people, but at the cost of obedience, not just to grant you some wishes. It's the realization that He's in charge and we serve Him, period.

17. Verse 3: 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?
- a) In these verses, God tells Isaiah that He's very aware of the fact that Israelites were fasting to ask His help. Yet while the Israelites were on those fasts, they exploited (treated badly) those who worked for them. When the fasts were over they got into fights. The point here is simply that they were being a bad witness to others while they were fasting. Again the issue is being a good witness to others is a prerequisite for God to help us in our lives.
 - b) Before I get into the topic of fasting itself, let me discuss God as a "Genie in a bottle". Even if we acted perfectly, never sinned and are a great witness to others around us, realize that is what God called us to do. My point is God doesn't owe us anything over and above the fact He paid the full price for our sins, which let's face it, is the key thing. The point is we can't say to God, "I've been pretty good for three days now, You owe me big time!"
 - i) With that said, God does desire a relationship with us and He wants us to draw on His power to make a difference in the world. God's not a genie in a bottle to grant us wishes. I find that God won't do for us what we can do for ourselves. If we are willing to let Him guide us, He will do for us what we can't do for ourselves as He helps us become a good witness for Him.
 - ii) Shorter version, "God doesn't owe us "three wises" if we're good for say 3 days!"
 - c) OK, I promised in the introduction I'd talk about fasting. A few good books were written on this topic. My advice is learn a few of the basic's before starting one. Daniel fasted by avoiding certain types of foods and John the Baptist's disciples fasted by avoiding all food for a period of time. All I'm saying is there is more than one type of fast. The hardest part is the first few days, after that one's appetite disappears. I admit, I rarely practice this as it is a hard disciple to master. Here's the key point: It's about dedicating the time we would use for eating and giving that time to God say through pray and bible study. It's a way of saying to God, "You are more important to me than food is." Another principal to realize is it should be done in a way, where one doesn't appear to be fasting and we don't make a big deal about it. The purpose is never to earn God's love or get Him to do something big for us, but simply to prove He means more to us than the time we dedicate for eating.
 - d) The point as it relates to these verses is the Israelites were saying, "OK God, I've fasted for the last day or week, now you owe me big time!" It's like when I said, "OK, I haven't done any bad sins for a week now, God, you owe me!" Again the reminder is God doesn't owe us anything other than to keep His word that our sins are forgiven. Anything He chooses to do over and above that is His business and not ours.
 - i) If that's true, why fast? Let me think of an example. Suppose someone we love is very sick at the moment. If we fast for their health to return, is God now obligated to help us because we fasted? Of course not. There's nothing wrong with asking God to help in tough situations. There's nothing wrong with fasting to show that He means more to us than food. What's wrong is thinking, "OK, God I've done all of these things, now You owe me!" Wanting God to help is a good issue to bring to Him in prayer. Demanding He respond because "we've been good" is not!
 - e) If all of that is true, why pray or fast in the first place? The answer is when we commit to a time of focus upon Him and show He means more to us than say food, we're making the effort to learn what is His will. Often a long time commitment to seek Him will help us to see issues from His perspective. What all that time does, is change our perspective about any given issue and see that issue from His perspective.

- f) Now that I've beaten that point to death and we understand a little more about what it is we should be doing and not doing about fasting and prayer, back to Isaiah:
18. Verse 6: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
- a) Bottom line: You want to be a good witness for God? Be that witness to others near to us, and not just try to please God based on how many hours we spend in prayer or a fast. It's about being a good witness to others? Need some practical examples? Verse 7 lists some for us. They include helping the poor and especially helping our fellow believers. It's all about the "servant's heart" as we're a witness for Him.
- b) Since I discussed the tough topic of fasting, let me also discuss the tough topic of giving to others in need. To state the obvious, if we give away everything we own, we too will be a part of those in need. If we never help anyone in need, we're a bad witness for God. If we never help our own families because we give away all to strangers, we're a bad witness. It is a matter of balance and we can ask God to help with that balance. As an example, I will sometimes work in bad neighborhoods. I rarely give money to those who ask. However, I will sometimes buy food for those who say they need to eat. In those situations, I try to pray quickly as what God wants me to do, and go from there. The important issue here is about being a good witness for God as that's what He desires of us. That's the point being made here in these verses.
19. Verse 8: Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. ¹² Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.
- a) A logical question to ponder at this point is "Why bother? If God doesn't owe us anything for fasting and prayer, why bother? The answer is in these verses. The short version is if we do live as God desires we live, then we are a good witness for Him.
- b) Another good way to describe the life of the Christian who lives this way, is God will not give us our every desire, just our needs. Think about it this way: If we're committed to be a good witness for God, He's well aware we need food and water to survive as well as the basics for living. God never says, I'll give you that big car you've always wanted if you do pray hard enough. However, He promises to guide us through whatever situations we're in so that those situations will give us opportunities to be a witness for Him.
- c) That's the idea of these verses, that God promises we'll be a good witness for Him if we're willing to take the trouble to seek Him and live as He desires. God even promises He can fix what is broken as implied in Verse 12. It's not a guarantee life will be as it was. It's just a promise that we will be blessed (joy in our hearts) if we are a good witness for Him.
20. Verse 13: "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, ¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.
- a) We've now come full circle: God says "Honor the Sabbath and you're life will be blessed."
- b) I spent a page (Page 3) discussing Christians and Sabbaths, so I won't repeat it here.

- c) All I want to repeat is that God desires we "rest in Him" from whatever we consider to be our normal activity through the week. Yes certain chores still need to be done on that day of rest, but it's the idea of "easing up" and giving our bodies a chance to rest. Yes it's easy to make a bunch of rules and think, "God will only be pleased with me, if I do this or that on my day of rest." Seventh Day Adventists (a Christian denomination) will say that we should never do "church" on the Sabbath. Most denominations argue that Sabbath means we do go to church that day. I'm not here to solve that debate. I'm just saying God desires we take a day to rest from our normal activities as a witness for Him.
 - d) The Sabbath is a way of saying I trust He will provide for my needs as I'm not going to try to earn more money by working that day. Are there emergency situations where we have to violate that rule? Of course. Just as our bodies are designed to work well when we get a good night's sleep, so our bodies also should rest once a week from our normal routine. All the rituals we do over and above that "Sabbath rest" are usually more of a burden than a joy. A Sabbath should be a time of joy, not a ritual. That's the point being made here.
 - e) Speaking of joy, yes it's the end of the lesson. If there is one thing to gather out of my talk here is that God desires obedience. He promises to bless our lives for that obedience as to be a good witness for Him. There is no "I did this and that for God, so now He owes me." However, there is joy in using our lives to make a difference for Him and that's what He promises us if we live as He desires. OK, enough of that, time to close in prayer.
21. Heavenly Father, we are painfully aware we can never be good enough to please You. However we should never make that an excuse for not living as You desire we live. Help us to live as to be a good witness for You and make a difference in the world around us. Help us to rely upon Your power to make that difference and guide our lives so that we can make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.