

TEXT: Isaiah 56:9-12

TITLE: CONDEMNATION OF SELF SERVING LEADERSHIP

BIG IDEA:

GOD INVITES UNSUSPECTING DISASTER UPON THE SELF SERVING LEADERS WHO SHOULD BE PROTECTING AND FEEDING HIS VULNERABLE FLOCK

INTRODUCTION:

In the first half of Chap. 56 we saw God's message of encouragement to those who were traditionally viewed as Outsiders – to the Gentiles and to the eunuchs. The Lord is gracious to gather them into the family of the redeemed. He makes it possible for the Outsiders to become Insiders – full members of the family of faith. But now the passage takes an abrupt change in direction and brings a word of condemnation against those who would have considered themselves the supreme Insiders – the civil rulers and religious rulers of the nation of Israel.

They had been charged with the important responsibility of protecting and feeding the flock of God which is always vulnerable to attack. But God indicts them here for totally failing to fulfill their charge. Instead of being a model for servant leadership, they have served themselves; instead of protecting the flock they have only been concerned for protecting and advancing their own power and prestige and possessions. They have abused their position of authority and failed to sound the alarm about coming dangers. They have demonstrated a complete lack of understanding and discernment.

We have examples all around us today of those who have turned the ministry into an opportunity for building their own kingdom of prosperity and indulgence. Just follow the money; investigate the lifestyles of some of the prominent televangelists and preachers of the popular prosperity gospel. It is sickening to see how far removed their ministry model is from the example demonstrated for us in the ministry of Jesus and His apostles.

Probably the easiest and most visible target to highlight is **Joel Osteen:**

<http://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/joel-osteen-net-worth/>

Joel Osteen is an American preacher, televangelist and author who has a net worth of **\$40 million** dollars. Joel Osteen is the pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. He took over his father's role as a pastor and televangelist in 1999, despite having very little formal religious training. Since then, the Lakewood Church broadcast has grown exponentially and can be seen in 100 different countries.

Joel wrote a positive-thinking book in 2004, which helped him promote his "live at your full potential" message on the road to sold-out sports arenas.

- his inaugural book "**Your Best Life Now**"
- second book titled "**Become A Better You**"

Joel Osteen, whose book sales and related stuff generates a reported **\$55 million per year**, claims an individual should not feel guilt for possessing lots of material wealth. Instead, one needs to thank and praise God for the acquired wealth.

How many sheep have been deceived into a sense of false security by his adulterated message?

Opening and closing sections linked by the invitation “Come” and the contrast between a feast of food and a feast of wine. The heart of the paragraph in verses 10-11 will detail their failures.

GOD INVITES UNSUSPECTING DISASTER UPON THE SELF SERVING LEADERS WHO SHOULD BE PROTECTING AND FEEDING HIS VULNERABLE FLOCK

I. (:9) DIVINE INVITATION TO DEVOUR GOD’S PEOPLE – God Sees the Vulnerability of the Flock

*“All you beasts of the field,
All you beasts in the forest,
Come to eat.”*

What happens when God removes protective hedge around his vineyard? **Isaiah 5**

Jer. 12:7-9

Ezek. 34:5, 8, 17-22

Parunak: A flock is constantly at risk because of wild animals who would prey on the sheep. David described the risk to Saul, from his experience as a shepherd:

1Sa 17:34 *And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock [cf. Is. 5:5]*

The wild beasts who devour are pagan armies. God defended his flock from the beasts of Assyria under Hezekiah, but the time will come when, because of their sin, he will abandon them to the beasts of Babylon.

Our Lord warned the disciples,

Mat 7:15 *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening **wolves**.*

Mat 10:16 *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of **wolves**:*

Paul tells the elders of the church at Ephesus,

Act 20:28-30 *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves** enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*

Borgman: Vs. 9 -- Hostility between man and beast since the Fall; look at symbolism in Daniel and Revelation; the one named the Beast in eschatological times; Simple invitation – Come and eat; frightening thing is that man is the meal; Fine dining – not the emphatic stem for devour; part of the covenant curse for infidelity; **Lev. 26:21; Deut. 28:25; 32:23**; cf. wicked **Jezebel** (subtle but devastating wickedness) – the dogs will lick up her blood – king says, “*She is a cursed woman*”; 2 Kings – wild beasts went and devoured them; youth mocking Elijah for his baldness;

Young: There is also the possibility of making the last designation an object of the infinitive to

devour, so that the verse would read: *All ye beasts of the field, come to devour all the beasts in the forest.* On this construction the beasts of the field are the enemies, and the beasts of the forest Israel. [Parunak takes this view] Why, however, should Israel be so designated?

[maybe beasts of the forest would normally be the ones feasting on the beasts of the field so that this is an unnatural reversal??]

II. (:10-11) DIVINE INDICTMENT OF LEADERSHIP FAILURE

6 Areas of Failure:

These would be true in political arena as well – but I will be concentrating our application on spiritual leadership within the church

Really 2 main figures: watchmen/watch dogs and shepherds

Motyer: The titles *watchmen* (10a) and *shepherds* (11c) contrast two aspects of the true leader – to guard from external danger and to care for internal need.

But 6 areas of failure highlighted

A. Failure to Exercise Discernment – Blind Watchmen

*“His watchmen are blind,
All of them know nothing.”*

What should be the function of watchmen?

Oswalt: They do not understand the critical nature of their task, they do not know the desperate nature of the times, they do not know the nature of their people, they do not know their own failings. As a result, in a changed figure, they are like watchdogs (cf. Job 30:1) that cannot bark, utterly useless for the task they have been given.

Borgman: What could provoke God to call the beasts of the field to come and make a meal of His people? Diagnosis of the watchmen; what were they called to do? Stood on hill or city wall as a defense mechanism; **Is. 52:7-8**; morphed into more of a prophetic role to look for God’s work and proclaim it to the people; taking on a ministerial function; **Ezek. 3:17** – communicate God’s warnings; **Ezek. 33:1ff**; role of the preacher – called to warn and exhort and rebuke of dangers both from within and without; **Acts 20:27** “*free from the blood of all men*”; “*Be on guard*”; the problem is the watchmen are blind; of no use; an oxymoron; not lacking real sight but had no discernment; couldn’t see danger because they couldn’t see truth; second diagnosis: they know nothing; need knowledge of the Word of God, of truth;

Positive Example / Standard:

Matt. 16:3 “*Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?*”

2 Tim. 2:15 “*a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*”

Jesus came as the *Logos* – bringing God’s message down from heaven; revealing who God is as

well as the message of God; knowing all things regarding the future and regarding the heart of man

B. Failure to Sound Warning – Mute Dogs

*“All of them are dumb dogs
unable to bark,”*

Let's not be critical or judge others

Let's be loving; don't say anything harsh or unpleasant

What does the Bible say about watchmen who don't sound the cry of warning?

Scouter might not have been a very intimidating watchdog, but at least he would bark

Borgman: mute dogs; unable to bark; supposed to lift up his voice and cry out; dumb as in mute; dog appears 32 times in OT and viewed as contemptible; a scavenger; dishonorable persons or evil doers; Ps. 22 – *“dogs have surrounded me”*; called Gentiles dogs; negative imagery continues in NT – applied to the false circumcision – you are not the dogs, they are the dogs; nasty way to refer to someone;

Positive Example / Standard:

No false message of peace and prosperity proclaimed by Christ or the apostles; their messages were full of warning and rebuke

Plenty of bark in the warnings and rebukes issued by Jesus – just look at **Matt. 23**

Acts 20:27 Paul didn't shrink back from warning them and proclaiming the whole counsel of God

C. Failure to Stand Guard in State of Alertness – Lazy Dreamers

*“Dreamers lying down,
who love to slumber;”*

Not exactly the ideal guard: blind, mute, asleep

No work ethic; looking for a life of ease and comfort

Look at what Jesus had to say about the urgency of staying alert, keeping watch, being on guard, not falling asleep

Borgman: Lazy and greedy; not dreamers but sleepers; slumber is epitome of laziness – Prov. 6 and 24;

Positive Example / Standard:

Matt. 25:1-13 Parable of the Ten Virgins – *“be on the alert”* for the return of Christ

Matt. 26:41 – *Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation*

Ps. 121: 3-4 *“He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”*

2 Cor. 6:4-10 ministry was not a life of slothfulness or ease for the Apostle Paul

D. Failure to Practice Contentment – Greedy Dogs

“And the dogs are greedy,

they are not satisfied.”

Love for money is the root of all kinds of evil

Oswalt: These people have wide-open throats that cannot be filled, no matter how much they swallow . . . Having forsaken the real meaning of their lives for gratification of desire, they find no satisfaction there either.

Borgman: strong appetites and they don't know satisfaction; “*whose god is their belly*”; they are opposite of what they are supposed to be; possess all the disqualifying characteristics;

MacArthur: Someone needs to say this plainly: The faith healers and health-and-wealth preachers who dominate religious television are shameless frauds. Their message is not the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is nothing spiritual or miraculous about their on-stage chicanery. It is all a devious ruse designed to take advantage of desperate people. They are not Godly ministers but greedy impostors who corrupt the Word of God for money's sake. They are not real pastors who shepherd the flock of God but hirelings whose only design is to fleece the sheep. Their love of money is glaringly obvious in what they say as well as how they live. They claim to possess great spiritual power, but in reality they are rank materialists and enemies of everything holy.

online article at <http://www.gty.org/Blog/B091207>

Positive Example / Standard:

Luke 4 – Temptation account of Jesus – “*Man shall not live on bread alone*”

Matt. 6:33 “*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” – no anxiety about material provisions

Phil. 4:1-13

1 Tim. 6:9-11

2 Tim. 2:3-4

2 Pet. 2:3

E. Failure to Shepherd Wisely – Foolish Shepherds

“And they are shepherds who have no understanding;”

Look at Jeremiah's indictment of foolish shepherds

Borgman: Imagery of Shepherds; same group; no discernment; no knowledge; role is to both guard and feed the sheep; Jer. 3:15; Word of God is rod and staff that protects the flock and the pasture that feeds the flock;

Positive Example / Standard:

Psalm 23

John 10:11-18

F. Failure to Unselfishly Serve God with Integrity – Selfish Extortioners

*They have all turned to their own way,
Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one.”*

Unwilling to place their dependence upon God and to do things His way
Not standing up for the rights of widows and orphans, but exploiting others to feather their own nest unjustly

What an indictment of the nation Israel – corrupt leadership all the way around

Borgman: Jer. 10: 21 “the shepherds have become stupid”; “they have turned to their own way” – Is. 53:6; sinful rebellion; self-willed; should be submitted to the Chief Shepherd; they pursue unjust gain; easy life, easy money; turning the ministry into opportunity for their own gain;

Young: when greedy gain fills the hearts of ministers, disaster is sure to follow; their usefulness in God's service is at an end

Parunak: Note a symmetry in the description of the dogs and the shepherds. Each has two main failings. The first failing is in their lack of attentiveness to the dangers confronting the flock. The second is in their selfish focus on their own appetites.

Is. 28:7-8

Is. 29:9-11

Positive Example / Standard: Examine motivation for ministry

1 Tim. 3:3 Elder must be free from the “*love of money*”

1 Pet. 5:2 “*not for sordid gain*”

2 Cor. 4:2 “*but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*” – transparency and accountability in ministry

III. (:12) DELUDED INTOXICATION OF UNDISCERNING LEADERS – The Leaders Pursue Their Hedonistic Lusts in a False Sense of Security

*“Come,’ they say, ‘let us get wine, and let us drink heavily of strong drink;
And tomorrow will be like today, only more so.”*

Inebriated optimism and careless self indulgence in the lusts of the flesh

Constable: Rather than caring for the sheep unselfishly, these shepherds went off and got drunk—repeatedly. They indulged themselves at the expense of their charges, and in the process, became enslaved and incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities.

Don't imagine the future will look like the present

Borgman: they abuse alcohol; **Is. 28:7** “*reel with strong drink*”; they are presumptuous and complacent; **James 4:13-16**; arrogant practical atheism; anticipating enjoying same debauchery tomorrow, only intensified; **Jer. 12:10** – they end up ruining the flock of God; **Jer. 23: 1**; **Ezek. 34** – prophecy against the shepherds of my people – call them into account; hold them responsible; confront and denounce self serving leaders; Elmer Gantry more reality than spooof today in the evangelical camp; Look at present day scandals: Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert

Parunak: Both Israel's watchdogs and her shepherds were self-serving. We have already read our Lord's condemnation of self-serving shepherds, and the NT continues this theme in warning against those who would serve for pay.

Act 20:33-35 *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 I have shewed you all things, how that **so labouring** ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

1Pe 5:1-3 *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; **not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind**; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*

Motyer: To incompetence (10), self-concern (11ab) and selfish preoccupation (11cef), the rulers added complacency about tomorrow.

Cf. James 4:13-16

Wikipedia article: In 2007, [Senator Chuck Grassley \(R-IA\)](#) opened a probe into the finances of six televangelists who preach a "[prosperity gospel](#)"- The probe investigated reports of lavish lifestyles by televangelists including: fleets of [Rolls Royces](#), palatial mansions, private jets, and other expensive items purportedly paid for by television viewers who donate due to the ministries' encouragement of offerings. The six that were investigated are:

On 6 January 2011 Senator Grassley released his review of the six ministries response to his inquiry. He called for a further congressional review of tax-exemption laws for religious group

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Televangelism>

CONCLUSION:

Servant leadership is what the Great Shepherd wants for all of His under shepherds;

That is why the **model of plurality of elder church govt** is so important with its checks and balances and with its resistance to the elevation of one man to some type of superior role – like that of Diotrephes who loves to be first; who loves all of the perks; who is the ultimate in self serving leadership

We don't emphasize these distinctives of Solid Rock Community Church without sound justification; the Bible makes a big deal out of these issues and we are right to make a big deal of them as well; these are not personal soap box issues; these are the very battleground issues where Satan seeks to undermine the advancement of the kingdom of God in this present dispensation of the Church Age

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In the political realm today, where do we see examples of corruption and self serving leaders who are amassing a fortune for themselves rather than serving to protect and defend?
- 2) In the evangelical church today, where do we see such examples?
- 3) What safeguards do we have in our church to protect the integrity of ministry?
- 4) How can we be more faithful as watchmen and shepherds of God's flock?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Beall: In vv. 9-12, the Gentile nations (depicted as beasts of the field) are exhorted to come to devour slumbering Israel. Israel's watchmen (their leaders, certainly including the prophets and probably the kings as well) are described in v. 10 as blind and ignorant, dumb dogs unable to bark. Instead of guarding the flock, they are asleep (compare Acts 20:28-29). In v. 11, the "dog" figure is again used, but in a slightly different fashion. Not only are the leaders not watchdogs, they are greedy, having an insatiable appetite to devour the flock rather than care for it (see Ezek 34:1-10). They are supposed to be shepherding the flock, but instead they act like greedy dogs, with no understanding, each one going his own way for his own gain.

David Thompson:

WHEN JESUS CHRIST RETURNS TO REIGN, THOSE WHO HAVE PURPOSED TO GOVERN THEIR LIVES IN RIGHTEOUS WAYS WILL BE BLESSED AND THOSE WHO HAVE NOT WILL BE CURSED.

DESCRIPTION #2 – The description of those who will be cursed when Christ returns. **56:9-11**

(Cursed Picture #1) - The religious leaders were blind . **56:10a**

(Cursed Picture #2) - All of the leaders knew nothing . **56:10b**

(Cursed Picture #3) - All of the religious leaders were like mute dogs. **56:10c**

(Cursed Picture #4) - All of the religious leaders were lazy dreamers . **56:10d**

(Cursed Picture #5) - All of the religious leaders were greedy . **56:11a**

(Cursed Picture #6) - They were religious leaders with no knowledge . **56:11b**

(Cursed Picture #7) - They were religious shepherds who have all turned to their own way.

56:11c

(Cursed Picture #8) - They were religious leaders who are all after unjust gain. **56:11d**

(Cursed Picture #9) - They were religious leaders who love to get drunk . **56:12a**

(Cursed Picture #10) - They were religious leaders who live like there is no tomorrow . **56:12b**

Motyer: The critique of leadership offered here is wholly one of character not of policy. The opinion that from the point of view of the public it matters only what the government's policy is, but the private lives of leaders is their own affair, finds no support. The juxtaposition of 56:9-12 with 57:1-21 insists that private wrong and public right do not co-exist.

Brian Borgman: Blind Watchmen and Ignorant Shepherds

In contrast with eunuchs who dedicate themselves to genuine worship; Those who should be the closest end up being judged and condemned. **In Praise of Folly** by Erasmus – goes after the politicians and philosophers and clergy with heavy satire; attacks a carnal, self-serving, self-seeking clergy; true in our day as well;

Even the best of men are men at best; nobody is immune to the temptations of ministry; we are all depraved

- we need response of humility; guard our hearts
- we need response of prayer for our leaders

Phil Pockras: Sleeping Dogs and Abusive Shepherds

Exposing false leaders for what they are; supposed to be trustworthy and leaders among the people of God; illustration from Rom. 11 of grafting process; here we are looking at the ones broken off; God invites predators to come into his flock of sheep; Disciplining the true Israel of God and exposing and judging the hypocritical leaders; useless watchdogs and abusers of the flock; civil and religious leaders; the magistrates and the ministry; devoured by the Babylonians and by the Romans in AD 70; going along with the culture of the day instead of warning against idolatry and the filth of the age;

They are diligent and wide awake in protecting their own selfish interests; they are greedy; constantly wanting more and more; they never have enough; greedy of their own position of leaders of the people of God; hated any threat to their money, their place and their power; taking care of #1; concerned for their popularity and their power; you can make a lot of money if you have no scruples;