

Crying Unto the Lord

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 63:15-19

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If you will, take your Bibles and look with me in Isaiah 63. I want to read for us from verse 15 down to verse 19 and speak with you on this subject: what it is to cry unto the Lord. We hear a lot of people talking about prayer and addressing the Lord, but what I want to show you from this particular portion of Scripture is what is that cry unto the Lord that the Lord gives when he is pleased to do a work of grace in the heart. How will that be reflected? I do not believe that you have to put words in people's mouths to teach them what to say and how to say it. That's religion and I say it to my shame but back in my early years, that's what I was taught to do, get people to repeat a particular prayer after me so that they would know exactly the right words to say in order for God to save them. You've heard it probably spoken of as the Sinner's Prayer, but Bob just read the Sinner's Prayer in Luke 18, "Lord, be merciful to me the sinner." It didn't matter whether everybody else in the world would have been righteous or not, as the Lord dealt in his heart he knew himself to be that sinner that stood in need of Christ's work and Christ's death and I believe that's the case and we see an example of that here in Isaiah 63:15-19.

15 Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? 16 Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting. 17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. 18 The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. 19 We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.

You can see some of the foregoing verses in this chapter as we studied them, how the Lord is pleased to through vengeance bring redemption. We saw that in the first verses, that wrath that was to be poured out on the Lord Jesus Christ was a day of vengeance for that people that he would save and as a result, in verses 7 through 14, praise to the Lord. He truly is to be praised for the salvation that he has wrought on behalf of his people and my prayer is that not a day ever goes by in the hustle and bustle and business of this life

and world that the Spirit of God does not direct me or you to pause in quiet solitude and thank him and praise him for the greatest mercy and grace of all that the Lord Jesus Christ should bear the sin of sinners such as we are.

Then here in verses 15 through 19, that that continued to be our cry unto the Lord. It's the Lord who gives the cry. It's like when a baby is born, you listen for the cry. That's the evidence that there's been life given and I listen for it in men's testimonies. What is their cry unto the Lord? When did the Lord? How did the Lord? Why did the Lord cause you to cry unto him?

Then be quiet and listen. Even there, don't try to guide people. Don't try to talk them into a good profession because if it's not the Lord that has given that cry, then you don't want them thinking that they are the Lord's when they're not. There's a specific cry and that's what I want us to consider here.

First then, what is it to cry unto the Lord. Verse 15, the cry is unto the Lord. These are petitions; these are requests that are put up to God and to none other. You notice, verse 15, "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory." That's quite a request when you consider God and who he is in all of his holiness and justice. The first question is: why should he consider a sinner such as I am? Are you still overawed with that thought that when you address the Father you're addressing a holy God and a just God? And to continue to ask yourself why he should ever even consider me? Because when we cry unto the Lord, that's what we're doing. We're asking him to look upon us and to be merciful and to be gracious. That's the cry. It's like the publican in the temple, "Be merciful to me the sinner."

Well, God can't just be merciful. He can't just look the other way with regard to sin and that's why what we're reading here in verses 15 through 19 are so important to see in their context because in the beginning verses of this chapter, the sin was dealt with in the substitute. This was a prophecy forward looking to when Christ would actually tread the winepress alone and God's anger, wrath would be poured out upon him and that the blood guiltiness of his people should be sprinkled upon his garments of righteousness, upon his raiment, and in return, God would grant to his people that garment of righteousness. So this is sequential in verse 15. Based upon that, "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory," and consider.

So crying to the Lord has no regard to men. It has no regard to any kind of hope or help from men but it is wholly a cry unto the Lord and that for mercy; that for help; that for grace as we see in verse 17, "O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance." Now, some might read that and think that's pretty strong language where here the prayer is questioning God as to why he would make us err from our ways and harden our heart from fear. Well, I liken this to the winter season and I don't pretend to understand all that takes place with regard to the sun. The sun hasn't changed, I just know things get cold and things get hard. The sun continues to rise and set as we use the language or the earth continues to circle around the sun just like all other times but there

is distance from the sun that effects how the temperature of the earth, the angle of the earth, all of this affects the coldness, if you will, of this earth and I liken it here: if the Lord should in any way withhold his mercy, if the Lord should any way withhold his grace, then all that will result is coldness and hardness of heart.

The Lord doesn't have to put coldness in the heart, it's there already. When it says of Pharaoh that the Lord hardened his heart, it was the Lord removing his hand, restraining hand from Pharaoh and causing that heart to be manifest for what it was in all of its hardness. I know people like to recite quickly what is called the Lord's Prayer, but in reality the Lord's Prayer is John 17. That's where the Lord prayed for his own. What men call the Lord's Prayer is really the disciple's prayer and how flippantly it is recited. Before sports events, you see kids in the huddle going through it and saying it but no thought about what it says.

"Our Father which art in heaven," isn't that the same thing here, "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and thy glory"? That's what the word "hallowed" means. You are a holy God who is to be glorified and hallowed in every way. So, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread," and then what's the next part say? "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Why is it put that way particularly in that prayer, "Lead us not into temptation"? It's because if the Lord ever takes his hand off of us, that's the way we would go. "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way."

You don't even have to be an abject murderer, per se, or an adulterer, or a drunkard by the world's standards. Every one of us is a sinner by nature and it's only the restraining hand of God that keeps us from going the way we would go and therefore this prayer is pertinent even for one who is a child of the Lord. "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways?" There is no part of our salvation from beginning to end that if the Lord should just give it to us, that we could accomplish and fulfill. Yet sometimes, many times, most times, we become arrogant. We become proud of the grace that we have that the Lord has given us and we presume that we're doing certain things to his honor and glory because we've matured or we've gotten a little further down the road, as some people say. That's a dangerous statement there because all the Lord would have to do was just turn you lose for just a nanosecond and you would fall into hell were it not for him sustaining and keeping you.

So this is the prayer, "O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways." Isaiah is looking at a time here where it appears that Israel has completely abandoned the Lord and the Lord has abandoned them and yet the prayer is, "Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance." Notice "servants" is in plural and "the tribes," plural, and "of thine inheritance" describes the servants. That's who we are. We're the Lord's servants. Yes, we're his children but just as the Scriptures say, "Children, obey your parents," there's a reason. It's because in his purpose and will, he has put them under our authority and we're to guide and lead them in the direction they should go. The same thing applies with parents and kids. You turn a kid loose and just watch where they go. Give them

some freedom, they're going to follow the nature of that heart. What you've been trying to do all your lifetime is restrain them, but turn them loose and watch them. Unless the Lord is pleased to do a work in their heart, they will run headlong into hell, split it wide open. I don't care what kind of teaching we give them, they will split hell wide open unless the Lord is pleased to turn them and cause them to return. I know it's sorrowful. We're talking about Mother's Day and thinking about our children, but the greatest sorrow of all is that spiritual separation that there is between a parent and a child. So even our cry unto the Lord, whether for ourselves or for our children, it's the same. "Return for thy servants' sake." In other words, any that are the Lord's, any for whom he has paid the debt, Lord, keep your hand upon them. Return. Turn them again.

So this is what it is to cry unto the Lord. But let's look at the second lesson that we see here, again, coming back to this portion of Scripture, and that is how that God causes his children to cry unto him. There again, left to ourselves, we'd never pray. Let to ourselves, we would never cry unto the Lord. It takes the Spirit of the Lord to intercede on our behalf and cause us to cry unto him. That's what Paul wrote there in Romans 8. But notice that for us to be brought to cry unto the Lord, the Lord has to restrain our way. He has to hedge in our way. He has to bring pressure to bear and if we're the Lord's, he will.

In love he chastens his children and so that's what we see here. These, if you will, complaints, I don't know what word to use here; the pleas that we find written here. First of all, that the Lord would have given them up. You see, when the Lord removes his hand, it's not only to show us the evil of our own way because when you go down a path even after so many years of professing to know the Lord and he causes you to go down that path and you fall whereas back here maybe you saw somebody else's fall and you said, "How could they do that?" you always be careful because you have the same nature. Paul even warned the Galatians. He said, "You that are spiritual, restore such a one but take heed to yourselves lest you also be overtaken with that fault." Whenever I'm asked to visit with people that have fallen, I look them in the eye and tell them, "You know, all I can do is point you to the Lord because I have the same nature as you do." And even someone sharing with you some of the thoughts of their heart as to what has caused them to fall is enough to cause you to fall.

Paul said, "I had not known covetousness until I heard the law say, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" That's all you have to say. All you have to do is mention the word "covetousness" and if you listen here today, automatically your mind goes to times when you coveted. It automatically starts racing that way. I don't care what the sin is: adultery, gambling, anger, murder, all of these things. Guilty. Guilty. Guilty. Guilty. It's one sinner consoling another sinner, but the Lord in his mercy and grace, brings us into those situations to where you even question yourself afterward, "How on earth can I call myself a child of God and think that way? Or react that way? Or do that?" Well, that's the Lord. If he has brought you to say that, then that thought even has to be repented of. He's got to because that right there shows that we have a higher opinion of ourselves than we should have, that if he ever would take his hand off of us, we would be just the same as the worst out there.

So this is the plea that we find here in verse 17, "O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways." There are times where the Lord will give us just enough rope to hang ourselves. It's like a dog running free, it's on a leash, a long leash, and all of a sudden, it pulls it up. For awhile it thought it was free and there are times when the Lord doesn't stop you immediately. He'll cause you to go down that path but it's never for your destruction. It's never for the destruction of his people because if Christ has paid the debt, he can't destroy you. He won't destroy you. But he will bring you to a point where whatever path you were following, whatever path that was in wandering, it will become obnoxious to you. It will become nauseous to you and you will cry out, "O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways and hardened our heart from thy fear?" Have you ever had that fear that the Lord has given you over the fact that you have not feared him and glorified him as he deserves? I pray so because that's the Spirit at work there. The worst thing is to not fear him and not be fearful for not fearing him. He's worthy of all praise and honor. There is no greater coldness or hardness of heart than not to fear the Lord in the sense of giving him the glory due unto his name.

So this is the plea that we have here in verse 17, "O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways?" Stop and think about what "thy ways" are with regard to the Lord. His ways direct us to his Son, whether it's in his providence or in his word or by his Spirit, it is all to direct us to his Son and the glory of his Son, and therefore to be left to the error of our ways or to make us to err from his ways and harden our heart would be to think anything less of Christ or to consider any situation in life more important than the glory of Christ.

This is a lesson that every time I think I've learned it, the Lord has to teach me again. This is not about Ken Wimer. Whatever the event, whatever the circumstance, however the Lord has directed my day, if I'm thinking that this is about me and I react to men, which is really a way of reacting to God or against God in how I react, then the problem is I'm thinking this is about me. It's not. Everything and this is where I pray that the Lord would give us eyes to see this, everything to the minutest detail in our lives that you can look back on to this point and yet future, has everything to do with his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And until he gives us a mind to see that way, we're going to continue to tick against the pricks; we're going to continue to evaluate life from the wrong perspective and make it introspective when it really is about the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever the situation. You know, sometimes we pray for blessing and we pray for grace and God sends it wrapped in a problem and the whole purposes of him doing that is lest we should even boast in that grace or that mercy to cause us to see that what he gives us, he gives us only for Christ's sake. No other reason. We don't deserve his mercy. We don't deserve his grace.

So herein is the reason God causes his children to cry unto him, but also in verse 18, you know, we talk about God's holiness, we talk about rejoicing in that righteousness that he has worked out on our behalf and given to us, and yet how little we really possess it. I'm talking about in our minds and hearts and that's what verse 18 says, "The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while." There it's speaking geographically how the Lord took them out of Egypt and brought them into the land and it's called the Promised

Land and God faithfully brought them there and yet how little time did they really possess it because of their own idolatry, because of their sin. You know, we can never lose the salvation that God has wrought for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, but let me ask you this: how much time do we really spend enjoying it? How much time do we really have the joy of salvation? It's just but a fleeting moment. Maybe even an hour set aside for worship like this we get little spots of enjoyment in thinking upon Christ and thinking, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if it was always this way?" but then how quickly it's gone.

As soon as I say that, I know because I know my own heart, your mind is already running down a thousand roads, a thousand different directions. There again, the Lord has to bring us to the end of ourselves. He has to constantly be reining us back in again to what is vital and what is important in this life because all of us have ADD. We're distracted by this world. We're distracted by our flesh. We're distracted by things that others think of us or opinions they have of us. What difference does it make if we're Christ's and we're the Lord's, that we would be brought to rest in him.

So verse 18, this is the plea. This is what causes one to cry unto the Lord. Notice, "yet but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary." You think about what his sanctuary represented, the Lord Jesus Christ. What are those adversaries that so quickly trod down God's sanctuary? Well, Christ gave a parable of the sower and the seed. Do you remember that? The seed was sown and it fell on different types of ground. The birds came and took it away. The cares of the world like thorns rose up and snuffed it out, choked it out. Or the sun arose, such as persecution and drowned it out. Three fourths of that seed that was sown had no effect, no fruit.

I know there are preachers that say, "Well, that's a picture of the heart of an unconverted person." I have to tell you, dear friends, that's a picture of my heart because I can't tell you how many times once that seed has been sown the birds come and take it away, no sooner out that door. It might be a phone call. It might be pulling out here and someone cuts you off and the next thing you know... It might be a conversation afterward. Your thoughts, how little while we possess the glory of what this Gospel teaches us of Christ. Someone begins to chit-chat with you and asks you about the kids or ask you about work and the next thing you know, grrr. It's all taken away. That's the nature of our heart but the Lord purposes all these things but just be aware there are plenty of adversaries that trod down his sanctuary even today and that's not just adversaries out there. The biggest adversary we have we carry around in this flesh. It's this body. It's this flesh that the Spirit of God must continue to restrain. But these are what God uses. Adversity the Lord uses to cause his children to cry unto him.

The third and final lesson then that I see in this portion is the reasons. What are the reasons to cry unto the Lord? I'm not talking about just, "Okay, it hurts, Lord, so please take away the hurt." There are selfish reasons for which people cry unto the Lord, but what I see here in verse 15, coming back up here again to the top of the portion, the one reason to cry unto the Lord is because of his tender mercies and his willingness to be merciful even when we've been unmerciful; his willingness to be faithful even though we're unfaithful.

When it says there in verse 15, "where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?" this is like children that are carrying on and suddenly they realize that you've gone silent. Sometimes I think we feel like maybe always acting or reacting to what our children say and do is the best way to address it, but I know with my children if I go silent, all of a sudden it gets attention. "What's wrong with dad? What's going on?" And prayerfully, the whole thought is, "What did I do?"

And certainly this is the cry here in verse 15, "where is thy zeal and thy strength?" When the Lord removes his hand, if he's our zeal and strength and he removes his hand, it weakens us and now in that weakened state, we begin to realize just how important it is for the Lord to sustain us day in and day out, moment by moment. And he doesn't even have to say anything, just the removing of that hand causes his children to yearn for. Notice it says here, "the sounding of thy bowels." I know that's maybe not a way that we would necessarily speak but it's being close enough to somebody where you're leaning on their chest or on their stomach and you can hear their stomach growl. It's actually a term of closeness; close enough to hear the stomach growl. And in Scripture, the bowels represented the innermost part of a person. It was used to describe the seat of their thoughts and emotions and affections. The bowels of mercy is what we read Paul speaking of in the New Testament. And it's for that reason that God would be near to us to such a degree we could hear the sounding of his bowels and of his mercies towards us.

And the question, "are they restrained?" I liken this to the Song of Solomon when the beloved bride was asleep and her bridegroom came and put his hand in the lattice of the door and she heard the sound of it but then he withdrew and went away. She was asleep but it stirred her awake to the point where she got up and actually ran out in the street and started asking people, "Where's my beloved? Where's my beloved?" You see, this is the reason to cry unto the Lord, that he would never remove his hand from us or his hand of mercy. He won't but there are times when he'll cause us to feel it to get our attention and to draw us again and again unto himself.

If you look in Psalm 77:9. They say it's not until you've lost something that you really miss it or realize its importance. That's true of the Lord's mercies. He is merciful all the time, he's gracious all the time, but we're not always aware of it and this is his way of making us aware of it and causing us to see our need and to cry unto him. But here in Psalm 77:9, to be brought to ask this question. Well, you can go all the way back up to the top, but look at the questions beginning with verse 6, "I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search." So this is when the Spirit causes you to make diligent search. This is a good thing. This has drawn us to him.

"Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Then "Selah" just means "to pause and to think about it." Now listen, it says, "And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember

the years of the right hand of the most High." Again, who's the right hand of the most High? That's Christ and I will be brought again, even in this, to see that if I'm to have mercy, if I'm to have grace, it will be because of Christ and it will be because of his great work on my behalf.

Now, coming back here to Isaiah 63, again, just considering this final point: what are the reasons to cry unto the Lord, it's because he is merciful. Even though there are times when he might seemingly have turned away, he never in reality does. Everything he does is in mercy and grace toward any of his own. But the reason to plead with him is not only for his mercy but look in verse 16, "Doubtless thou art our father," and if could correct anything here, I would put that in capital because this is a reference to God being our Father. "Though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." When it says "though Abraham be ignorant of us," it's a way of saying if Abraham were alive today seeing our situation as a people, he wouldn't even recognize us. So far gone we are as a nation, as a people. But doubtless, nevertheless, thou art our father.

You see, this is what is so vital because the Lord will remove from us every comfort, every prop. It might be the comfort of our work. It might be the comfort of our health. It might be the comfort of peace and security in this nation. It might be even the comfort of our children where in the end they might all just walk off and leave you. If your confidence is in those things, you're most certainly to be disappointed and discouraged but nevertheless, thou art our father. Do you see how vital that is? Not everybody can call God their Father, only those that the Son represents and the Son has redeemed and the Son has named his own. That's our adoption in him.

Therefore it says, "thou, O LORD," again, "art our father," but how so? As "our redeemer." That's what distinguishes us from the rest of the world so let's don't get caught up with the world. Let's don't get jealous of the world. No matter how dark things may be, the reason to cry unto the Lord is because if Christ has paid our debt, he is our Father, and therefore his "name is from everlasting." Everything else is going to fail. Everything else will falter, but his name, that name that he has put in his Son, is from everlasting and for everlasting.

So these are the reasons to cry unto the Lord: because of his mercy; because he is our Father; and then, thirdly and finally down in verse 19, it's because if he has chosen us and Christ has redeemed us and the Spirit called us, we're his. I don't know how important that is to read those three words but to me right now, it just strengthens my heart, "We are thine." It doesn't matter who else's I am. You know, people trying to trace their genealogy back to men and roots, in the end, we all come from a long line of reprobates and rebels and sinners and yet to be the Lord's.

"We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name." When it says "thou never barest rule over them," it's like children of other people's households, they might misbehave and everything but you're not laying up nights worrying about them. That's somebody else's issue. We care for those that are our own and if the Lord so graciously does not leave us to ourselves and tenderly draws us again

and again unto himself, that's because we're his and he has bought us with a great price. So don't marvel that he brings affliction, he brings chastening, he brings events to bear in our lives that would wean us from ever going the way of this world and would turn us again and again unto his blessed Son. It's like Jeremiah said, "Turn thou me and I shall be turned." That's a mercy and so if the Lord brings us into situations to cry unto him, then we bless his name. Others he leaves to themselves and they go the way of all flesh and split hell wide open, but if he restrains us, it's for his glory and mercy's sake and therein we thank him.