

Hope in Adversity

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 64:1-5

Preached On: Sunday, May 19, 2013

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I'd just like to advise you to look with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 64 and I'm going to be reading for you just the first five verses of this chapter and speak with you on "Hope in Adversity," a message that I trust will be an encouragement to each of us as we face adversity, whatever the way the Lord is pleased to bring it into our lives. It's a reality of living in a fallen world, that we're going to know adversity. Just because we're the Lord's, in no way exempts us from it and so it's a matter of learning from his word as to how we're to deal with it. I can tell you that each of us as we look back on the path wherein the Lord has directed us, we can say his hand is so led that every turn in the road, every valley, every thorny way that he has caused us to pass through as his sheep, he has custom made for us and it is our story because it is his story. I trust that that's how we see it but here in Isaiah 64, beginning with verse 1,

"1 Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, 2 As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! 3 When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. 4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. 5 Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved."

The dictionary defines "adversity" and you can see the word here in verse 2, "to make thy name known to thine adversaries." The word "adversary," you have the word "adversity." There are a couple of ways you could read there when it says "thine adversaries." There are those who oppose God in his holiness, in his justice, in how it is he is determined to save to his people. That's what we are by nature is that we're born into this world, we're his adversaries but another way of looking at it is that all that our adversaries are his adversaries. In other words, we live and move and have our being in him. There is not one adversary, there is not one adversity but what he ordains and he causes to be so either

way, these are his adversaries. Now, the dictionary defines “adversity” as “misfortune” or “some hardship and suffering that happens.” But I have to take exception with that when you consider that there is nothing that happens randomly, that all that takes place is of the Lord’s directing and of the Lord’s guidance. We were talking about this with the men during our time of prayer before the worship time in my study and talked about looking back on our lives. If we truly believe and trust in God as Sovereign and who he is, we’ll never have to look back with regret or have to look back and say, “I would have done this differently,” or “I would have done that differently.” That, in itself, would be rebellion. It would be to question God’s direction and purpose in our lives and so I don’t want us to see adversity as a misfortune and we speak of that word whenever something happens and we say, “Well, that’s unfortunate.” We need to find a better word because hardship it is, yes, it wouldn’t be a trial were it not a difficulty. It wouldn’t be adversity were it not difficult for us but even in that, there is hope in that when the Lord causes you to see his hand in everything, then truly we can worship him.

And that’s what we read as Bob read for us in Ecclesiastes 3, if you’ll just look back there with me briefly. In a perfect world that we would make and even that is to question God because he is the Author and Director and Sovereign Governor of this world but how often even in our hearts we say, “Well, if I could be God for a day, here’s how I would determine things.” That’s foolish talk. I even heard someone say that, “What would you do if you were God for a day?” We’d probably condemn everybody to hell but us and wipe everybody else out and then be left alone. But even that is contrary to what we find in the beginning, “It is not good that man dwell alone,” so you can see that there are ways in which we reason that are not God’s ways. In our minds, we’d always plan an easy, quiet, weaker day, just peaceable.

And yet as Bob read for us in Ecclesiastes 3:1, that “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” I don’t know why we get surprised when there is the heat of the summer, there is the falling of the leaves in the fall and then there is the coldness of the winter and we all look forward to the spring and we all in our minds think, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if it could always be spring-like?” Well, that’s not how God has made this world. There is “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill.” People say, “When’s the killing going to stop?” It won’t. Get that out of your mind. “A time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep.” If we had our world, we’d never weep and yet the Lord has ordained those times to weep, “a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” It’s all summed up there in verse 14, “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.”

So, this is what we’re to learn from adversity but secondly, the Lord’s people are made to know adversity in many ways more than even the ungodly. That might surprise you and I know it goes contrary to the modern popular message that if you come to Jesus, all will be well. Well, 1. the Lord uses adversity to chasten and purge us from this world. If it were not for adversity, we would all get our feet and our roots planted pretty deeply in this world, become too accustomed to it. That is our nature and so the Lord uses adversity

to keep us from going the way of the world, to keep us from putting our confidence in anything in this world. If there weren't the dark days, we wouldn't appreciate the sunshine. If there weren't the storm, we wouldn't appreciate the calm. And all of these things the Lord does to cause our eyes to be upon him but even more importantly, you stop and think about what it is to be the Lord's, to be isolated out from the rest of this world. And that's what he does: he takes us from the world and draws us unto himself and sets us apart.

So, here we are as sheep in this world. Christ described it as "sheep among wolves," and it's just the type of world that we live in. Because of the enmity of the world against the Shepherd we the sheep, can expect the same sort of enmity. We live in a world of enmity and yet, if you read over here in Matthew 10:16, as the Lord's people, we can expect adversity. You know, the world is comfortable in the world for the most part: they love being with their friends as long as things are going their way, they're happy. That's the world but to be chosen of God, redeemed by Christ and called by the Spirit, we are called out of this world and, therefore, separated from it and so marvel not that the world stands against you. If they hated Christ, they'll hate you so I've got to tell you that this matter of being drawn to Christ or coming to Christ is to be brought into a world of adversity for Christ's sake, for the gospel's sake. Don't be alarmed that you stand alone or that he has taught you what he has not taught the rest of the world. That's his grace, to separate us out.

But he says here in Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." Why is there adversity? Well, because we're sheep and sheep are animals of prey or being preyed upon. Predators prey upon sheep. "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," but what? "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." You think: two contrasting things there. In reality, serpents are fearful animals. The only time they really strike is when they get in a corner. That's why if you surprise one, they go scurrying off. This is the example that the Lord gives "to be wise as serpents." You don't have to go looking for trouble. When it comes, moves out of the way. Run to that refuge which is the Lord, "and harmless as doves."

Now, I had somebody question this one time, they said, "Have you ever watched two doves fight each other over territory? They'll kind of go at each other." But I believe that the sense here is that typically when you think of a dove, it's one that is gentle, it is one that is not like the hawk preying on other animals. That is to be our attitude and our demeanor as we are as sheep. I often say that sheep were not made with horns to fight or to defend themselves. A sheep is a dumb animal. It stands in need of the shepherd and yet, there are wolves that would prey on the sheep given that opportunity.

So, adversity is a part of our life, it's to be expected and especially so believing the gospel that we do. Paul spoke of those who were enemies of the cross. When the Lord draws one of his own to himself, he is causing you to stand against all of modern day religion, all of works religion. There is an enmity of works religion against those that are the Lord's just like there was enmity between Cain and Abel. It wasn't Abel that hated Cain, it was Cain that hated Abel and so it is, we can expect that sort of adversity.

But coming back to Isaiah 64, this chapter that we have here is a continuation of the one previous. Now, chapter divisions were put in here to help us with reading the Scriptures and have a starting point and a stopping point but in the original, there was no chapter division and so, even as we saw in Isaiah 63:15, notice how verse 15 began, "Look down from heaven and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and thy glory." The same way verse 1 of 64 begins, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence." What was the issue? Well, it was the adversity that the people of Israel were facing. It says there in verse 18 of Isaiah 63, "The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while." Here was the Promised Land and yet full of trouble and the cry here, as you see, "our adversaries," there is the word, "have trodden down thy sanctuary," and yet, "we are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name." So, there we see the Lord had purposed to separate them out.

So the prayer here in verses 1 and 2 of Isaiah 64 is that God would appear in some remarkable manner for them against his and their enemies. You see, if they're Christ's enemies, they're our enemies and so the cry here in verses 1 and 2 is for the Lord to intervene in a very powerful and mighty way on their behalf. Then in verses 3-5 that I read for you, the plea here is that God would act toward them as he had formerly done with his people. And you stop and think about all of the deliverances of the children of Israel that God wrought in delivering them out of Egypt with a high hand by that Passover lamb and how that is a picture of how he delivers us through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You say, "Where's the hope?" Well, in verse 1 and 2, the hope in adversity is in that we do have a God who is sovereign over all. I'm thankful he is sovereign. I know this is a bone of contention for the enemies, they don't want a sovereign God. I believe strongly that is the one reason why people believe in evolution today. It's not because it makes sense, it's the most illogical thing that you could ever think of even scientifically. Where is the proof? They keep going around trying to find proof but the real reason why men believe in evolution today is because the alternative they don't like and that is that there is a God who has created this universe to his honor and glory and rules it and reigns and directs it as he will. If you want to start a fight over lunch at work sometime, just sit down and bring that up, "Let's talk about whether there are random events. Let's just talk today about the Katrinas that hit New Orleans, whether that was just a storm that busted loose on its own or whether the Lord actually was directing it," that everything that took place, took place exactly as he purposed it.

You'll have a fight on your hands because men contest such a God and yet the Lord's people, if we're the Lord's this is our comfort. It doesn't grieve us one bit to say that God is sovereign. In fact, that's why we pray. I've had people say to me, "Well, if you truly believe God is sovereign, why do you pray?" I pray because he is sovereign. Why would I pray to a God who wasn't? What would be the purpose? He'd just throw it back in my face and say, "Well, you go take care of it. I created you. I gave you a mind. I gave you everything so why are you coming to me?" That would be the case if it were not that he

was sovereign. No, we bring our petitions before God because of who he is and his sovereignty in all things.

So, there is the cry in verse 1, “Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries,” notice, “that the nations may tremble at thy presence!” He’s not just the God of his people, he is the God of the nations and I’m thankful that there was a point in time when, indeed, God did rend the heavens and that he did come down and that he did deal mightily with his adversaries and with ours. You say, “When was that?” Well, when the Lord Jesus Christ was brought to this earth and he took on our greatest enemy which is our sin that left unjudged, that sin would have most certainly condemned us and yet he purposed in coming down and rending the heavens to save a people such as we are, that the nations may tremble at thy presence.

But we see here, the prayer is for God to act in a very extraordinary way and this is common language in Scripture, that God would rend the heavens and that he would come down. It’s an acknowledgement that everything that takes place on earth comes from heaven. That’s why it says that he would rend the heavens. Notice that “thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down.” The glory here belongs unto God to act in whatever the adversity might be but the point is that there are no cases too difficult for our God. Ah, that he would cause us to see that. We get frustrated. We face circumstances and situations that yes, quite honestly, are beyond us and yet, even as Christ said with regard to the salvation of sinners, “With man it is impossible but with God all things are possible.” I’m thankful it’s that way. That could only be if he is sovereign and he is and so we see that there are no cases too difficult for God.

Notice, if you stop and think about some of the language here in verse 1, “that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.” We’re trying to develop these bunker busting bombs now that can go 500 feet deep or 1,000 feet deep and kind of destroy what man has buried in some cave somewhere in a mountain. I don’t know whether it’s ever been tried or possible to just literally throw every armament that man knows at a mountain and try to dissipate it and bring it down to nothing. Just one mountain. Let’s start with Kilimanjaro or Mount Everest; let’s just decide to bring all the armies of the world and see if we can bomb this thing into a beach. How much would it take? And that’s just one mountain and the language that’s used here says “that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.” Such a God is our God that not even the mountains are a hiding place; not even the rockiest of mountains can withstand at his presence. If the mountains can be dissolved in his presence, how much more so even his enemies?

So, let whatever opposition there is that stands against the Lord’s people and we’ve seen the power even of one volcano. Some say that this is what it’s describing here in verse 2, “As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries.” What it is, is the depiction of the very wrath of God and that when God is pleased and it’s time to cause that wrath to be poured out upon his enemies, who can stand? That’s why the Lord said, “Vengeance is mine saith the Lord. I will

repay.” We don’t have to take these matters into our hands but when you stop and think even there, that the very wrath of God withstood against us or should have, the Lord Jesus Christ himself bore, that he might justify us as sinners. We’re no better than anybody else in this world. If that wrath has not fallen upon us, it’s because it’s fallen upon his Son.

There are no cases too difficult for our God. Secondly we see here the whole hope in God being sovereign is that he does what he does to get himself the glory in all things. Notice in verse 2, “To make thy name known to thine adversaries.” Verse 3, “When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.” Verse 4, “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.” Everything that God does, he does for his glory. Would that we would remember that because, again, we so often think that this world is turning around us and that’s the way we begin to reason. You know, “Why doesn’t God do this? I’ve been praying to him for such a long time and why doesn’t he act in this way? Why? Why? Why?” Well, by his grace, we need to bow and look at the reality that everything he does, he does for his glory. It’s not for our glory but his alone. He makes his presence known. He causes his name to be glorified. All that he does, he has done for his honor and glory. Sooner or later, God will make his name known to his adversaries. Just because he’s silent doesn’t mean he’s not at work and even though we cry unto him and he doesn’t answer necessarily the way that we assume he should or in the way that we feel he should, even that is a rebellion, to think that he ought to act on our timetable.

No, this is his to do but the point here is that his very presence causes the enemies to tremble. Do you see that in verse 2? “That the nations may tremble at thy presence.” Verse 3, “the mountains flowed down at thy presence.” This is one thing that shows me that most of what men call a profession is nothing but an empty profession. I hear people talking about a religious experience they’ve had and they’re almost giddy about it. There is no understanding of who God is in his holiness and justice. You see people at the beck and call of a preacher, walking down an aisle and popping bubblegum and smiling and just kind of nonchalantly going forward to shake a preacher’s hand and calling it having an experience with God. Nothing could be further from the truth. I’ll tell you what, if you have ever encountered God in truth and that is had your eyes opened to see him, who he is, you have seen your lost estate and you have seen yourself as a blood-guilty sinner before a holy God and you have been brought even as John did there in Revelation when the revelation of Christ was made to him it says, “he fell as it were as dead at his feet.” That’s his presence. When he has been pleased to make his presence known, you see yourself as worthy of being cast into hell, of splitting hell wide open and God would be just in doing so. As long as person is reasoning in their minds, “Well, God would never do that to me,” they’ve never known God’s presence.

If you go over to Revelation 6:17, and thank God he does not leave his people to go down a path to condemnation. We’re born in this world in our hearts rebels and yet, if Christ has redeemed us, there is going to be a time when the Spirit brings us and causes us to see God in truth and holy and just and to see ourselves as desperate sinners and to cry unto

him for mercy. I believe that in Isaiah 64, we're coming to it in verse 4, that's what it's talking about, "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." I remember as the Lord began dealing in my heart as a self-righteous, lost religionist, thinking myself somebody when I was nobody and my eyes were first opened. I did not know what awaited me. For all I knew, God was about ready to cast me into hell and for 3 ½ months he let me lie in darkness, a darkness that is unlike anything that I would ever have known in this world. A spiritual darkness, to wait on him and then when he was pleased to reveal Christ in me, what a glory! What a grace to know that all along he had purposed mercy and grace for sinners such as I. But I'll tell you what: there is that knowing and understanding of him as Sovereign, there is that trembling in his presence and if you've ever been lost, you know what I'm talking about. That's the way he deals with us, in mercy.

But all others, you can see here in Revelation 6. You talk about mountains trembling. This is what awaits sinners who do not have Christ as a ransom. It says in verse 14, "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." Every mountain. Every stronghold. Everything that a man ever put his confidence in. "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains." To them, they thought that to be a safe refuge and yet we read here, "And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Isn't it amazing that man left to himself would rather run even to the mountains thinking that to be a safety, than to repent and to bow to Christ as the Lamb. If the Lord has granted you repentance, thank him, glorify him because that's a mercy and that's a grace. Such a God is he.

So, our hope is in this God who is just and who is holy and who is sovereign and who does all of his glory and all of his bidding. But coming back here to Isaiah 64, a second reason to hope is that our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. In other words, how he has been pleased to save and preserve his people in the past, we can bank on as to how he's pleased to save and keep his people now. You see in verse 3, the writer here is pleading those things of the past, "When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for." In other words, if you go back and look at how he was pleased to save even his people in bringing them out of Egypt with a high hand. You can go back and read in the Scriptures, how he was pleased to deliver Israel in many situations that were beyond them. When I read those things, I find some comfort to know that even as he was God for them, so he is God for such a sinner as I am and I can rest in that, there's hope even as they plead here what the Lord has done with his people.

Notice in verse 3, "When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for." There are no conditions placed upon us being able to see first. That would be like telling a blind man, "As soon as you can see, then I'll give you eyes." That makes no sense at all. Or standing in front of an oven and saying, "As soon as you give me some heat, then I'll put

some bread in there and we can bake it together.” That’s illogical; it makes no sense. No, everything that pertains to our deliverance and our salvation is wholly dependent upon God doing it, “When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for.” If you’re the Lord’s, you’ll be able to say with me that I was found of the Lord. I didn’t seek him. As far as I knew, I already knew him. That was my thinking. I’d made my profession and I’d done what men had taught me to do to stake my claim and just almost hold God at gunpoint, hostage, “You have to save me because I’ve prayed the prayer.” That was the thinking of my rebellious heart and yet then in his time, to deal tenderly with me and cause me to see that all of my righteousnesses were nothing but filthy rags. Such a God is he. He does not leave us to fall into condemnation with the world because he has purposed to save us. So, it is here: how he has acted in the past so he does now. It’s not our doing, it’s his.

We’re coming now to verse 4. This is where I want us to focus just for a few minutes before we stop. You can see, “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen.” What’s he talking about there? It’s not just his condemnation but how it is he saves his people. This matter of him saving a sinner is not going to be known or learned by men’s natural wisdom. We’re not educated into this. This is a mystery, “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.” What did he prepare? Well, he prepared a Savior. He prepared a substitute. He prepared a righteousness that man could never, of himself, work out. Paul said that in writing to the Galatians, “If righteousness come by law Christ is dead in vain.” Anybody that thinks that somehow by something they do God is pleased to save them, then they make Christ’s death worthless is what that is. You relegate it to the dung heap. I could never do that. I know what I deserve. I know that given a lifetime, I could never, ever satisfy a holy and righteous God. But, O the blessing of what he has prepared. You see that in verse 4? “For him that waiteth for him.”

If you look over in 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul uses this verse right here that we’re studying to show the mystery of how it is that God is pleased to save sinners. Notice, beginning with verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 2, “I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.” Preachers today like to stand up and tell funny stories and get people laughing and entertaining them on the road to hell but Paul said, “I didn’t come with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you,” whose testimony? “God’s testimony. I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” It wasn’t that Paul couldn’t have preached on other topics but he said, “I determined not to know anything among you.” Determined not to. “Save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” It wasn’t because he was afraid of men, but here’s that trembling again, trembling at the very presence of God.

I understand what that is. I don’t want anybody here to think that this matter of standing here and preaching is just locking myself in a room for a few hours and coming up with a message and walking out and saying, “Okay, here it is. Now take it or leave it.” Even now, there is a weightiness in how I’m speaking, in how I’m declaring this word to you

because of whose word it is. It's God's word and if the only voice you hear is mine, we're all in trouble. That God would be pleased to open these eyes and to reveal Christ in our hearts, otherwise we'll walk out that door the same way we came in, just as hardened. Paul said, "in much weakness." I think about what it is to try to declare the glory of Christ, it's in much weakness. And in fear. Not fear of men, but fear of saying anything that would in any way detract from his glory. In trembling.

"And my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom." You see, there was a day in which I thought preaching a good message was coming up with a nice alliterated outline that men could hang onto and afterward they would say, "Wow, those are some good points. I need to write those down," to now whether or not there is an outline or not, it doesn't matter so long as this word is brought home to the heart of the Lord's people and he is pleased to reveal himself in the heart of some poor sinner. "And my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." I'm telling you that this demonstration of the Spirit and of power is not with men falling out of their chair and falling in the aisle and swooning and all this stuff that goes on in the name of the Spirit today but it's the quiet working of the Spirit in the heart that silences the sinner before God and causes them to see their desperate need of Christ, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. I've given up trying to even define faith. People always want to pull you there, "Well, give us your definition of faith." I don't know if you can define it other than it's the absolute casting of a soul of the heart of a desperate sinner upon Christ and Christ alone and there resting and unless the Spirit of God grants that faith, you'll never have faith. You'll die in your unbelief.

It's a mystery but that's what he describes here in verse 6, "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written," here it is, he's quoting right from Isaiah 64:4, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us," how? "By his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." This is a spiritual work. It's a work of the Spirit to take needy, guilty sinners and draw them to Christ.

I've got to wrap it up but we'll come back here to Isaiah 64 again next time. You see in verse 5, "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness." We're going to have a whole message just on that one verse because natural men look at that and say, "Ah, worketh righteousness. That means it's something I work out." No, not in the context. Not in the context. To work righteousness is not something you come up with as a righteousness of your own but to work righteousness is to live in that righteousness which God himself has prepared and God himself has imputed upon completion of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that we rejoice, in that righteousness. But we'll look at that, Lord willing, next time because this is our hope in adversity. The hope is in the

person and in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and I pray that that, indeed, is your hope even as I trust is mine.