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# Rending the Heavens

Isaiah 63:15-64:12

## Overview

- ? Text: Isaiah 63:15-64:12
- ? Big Idea: God accomplishes what human efforts at their best fail to do.
- ? Basic Principle: Past displays of grace should create cravings for present displays of grace. (cf. Ps.81:10; see also previous context of this prayer as a basis for asking for new manifestations of God)
- ? Theme: how to pray when sensing a serious need for fresh mercies of God. (That is, what our prayers ought to look like when we find ourselves in rough times and God seems far away)
- ? Target: To scrap an everyday expectation of God and seek him boldly for new mercies from on high.

## Introduction

### Exposing the need

“The greatest problem confronting us in the Church today is that the vast majority of professing Christians are not convinced of the reality and the desirableness of revival”, said Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones in 1959. That thought has held me for some time. Do we find truth in that consideration? Are our expectations of God too small and our desires of His glory too flat? Is the prospect for tomorrow merely status quo? Do we pray to thank God for past blessings and yet present our requests to God for future help with a tacit notion that He’s just going to do what he is going to do regardless of what I ask?

Our outlook just may be merely in the direction of the routine. Our expectations of God simply might be too small?

For the next 5 weeks I want us to think together on biblical revival. We will be looking at texts in the Bible that point toward revitalization of God’s people. The Bible commands us to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (cf. Eph.5:18). The Bible tells us that the Spirit is provided through “hearing by faith” (cf. Gal.3:2,5). And that “those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom.8:5). It is clear, is it not, that the Spirit goes where the Word goes? And so, our time will be spent in the Bible seeing and savoring the beauty of the Lord with hope that His Spirit will inflame us and empower us for worship and acts of sacrificial love.

The conviction of this message and the Bible as a whole is this: God accomplishes what human efforts at their best fail to do (cf. Mark 9:18; Isaiah 63:15-64:12). My hope for the next 5 weeks is that we all will increase in passion for God (cf. Ps.42:1ff). My cry to God for this series on biblical revival is for God's people to increase in thirst for the ministry of the Word; that prayer springs to the center of private and corporate life; that the grip of enslaving sin will be broken and believers seek reconciliation between their estranged relationships. When God kindles the hearts of His people with fresh grace from on high, God's glories and not material beauty captivate the hearts of God's people. We will joyfully suffer for our Lord when new mercies are enjoyed. When we are "filled with the fullness of God", we treasure participation in the things of God over career advancement. And people who have always been indifferent to the gospel now inquire passionately. As a wave of divine grace washes over the church and spills out onto our neighboring communities God's elect are gathered and His saints are singing and serving. That is what happens when God kindles His people. And that is how we should pray for the chapel today.

## Defining the term

To begin we must make clear a distinction between authentic revival and its imitations ( I'm persuaded that the Reformed view represents most accurately what the Bible says about revival and not views like Wesleyan perfectionism, Pentecostalism, Keswick perspective, Baptist evangelistic campaigns, etc.).

## What it is not

- ? A revival is not a man-made adjustment or method whereby if followed the Spirit would then "fill" or "baptize" the faithful after salvation perfecting the believer by eradicating inbred sin.
- ? A revival is not a "second (or third) blessing" signaled by speaking in tongues by which a believer is taken to a new level of spirituality.
- ? A revival is not a scheduled event known as an evangelistic meeting.

## What it is

When we are talking about "revival" what we are meaning is the following definition and counsel taken straight out of Raymond Ortlund's book "When God comes to Church" & J.I. Packer's book "Keep in Step with the Spirit".

- ? DEFINITION: Raymond Ortlund says, "Revival is a season in the life of the church when God causes the normal ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power. Revival is seasonal, not perennial. God causes it; we do not. It is the normal ministry of the gospel, not something eccentric or even different from what the church is always charged to do...And this blessing spills out from the church to wash over the nations with an ingathering of many new converts to Christ".
- ? COUNSEL: J.I. Paker says, "There are three things to do. First, preach and teach God's truth; second, prepare Christ's way; third, pray for the Spirit's outpouring.

The experiences of revival which suddenly blow in with God-glorifying, sin-destroying, soul-satisfying effects upon the Church are not Biblically required for progressive sanctification. Nevertheless, these seasons of extraordinary outpouring of God's Spirit are seen clearly in the Bible and are held out for the Church to motivate itself to seek the fullness of God.

## Mapping the Course

Now that we have a working definition of what we are talking about in this series, I want to map out where we are going over the next few weeks. This series can be broken down into two sections. The first three weeks we will look at the topic "What God can do". In these messages, we will explore God in the Scriptures. We will notice what He has done and can do for His people who need him so badly and will demonstrate that yearning through prayer. The final two weeks we will explore the topic "What we must do". In these closing messages, we will hear the Bible exhort us to ready ourselves for God's intervening and powerful work of the Spirit. We will notice that there is nothing we can do to force God into action. When we say "make ready" for the fresh outpouring of the Spirit, we do not mean that this kind of readiness twists God's arm and thus making Him respond. (that thought is nauseating). We simply mean that we are responsible to take out any "log jams of sin" damming up the river of delights flowing from the throne of grace to the people of God ("log jam of sin" = indulgence of pride, routine sinning, neglect of prayer and fellowship, worldly-mindedness, motives for action that are rooted in bitterness and jealousy) (cf. Isa.57:14; Ps.36:8). So, today we will look at Isaiah 63:15-64:12. The hope here is to witness what God can do so that we pray to God to do what he can do.

Let's commence our series by turning to Isaiah 63:15 and look to God for fresh mercies from on high. (Pray and read the text)

## Preaching the text

Jerusalem is in ruins (cf. 63:18; 64:10-11) and has been for a long time (cf. 61:4). The people are captives in Babylon (cf. 48:14). Cyrus the Persian is coming on the scene (cf. 44:28). Hope that they could ever be the kingdom ruled over and protected by God was deferred and made their hearts sick (Ps.137). The place to which they were taken was filled with idols (cf. 40-48). The time for God to bring His people back to the land and establish the Temple was unhurried (cf. 61:4). Will the exile be the graveyard of Israel's faith? Will their hope ever regain enough strength so as to express itself in passionate prayer?

It's at this moment that the prophecy of Isaiah patterns for them a prayer after which they were to follow.

## **A Pitiable Complaint (63:15-19)**

When times are harsh and God seems far away, Isaiah's pattern for passionate prayer needs to be pursued. In vv.15-19, we see this pattern first in a pitiable complaint. He starts this off with a basic appeal noticed in v.15

### **A basic appeal (v.15)**

“Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me”.

This basic appeal is for God to give His people His attention; “look and see”. This hardly means that Isaiah did not believe that God doesn't know everything and that He does not sustain everything in the universe. If the Lord would look away for mere a split second, the whole fabric of the universe would unravel (cf. Heb.1:3).

His cry was a cry for God to renew His contemplation of their pitiable situation. And this cry was fortified by remembrance of past redemptive acts. Notice vv.11-14 and how God visited His people in the past. Isaiah seems to glean courage to come to God for fresh outpourings of His power and compassion based upon by-gone grace.

LET US NOT FORGET past displays of grace should create cravings for present displays of grace (cf. Ps.81:10). As Isaiah sees what God did in Moses' day, he cries for God to do it in his day.

Beloved, this is a lesson we must learn. When we see past displays of grace in the Bible, we must desire present displays of grace in the now. \*This is what created Isaiah's craving for God. And this is what must increase our expectation of God. Look at Him in this passage and long for Him through this prayer.

Isaiah now moves from the basic prayer to the basis of prayer. This is seen in vv.16-19.

### **The basis of appeal (Vv.16-19)**

#### **God's position**

To make his appeal cogent, in vv.16-17, Isaiah portrays the position of God and depicts the condition of His people. God is appealed on the basis that He is their Father and their Redeemer. From of old, God created and provided and protected them as His children. He also rescued them from slavery and tyrants. On this basis He was requested to give them renewed love!

#### **Israel's condition**

Not only does Isaiah cry to God on the basis of who God is but also Isaiah talks about their condition; unrecognizable, wandering, hard-hearted, and reckless. They have

drifted from His ways and no longer feared sinning against Him. Their sin took a great toll on them. V.16 describes how disfigured they became. If Abraham were to come back to earth and see them, he would not even recognize them as being God's people.

### **Exhortation**

This is how we are to appeal to God for fresh manifestations of God's power and zeal and compassion in our lives. Do we see who God is; our great Creator and sustainer, our Father; our great Redeemer and rescuer, our savior Jesus Christ? Do we sense how far we've drifted? Have you wandered from the faith so far that you've become indistinguishable from a non-believer? Your talk, your TV viewing, your attitude, your priorities, your Friday night outings; are we any different from the world? If Abraham, the father of our faith, were to get into a time capsule and show up on our door step or in our church, would he recognize us as being God fearing, Spirit-led, holiness-pursuing kind of people?

Beloved, if there is to be an increase in eager and expectant prayer at the Chapel, we must see who God is and how much we so need him.

### **A Passionate Cry (64:1-7)**

What we've seen thus far in this passage is a pitiable complaint as a basis for his prayer. Now we come to a passionate cry. This is the heart of the passage. God is using this passage as a pattern for the church to cry out to God for new mercies when times are disturbing and God seems distant. How should we as the Chapel cry for a fresh visitation of God's Spirit?

### **Make known Yourself to the Nations (Vv.1-3)**

Isaiah is holding nothing back as he lifts his voice to the One seated in a holy and beautiful habitation. The imagery is arresting. The prophet sees God taking the sky above us and ripping it in two and stepping in to our world. Oh, can you hear something of the Lord Jesus Christ in this plea? Christ has torn the partition separating those who believe in Him from God. We have access through Jesus to the holy One of Israel. "He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will He not also graciously give us all things". Let nothing, O God, let nothing hide yourself from us. Don't consent to anything blocking your blessings flowing from the cross to your people! Tear down the separations! Away with any veil! Shred any shroud! Let the nations know who You are! Maranatha!

This type of praying does not drone on in drowsy desires for what will likely happen anyway. Is this not a bold, courageous, impassioned way of praying "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? That His kingdom will advance is the heart's cry of this prayer. Notice what may keep the kingdom from pressing forward. MOUNTAINS.

The effect God is to have in the world owing to this prayer is overwhelming. Answering this prayer was to take out mountains and make His name known to the adversaries; the nations. I cannot help but think that this is a missionary prayer (an evangelistic prayer). Oh that God will move and obliterate long-standing, well-established mountain-like resistance so that our enemies will see Him for who he is and tremble at and bow to his majesty.

Beloved, this past prayer was recorded in our Bibles to fuel our present prayer. And so, let us pray a passionate cry to God to make himself known to the nations. It also was a cry to make himself known again to his people. We see this in vv.4-7.

### **Make known Yourself to your people (Vv.4-7)**

Isaiah spots a problem. He has been crying out to God to rend the heavens and come close to His people. But now he mentions that God comes close to his people on His own terms. People to whom He rends the heavens and comes down are those

- ? “who wait for him” (v.4)
- ? “joyfully works righteousness” (v.5a)
- ? “remember You in your ways” (v.5b)

Isaiah characterizes recipients of His fresh power and zeal and compassion as ones who are hoping in Him while carrying out joyfully His commands and who not only know His ways but remember God in His ways. This is attractive. And this is the quandary.

The people in Babylon were not this way. Vv.6-7 tell us that they were anything but hope-filled, joyfully remembering the God of the way.

They were people who

- ? “have been in [their] sins a long time” (v.5b) = practicing sin
- ? “[were] unclean” (v.6a) = apart from God
- ? “fade and [were] taken away by [their] sins” (v.6b) = enfeebled by sin
- ? “do not call upon [God’s] name” (v.7a) = lacking in prayer
- ? “do not rouse [themselves] to take hold of [God]” (v.7b) = indifferent to God

Isaiah’s passionate cry was not merely mission-minded. He was crying out that God would make himself known to His people. See this for yourself in v.7. The reason Isaiah gives for a sleepy prayer life is seen in the middle of v.7. “...for you have hidden your face from us”.

What Isaiah is saying in this passionate cry is for God to make His face known to His people. This is a striking way of saying what He has been saying all along. “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down. Don’t hide Yourself from us. Don’t restrain yourself from our deplorable condition. Where are your zeal and your might? They are held back from us. Don’t make us wander from Your ways. Show your face that we will call upon Your name with passion and power”.

God has done this before for His people. He has awakened them from a drowsy relationship for passionate prayer. Does this give us hope? Can we observe this past prayer as a pattern for our present prayer? Are we slow-moving in our passion for God? Let us not forget: Past displays of grace should create cravings for present displays of grace.

This message is not merely for information. It is for exhortation. Let us cry out to God for a fresh manifestation of His power and presence!

What we’ve seen up to this point is that on the basis of by-gone grace Isaiah grows in boldness in appealing to God for a fresh outpouring of Himself. This appeal started with 1) a pitiable complaint sketching out their current situation. He then went on to lay before God 2) a passionate cry designed to invoke God’s desire to make His name know among the nations as well as His people.

Now we come to the closing of his patterned prayer for new mercies as he lays his appeal in front of God.

### **A Powerful Cause (64:8-12)**

Isaiah, like a persuasive lawyer, gives his most powerful cause for why God should rend the heavens and come down. With cogency and clarity, Isaiah lists the cause or the reason for why LORD needs to give them His attention.

#### **Helpless**

In summary, we can take vv.8-12 and say, “Because your people are helpless, hapless and yet hopeful...rend the heavens and come down”!

Come down with new mercies upon your people for we are helpless (as seen in vv.8-9). He makes this case by illustrating who God is. He mentions that God is their Father, God is their Potter and God is their Possessor.

God is their Father as we see in v.8. He is invoking God's grace by stating that they are the works of His hands. They need the Father's touch. They are but helpless children.

God is their Potter as seen in v.8. To make his case for God's intervention, he illustrates that they are but clay. The potter must move and mold and make lest they stay in the state of indifference. They are but helpless lumps of clay.

God is their Possessor. To arouse the face of God, Isaiah also says that they are His people (seen in v.9). The covenant-keeping God must uphold His promise to His people lest they drift and perish. They are but helpless covenant-receivers.

### **Hapless**

Isaiah continues laying before God the basis for rending the heavens and coming down with new mercies. He said that they were helpless. He now, in vv.10-11, says that they are hapless. The tragic condition of Jerusalem and the Temple is depicted to illustrate what sin does. They are devastated by the Babylonian destruction. They are wretched. They are desolate. Hope appears to be dashed. They need a fresh encounter from God.

### **Hopeful**

Isaiah rounds off his appeal for God's intervention with a rousing reason. He listed that they were helpless and hapless and so Oh God we need you to come down. But now Isaiah reserves the ace in the hole to make his case. V.12 gives indication that Isaiah was hopeful that God would move on their behalf. God will not allow His Name to be defamed. "Will you restrain yourself at these things"? The "these things" refer back to the desolation and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. His reputation is at stake. Earlier in the prophecy of Isaiah, God said a significant thing about the recovery from the Babylonian captivity. "For my own sake, for my own sake I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another".

Isaiah, in v.12, is appealing on the basis of God vindicating God's Name. And this is sure footing for an appeal for God's intervention (cf. Ps.79:9). God will uphold and promote His reputation. And so, Isaiah pleads his case on the basis of God's passion.

## Closing

Jonathan Edwards observed: “If we look through the whole Bible and observe all the examples of prayer that we find there recorded, we shall not find so many prayers for any other mercy as for the deliverance, restoration and prosperity of the church and the advancement of God’s glory and kingdom of grace in the world”.

God loves to hear from his people the kind of revival-like prayer that is recorded for us in this passage today. It was written down and preserved for the church to stir us up to ask questions like...

- ? What can God do among us?
- ? What can we boldly pray for?
- ? What should we eagerly expect?

God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Our prayers ought to look like that of Isaiah 63-64 when we find ourselves in rough times and God seems far away. Let us resolve to scrap an everyday expectation of God and seek him boldly for new mercies from on high. Let us give ourselves permission to see Him at work so that the Chapel’s atmosphere will be

- ? Magnifying the worth of God
- ? Treasuring the truth of God
- ? Delighting in the glory of God
- ? Suffering for the cause of God
- ? Spreading the gospel of God
- ? All that Christ will be put on display!

“I am the Lord Your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it” (Ps.81:10)