

The son of the stranger

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Preacher: Rev D.G.Macdonald

- [0 : 00] We're going to turn back now to the first passage that we read together in the Old Testament in the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 56. And I want us to read again at verse 3. Isaiah chapter 56 and at verse 3. Neither let the son of the stranger that has joined himself to the Lord speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people. Neither let the son of the stranger that has joined himself to the Lord speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people. The Bible always views the world as being divided in two. When you look into the Old Testament, you see that the distinction was very clear, very definite. There was, on the one hand, Israel. And there was, on the other hand, the nations of the world. It wasn't that there was Israel and Egypt or Israel and Assyria.
- [1 : 26] It was that there was Israel and then the rest of the world all put together. There was Israel and those outside of Israel. There were those who were in God's covenant community that were part of God's chosen people. And those who were strangers to God's covenant community. Those who were strangers to God's chosen people. The distinction was very clear, very definite. And then when you come into the New Testament, you find that the distinction is just as clear. However, it's not associated with national identity. But rather, the distinction is made according to one standing before the Lord Jesus Christ. So you look in the New Testament and you see that the world is still divided into two. There are believers. There are unbelievers.
- [2 : 29] There are the converted. There are the unconverted. There are those who are in Christ. Those who are out of Christ. Those who have the Son. Those who do not have the Son. Those that are part of the true Church of Christ. Those who are strangers to the true Church of Christ. Those who are in God's covenant community. Those who are strangers to God's covenant community. In this passage that we read together in Isaiah. We find that the prophet has a word for the stranger. For the outsider. For the person who was not part of Israel. For the person who was outside of that covenant community of the Lord's people. He is speaking to the stranger. To the outsider. Who actually has the desire to be included in God's covenant community.
- [3 : 34] To the stranger who wants to be part of that fellowship of God's people. And today what I want us to do is to look at this message that Isaiah brings to the stranger. And to try and apply it to ourselves here today. And as we do so I want to try and make it clear who it is that we're speaking to. We're speaking to you if you feel that you are outside of the covenant community of God.

We're speaking to you if there is something in your heart that makes you feel that you are excluded. That you're a stranger. And therefore it might be that today you're sitting here and maybe you feel that you're outside of the kingdom completely.

That you haven't even stepped into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that perhaps you're excluded from doing so. And we're speaking to you if perhaps you sense that you have stepped into the kingdom.

But yet you still don't feel part of it. You feel that in some way that you are separated from the rest of God's people. And therefore perhaps even for tomorrow it is your intention not to associate with the Lord's people.

[5 : 03] When they sit around the Lord's table. We're speaking to you who feel like a stranger. Who feel like an outsider. Who feel like you're excluded.

But yet the longing of your heart is to be included. To come inside. To be part of this church of Christ. What I want us then to do is to examine what it is that Isaiah has to say here to the stranger.

And there are four things that we're going to notice together. First of all the provision that was made for the stranger. And then secondly the problems that were faced by the stranger.

Then thirdly the personal choice that had to be made by the stranger. And then lastly the promises that were given to the stranger.

First of all then the provision that was made for the stranger. The door of Israel was always to be open to strangers.

[6 : 12] It's fascinating when you look through the Old Testament. When we think that you had this great nation of Israel. And you think that its doors were shut to the nations of the world.

When you actually look in the Old Testament you find that the door was always open to strangers. In Exodus and in chapter 12. Where the regulations for observing the Passover were given.

We read there that there was provision to be made. Even for the stranger who wanted to take part in the Passover. Initially we're told that the alien, the stranger was not to take part in the Passover.

But then it goes on to say. But if there is a stranger living among you. Who wants to celebrate the Lord's Passover. Then this is what the stranger must do. He must have all the males in his household circumcised.

And so it goes on. And then he can come and join in the Passover. As celebrated by the children of Israel. The door was open for the stranger to come.

[7 : 25] And to celebrate the Passover with the people of God. You have the time when the temple was being dedicated by Solomon. We read about it in 1 Kings.

And chapter 8. And we think of the temple as being the house of God. And the house that also belonged to the people of God. For them to come and to worship their God.

And you'd almost think that it was a place from which strangers, aliens, foreigners were excluded. But as Solomon is dedicating the temple.

In his prayer he prays this. He says, As for the foreigner, the stranger. Who does not belong to your people Israel. But has come from a distant land because of your name. For men will hear of your great name.

And your mighty hand. And your outstretched arm. When he comes to pray toward his temple. Then hear from heaven your dwelling place. And do whatever the stranger asks. And so it goes on.

- [8 : 22] So you see that even the door of the temple. Was to be open to the stranger. To the foreigner. To the alien. To the one who was excluded. From the children of Israel.
- These things should not surprise us in many ways. Because you remember that the covenant that was made with Abraham. The father of the faithful. Was that through him. All the nations of the world would be blessed. That the blessings would be poured. Not just upon the covenant people. Upon the nation of Israel.
- But that it would overflow. To touch the nations of the world. The gods of the heathen nations were excluded. The practices of the heathen nations were excluded.
- But not the people. The people. If they wanted to join themselves. To the covenant community of God. Would find that there was a door open to them.
- [9 : 23] The outsider could come in. The foreigner could become a citizen. The stranger could become a friend. Now of course. What we see in the Old Testament.
- Was all foreshadowing what was going to happen. In the New Testament. And all these things that we've been speaking about. Were foreshadowing the inclusivism. That would be found in Christ Jesus.
- And in the gospel of salvation. For God had ordained. That when the gospel of Christ would be preached. It would extend its invite. To the whosoever.
- Whosoever will. Let him come. And drink the waters of life. Freely. Whosoever will. Let him come.
- And drink the waters of life freely. You see the door of the gospel. Was going to swing wide open. So that anyone. Could come in. The door of the gospel.
- [10 : 22] Was being swung wide open. So that the invite would be extended. To every man, woman and child. Across the globe. Saying whosoever will. Let him come.
- Do you know when Jesus. Was speaking of himself in John chapter 10. About being the good shepherd. He goes on to speak of himself as being the gate.
- Or the door. And he says that he is the door. He is the gate. And he is saying that. Whosoever. Whosoever will. That they can come.
- And enter through him. As the door. The gate. That leads into fellowship with God. And with the people of God. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me. Will be saved.
- He will come in. And go out. And find pasture. The thief comes only to steal. And to kill. And to destroy. But I have come. That they might have life. And have it. To the full.
- [11 : 18] You know there is. A remarkable passage. In. The book of Revelation. At the end of chapter 3. When. We read there. About. A church.
- That has its door. Firmly closed. To the Lord Jesus Christ. And the picture is. Of the Lord Jesus. Standing outside that door. And he is. Knocking on it.
- And he is saying. Behold. I stand at the door. And knock. It is a. Kind of strange picture. A church. With its door.
- Closed. To the Lord Jesus Christ. But once you. Move on from that part. And you go on into chapter 4. There is again. The most extraordinary picture.
- Before us. After this. Says John. I looked. And there before me. Was a door. Standing open. In heaven.
- [12 : 15] A door. Standing open. In heaven. And this. Open door. Speaks of. Access. It speaks of. An access to heaven. That is quite. Amazing. And this is what. Jesus provides. For you and me. Who feel outside. For you and me.

Who feel perhaps. Strangers. Jesus is the. Wide open door. That gives to us. Access. Into the very. Heavenly places. That gives us.

Access. Into the very. Fellowship. Of the redeemed. A provision. Has been made. For you. And for me. Through Christ. Jesus. So that we.

Being outside. Can come in. We being strangers. Can become friends. We being foreigners. Can become citizens.

[13 : 10] Of the very. Household. Of God. The provision. Has been made. The second thing. I want us to notice. Is this. The problem. That.

The strangers. Faced. What were these. Problems. That. Strangers. Faced. Those who wanted. To be part of Israel. Well. The problems. That they faced.

Really. Were their own fears. And their own feelings. Their own fears. And their own feelings. What was it. That. They feared.

Well. They feared. I think. First of all. Rejection. They feared. That they would be. Rejected. By Israel. And that they would be. Rejected.

By Israel's God. And this fear. Really came through. Their misunderstanding. Their misunderstanding. Of. What Israel was about.

[14 : 05] And what. Israel's God. Was like. They knew. That. There was. A kind of. Exclusivism. About. Israel. And Israel's God.

As we've already noticed. False gods. Were not permitted. Sinful practices. Would not be tolerated. All these things. Had to be. Left.

Outside. And there was. This kind of. Fear. Within the heart. Within the head. Of the stranger. That if they were coming. Perhaps.

From a nation. That had false gods. That entertained. Sinful practices. That perhaps. When they sought. To enter. Into Israel. That the door. Would be firmly shut.

In their faces. That they would be considered. As being not suitable. Not appropriate. To be part. Of the fellowship. Of God's people. And that they would be.

[15 : 01] Turned away. By Israel. And by Israel. And by Israel's God. They did not understand. That yes. There was this. Shutting out. Of false gods.

And sinful practices. But. That there was. This openness. To those. Who wanted to enter in. To the community. Of the one. Through God. They feared.

Rejection. But I think. They also feared. Relegation. Let me try. And explain. What I mean. They feared. That even. If they.

Came in. To Israel. And even. If technically. They were accepted. Into the. Community. Of God's people. That in practice. That they would never.

Be fully embraced. That they would always. Feel like an. Incomer. To the fellowship. Of God's people. Maybe because. They had come. From a different nation.

[15 : 57] Because. They looked. Different. Different. Because. Because. They dressed. Different. Because. They spoke. Different. Because. Their parents. Were not Jews.

Because. Their culture. And their background. Was not. That. That was steeped. In Judaism. That they would never. Fully be accepted. In the fellowship. Of God's people.

They would always be like. Second class citizens. In this community. Of God's people. That was perhaps. The fear. That held them back.

Sometimes. From actually. Throwing their lot in. With the people of God. They feared rejection. And they feared. Relegation. And maybe for you.

Today. These are the same fears. That hold you back. They're the same fears. That burden. Your own heart. You fear.

[16 : 51] Rejection. Rejection. Perhaps. Not just. By the people of God. But perhaps. By God. Himself. Some time ago. I was. Listening to the testimony.

Of the late. Douglas McMillan. Who would have been. Known to. Many of you here. And speaking about the time. When he was in. Colchoun. Or Murachan. And David Patterson. Was there. As a student preacher.

And there was a time. When David Patterson. Was trying to get Douglas. To come along. To the church services. And he said to Douglas McMillan. When he wasn't there. One Sunday. He says. Why were you not in church?

Were you scared. That you'd be converted? And Douglas McMillan. Was saying that. If he was being truthful. He was scared. He wouldn't. Be converted.

He was scared. That he would be the first person. That God would turn away. That he would ask. And not receive. He would seek. And not find.

[17 : 47] That he would knock. And that the door. Would not be open to him. Is that the fear. Of your heart today? Not the fear. That you would be converted. But the fear.

That you wouldn't. The fear. That the door of heaven. Will be shut firmly. In your face. And that you will be. The first sinner. To be turned away. By the almighty God. Of heaven.

Is that your fear? Or maybe your fear. Is that of relegation. You look at the people of God. And you think. Even if I sat with them.

At the Lord's table. I would never feel. That I was part of them. Because when I look at them. They seem so different. They seem so different to me.

And perhaps there are things. In your past. That makes you think. That you could never. Be anything more. Than a second class citizen. It might even be. Like the stranger. It might be the way. That you look.

[18 : 43] The way that you dress. The way that you speak. It might be your background. It might be that. You never came from. A Christian home. It might be that. You don't have. The same amount of knowledge. It might be that. For a time. You wandered.

In a backslidden state. It might be any of these things. That make you think. Even if I went. And joined them. I would never fully feel. Part of them. You can remember.

We were talking up at the manse. The other evening. About the times when. We professed faith. And I was saying. I remember. In the church in Dunbegan. When I grew up.

And looking down from the balcony. At the people of God. As they celebrated. The Lord's Supper. And seeing these men. And women. Sitting around. These white cloth tables.

Taking the bread. That no matter how much. You wanted to be there. That you could never. Really. Be accepted. Or be part. Of that beautiful fellowship. Of God's people.

[19 : 39] Fear of relegation. Because of who. And what. You perceive yourself. To be. You may have these fears. Today. I may have these fears.

But even if we have. These fears. If we have the longing. If we have that longing. To be part of the covenant community. Of God's people. Then. And this is our third point.

There is a personal choice. That the stranger. Has to make. We acknowledge. And celebrate. The sovereignty.

Of our God. We acknowledge. And celebrate. The sovereignty. Of God. In grace. The sovereignty. And the rest. But we cannot deny. That throughout scripture. There is no escaping.

The element. Of decision. And choice. And all of us. Have to come to a point. Where we have decisions. To make. Choices. To make.

[20 : 36] The stranger. In Isaiah's day. Had to. Come to the point. Where they had to choose. They had to decide. Whether they would.

Attach themselves. Bind themselves. To the Lord. And to his people. Let no stranger. Says the word here. The son of the stranger.

That has joined himself. To the Lord. Speak. Say. Joined himself. To the Lord. You see. A choice has been made. A decision has been come to.

To join oneself. To the Lord. Now it's important to see here. What Isaiah is saying. The choice that the stranger. Had to make. Was not whether or not.

To embrace an idea. Or a philosophy. Or a religion. Or an identity. Or a nationality. The choice was. Will I. Or won't I.

[21 : 31] Bind myself. To a person. To the Lord. Ruth. Ruth was not. A Jewess. She was.

A lady. Who came from. The land of Moab. And there came a point. In her life. When she had a decision. To make. And the decision. Was not. Will I go with my mother-in-law.

Or will I go back. To my father. It wasn't. Will I. Go to the. Nation of Israel. Or will I stay. In the land of Moab. The choice.

That she had to make. Was. Will I. Bind myself. To the Lord. Jehovah. Or will I go back. To the false gods. Of Moab. That was the choice.

It was whether. To go with the Lord. Or whether. To walk away. Ittai. The Hittite. Who was there. About the time. Of King David.

[22 : 28] When David. Was. Facing the rebellion. Of his son. Absalom. And David. Is speaking to. Ittai. The Hittite. And he's saying to him. Look. Go. And take your men.

And go. And join yourself. With Absalom. Why come after me. And ittai is here. With this choice. He's got to make. But it's not a choice. Between David. And Absalom. It's not even.

A choice. Whether. To. Become part. Of Israel. Or. To remain. If you like. The Hittite. The choice is. Which God. Is he going to follow. And he makes a choice.

Of the Lord. And he says. As surely. As the Lord lives. I'm going to follow you. That was the choice. To be with the Lord. Or not.

Isaiah Father. Brings us out. Even in this passage. When he speaks about the stranger. When they bind themselves to the Lord. It's in order to do what? It's to serve. To worship. It's to love. It's to obey.

[23 : 21] He's speaking about. The person. The stranger. Making. A commitment. In relationship. To a personal God. That was the choice. Will you make a commitment.

A personal commitment. To this Lord. To this God. Of Israel. The choice has not changed. The decision that you and I have to make.

Is no different. To the decision that the stranger had to make. In Isaiah's day. And the decision that you have to make. Is not. Will I attach myself. To the congregation of Stornoway Free Church.

Or will I become a communicant member. In the congregation. It isn't. Will I go to the table. Or won't I go to the table. The decision you have to make.

Is will I commit myself. To the Lord. Or won't I. Perhaps one way to illustrate it. Is this. If you can imagine.

[24 : 19] The time. When. For those of you that. Are married certainly. When. Perhaps you were to use the old fashioned word. Courting. And you. Loved this person.

That you were with. You knew this person. That you were with. But there came a time. When you had to decide. Will I commit myself. To this person.

For the rest of my life. Will I marry this person. And stand up. And take vows. That until death has to part. I will be with this person. It was the choice you had to make.

In the same way. Even today. You may know the Lord. You may love the Lord. You may walk and talk. With the Lord. But there comes a point. When you have to decide.

You have to choose. Will I commit myself. To this Lord. For the rest. Of my life. And in many ways. That is what we do. When we profess.

[25 : 14] Our faith. When we go to the table. What we are saying is. I have chosen. I have decided. That I am going to follow Jesus. No turning back.

No turning back. I commit myself. In a relationship. Of love. And of faith. And of trust. And dependence. With this Lord. The God Almighty.

That is the choice. That you. And I. Have to make. Will we bind ourselves. To the Lord. Lord. I want us.

To finish. You're looking. At the promises. That are given. To the stranger. So far. What we've seen is this. That. There is this provision.

That has been made. For those of us. Who feel like strangers. To come in. To the covenant community. Of God's people. There are various fears. That we face. Fears of rejection.

[26 : 09] Fears of relegation. There is a decision. That we have to make. A decision. Whether or not. We are going to bind ourselves. To the Lord. But in order.

For us to make. That decision. Then what we find. Is the word of God. Brings to us. The encouragement. Of precious. Promises. And if we were to sum up.

The promises. That are here before us. In this passage. That could be summed up. In one word. Welcome. It is the promise. Of welcome.

Welcome. What was the stranger promised. In Isaiah's day. It was welcome. Welcome. We are told here. To God's house.

They would be welcomed. We are told. In verse 7. To the holy mountain. That is speaking. Of the place. Where the temple was. And what Isaiah is saying. Is this. The stranger. Who wants to come in.

[27 : 05] Will be made welcome. In the house of God. We are told. That they will be made welcome. Into God's presence. They will be made joyful. In my house of prayer. They will have this full.

And free access. Into the presence of God. To the very throne of grace. They will know what it is. To go and to speak. And to fellowship. With God. To be almost like Moses. And to speak to God.

Even as a man speaks to a friend. They will be welcomed. Into his presence. Welcome to God's ordinances. Burnt offerings. Burnt offerings. And sacrifices.

Shall be accepted. Upon mine altar. They can go and offer. The sacrifices. At the times of the great festivals. They can go. And they can offer sacrifices. In the temple of God.

And these sacrifices. Will be accepted. By the almighty. Welcomed. Amongst God's people. There shall be a house. Called a house of prayer.

[28 : 00] For all people. And the God. Which gathereth. The outcasts of Israel. Saith. I will gather yet others to him. Besides those that are gathered. He's saying. When I gather my people together.

They will be part of them. This stranger. Who has bound himself to me. He will be brought in. This stranger. Who has bound herself to me. She will be brought in. With my people. Because they will be part.

Of this glorious covenant. Community. This is what's being said. To the stranger. You will be welcomed. You may have all these. Fears of relegation. And fears of rejection.

But the promise is. One of welcome. We read. Together. In the epistle. Of Ephesians. Where there.

Paul is. Writing. To. A church. That. Is full of a whole mixture. Of people. There are those. Who have come from. A very.

[28 : 56] Religious background. Those that were part of Israel. There are those. That have come from. A gentile background. Those that. Weren't part of Israel. There are those. That have come from.

Decent. And. Moral. Kind of lives. And. There are those. That have come. From the most. Horrendous. And sinful. And immoral lives. And that. They're all there together. In this church. And.

Paul is writing to them. And he is making it clear to them. That. They together. Have been. Welcomed. Into the one. Household. Of faith. This is what he says to them.

In chapter 2. He says. Christ came. And he preached. Peace to you. Who are far away. Peace to those. Who are near. For through him. We both have access. By. The father.

By one spirit. Consequently. You are no longer. Foreigners. And aliens. But fellow citizens. With God's people. And members. Of God's household.

[29 : 51] Built upon the foundation. Of the apostles. And the prophets. With Christ Jesus himself. As the chief cornerstone. You are not foreigners. You are not strangers. You are not separated.

You have all been brought together. He is saying. Through the blood. Of Jesus Christ. It is. A great offence.

To God. To say. In the face. Of his gospel offer. I will have nothing. To do with you. And walk away. But I believe.

There is an even. Greater offence. And it is. To walk away. Saying. It is because. God. Will have nothing. To do with me. Let. Not the son.

Of the stranger. That has joined himself. To the Lord. Speak. Saying. The Lord. Has utterly. Separated me. From his people. Let not.

[30 : 46] The stranger. Says the word. Say. That the Lord. Will exclude me. From his people. Because the promise. Of God is this. Whoever comes. I will in no eyes.

Cast out. Whoever believes. Is given the right. To be called. The son. Or the sons of God. That is the promise. Of scripture. The promise.

To you. And to me. Today. The promise. That is over. The door. Of the gospel. Is one of welcome. Saying. Come. You will not be cast out.

And even the promise. That is. Bannered. Over the table. Of the Lord. Is one of welcome. It is welcoming. You and me. If we bound ourselves. To the Lord. It is saying.

Welcome. My son. My daughter. Welcome. To the household. Of faith. Welcome. To the community. Of the redeemed. Welcome. To the people. That sing the new song.

[31 : 40] And who praise. The Christ. Who loved them. And gave. Himself. For them. The promise. To you. Is one. Of welcome. Let's pray. Our God.

And our Father. We. Do praise. Your holy name. That although. Our sins. Have separated. Us from you. That you have.

Made a way. That you have. Given to us. That new. And living way. Through Christ Jesus. Whereby. We can come. And have access. To yourself. But Lord God.

We're often plagued. With the fears. And the feelings. Of our own hearts. For we find it hard. To grasp. That. Sinners. Like ourselves. Can have.

Such. A welcome. From the almighty. God of heaven. We ask. Oh God. That. When we. Look into.

[32 : 39] Our own hearts. And we see ourselves. To be like the prodigal. Having wandered off. Into the far country. And having let you down.

And betrayed you. In so many different ways. That you would help us also. To bring before. Our mind's eye. The picture of the father. Running to embrace.

The son. And to welcome him. And to celebrate. His return. As the one. Who was lost. But was found. Who was dead. But is alive again.

Lord God. We pray. That we could see. The outstretched arms. Of heaven. That we could recognize. That. Even in the outstretched. Arms of Christ.

As he died. On the cross. Of Calvary. So that we would. Truly believe. In our own hearts. That when we come to you. That we will not be cast out.

[33 : 37] That we would believe. That you are indeed. The rewarder. Of those. That diligently seek you. Lord God. Help us now. To ask. Believing that we will.

Receive. To seek. Believing that we will find. To knock. Believing that the door of heaven. Will be open to us. Hear our prayers.

For we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.