

Revival for the Repentant: Isaiah 57:14-21
 Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church
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We've been going through the Old Testament book of Isaiah, and we have 3 more Sundays left in Isaiah, including today. That's the plan. Then we'll move on to a 5 week-series on the church, which I'm looking forward to. We'll look at what the Bible says about Christ as the head of the church, the roles of elders and deacons in the church, the congregation's responsibilities and the importance of membership, and what our mission is together, what God has called us to be and do. We'll start that study on June 10th.

For these last 3 studies in Isaiah, we'll be in the third and final major section of the book. Isaiah 1-39 is the first part: Isaiah preaching to the southern kingdom of Judah in his own day. Chapters 40-55 then look to the future time when the people of Judah would be taken into exile by the Babylonians. And now this final section, chapters 56-66, look even further into the future, to a time that is future even to us. Looking to the fulfilment of all things.

Alec Motyer, who wrote a commentary on the book of Isaiah, summarizes these last chapters as "characteristic of a waiting people."¹ Look at the first verse in this new section.

"Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed." (Isaiah 56:1, ESV)

And Ray Ortlund, another scholar and pastor who has written about Isaiah, says this: "In Isaiah 56-66, the third major section of his book, the prophet shows us the way into ongoing revival as we await the fullness of God's coming kingdom."² I love the emphasis on revival. I hope we'll be encouraged by that this morning as we see it in our text.

We'll look this morning at 3 amazing truths that are revealed in chapter 57:14-21, and I'll mention each of those as we come to them. In this series through Isaiah we're taking certain portions of Isaiah that will help us get the big picture. We're not covering every verse or even every chapter. But I hope that you'll have a desire to continue studying Isaiah and learning from this very significant book in God's Word. And there is much more to study and much more to learn here beyond what I'm covering in this relatively short sermon series, considering the length and depth

¹*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Motyer, page 461.

²*Isaiah*, Ortlund, page 376.

of this book. So you could think of this series as an introduction to Isaiah, my hope being that this will help you in your ongoing reading of Isaiah in the future.

So let's take chapter 57 verses 14-21 as our text for this morning.

Read

The heading in my ESV Bible here is "Comfort for the Contrite." I like that. And the title I gave for the sermon is "Revival for the Repentant." The message of these verses is so convicting and so encouraging at the same time. There is the offer of comfort, the excitement of revival! That is so encouraging! But this offer is to those who humble themselves in an attitude of contrition and repentance. That is convicting. The comfort doesn't come to those who are prideful, to the unrepentant, to the ones who think they have all the answers and think they're doing all the right things. Revival doesn't come to the church or to the individuals who think they have it all together. Revival comes to those who are desperate for help, to those who are broken.

You know, the Hebrew word for "contrite" means crushed or beaten to pieces.

It's the same language used to describe the crushing of the golden calf in Ex 32:20. Do you remember that event? The people of Israel did a wicked thing: making and then worshiping that idol. When Moses returned he was furious.

"He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it." (Exodus 32:20, ESV)

The word for grinding is the same language used for contrition, being beaten to pieces. That sounds horrible. But it's the condition of the heart that puts us in an appropriate posture before the Lord. That's when we know that He is our only hope. When we're crushed to the point of no longer hoping in self, trusting in self, relying on self, or anything else.

The point is, we must be crushed in order to be made whole. The Lord must bring us low and then cause us to soar. If we're soaring, or think we're soaring, on the wings of self-achievement, that journey is going to end in disaster. But to come to the point of humble contrition and repentance . . . Do you remember that great verse at the end of Isaiah 40?

"but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31, ESV)

So there's conviction here in this passage, challenging us to give up on self and selfishness and pride and the arrogance of thinking we can make it on our own. And there's tremendous encouragement here for the broken, for the contrite, for the repentant. And I pray we will all find ourselves in that posture this morning, confessing our sins to the Lord and asking for His forgiveness, comfort, and reviving power.

The Lord is High and Lifted Up

The first thing I want us to consider in this passage is that the Lord is high and lifted up. See verse 15.

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place . . .

This language of “high and lifted up” is used elsewhere in Isaiah, in a couple other well-known passages. In the servant song of Isaiah 52-53, at the end of chapter 52 it says,

“Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” (Isaiah 52:13, ESV)

And then going back to the great chapter 6, where we read of Isaiah's vision of the Lord.

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.” (Isaiah 6:1, ESV)

One of the first sermons I preached in this series, back in January, was entitled “The Lord Exalted, the People Humbled.”

Isaiah 2:11 says, “The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.” And then 5:15-16 say it again, “Man is humbled, and each one is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are brought low. But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.”

And in chapter 6, in Isaiah's vision of the Lord's holiness, he sees the Lord sitting upon a throne, which helps to describe God's holiness. He is on a throne. He is high and lifted up. He is separate from us. He is transcendent. He is other. He is on a different plane (on a different level) than us.

Isaiah also saw the train of the Lord's robe filling the temple. He smelled the smoke that filled the place. And he also

heard and felt the thundering voices of the seraphim. What Isaiah saw and heard and felt was the blazing holiness of Almighty God.

Our God is an awesome God, a holy God, a transcendent God, and He demands our attention and our reverence. May we never forget that the God who is revealed in Scripture, the God whom we approach in prayer, the God whom we worship in these corporate gatherings, is the God who sits high up on the throne of the universe.

The Lord Dwells with the Lowly

And that's what makes this next point so stunning, that the Lord also dwells with the lowly. Look at the rest of verse 15 in our passage from chapter 57. I began reading it earlier, but stopped in the middle of the verse.

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”
(Isaiah 57:15, ESV)

There is a paradox here of God's transcendence and holiness on the one side, and His immanence on the other side. There seems to be a tension here. How can God be so high and lifted up, separated from sinners, and yet come down to dwell in the midst of such sinners?

First, notice what the verses at the end of the chapter say.

No peace for the wicked

Read vv. 20-21

So the Lord doesn't come down to dwell with everyone. It's not that He is minimizing sin, deciding just to ignore it. No, there will be punishment for the unrepentant. For those who never humble themselves, who never come to that point of contrition, being broken and desperate, pleading for God's forgiveness. For the wicked who remain in their sin, stubborn and rebellious, there will be no peace. The Lord will not make peace with them. He will not draw near to them. He will remain high above them, opposed to them. He will remain their enemy and cast them into forever punishment.

Peace for the contrite

So what happens with the contrite? In contrast to the wicked who will have no peace, the contrite will experience peace with God. Verse 19, “Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the Lord. Interestingly, that verse is alluded to by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:17 where he’s talking about the Jew-Gentile divide that is broken down in the Gospel, that both Jews and Gentiles are being reconciled to God in one body through the cross. He says that Jesus Christ “is our peace (v. 14), and in verse 17 is where he references the language of Isaiah 57. He says, “And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.” That is the Good News of the Gospel. Not only for the Jewish people who had received the promises about a coming Messiah, but also to the many other people groups of the world, this message of hope and forgiveness is going forth. Indeed for us, those who are far off. This message of peace has reached even us.

This term, peace, has a rich Old Testament background. It’s not simply the absence of hostility or enmity. But it includes active blessing from God. For instance, the pronouncement of blessing in Numbers 6: “*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*” (Numbers 6:24–26, ESV)

We also think of Isaiah 9:6, “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” (Isaiah 9:6, ESV)

And turning to the New Testament, we see the fulfillment of this in Jesus Christ. Even at His birth, the angels declared, in Luke 2:14, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

In Romans 5:1 Paul speaks specifically of the peace we have with God. Just a few verses later, in verses 10-11, he mentions reconciliation, which is to bring together two parties who have been enemies. Anyone who is not justified by faith is an enemy of God. We were all by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). But for those who are reconciled to Him, we are no longer enemies. We are no longer under His wrath. But instead, we are His friends. We have peace with Him.

And this comes about through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Romans 5:1 says it “. . . we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** God the Father put Jesus Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood, as Paul explains in Romans 3. That

means that Jesus bore the wrath that our sin deserves. God's wrath is against us, against our sin. But God poured out that wrath on Jesus. And Jesus paid the full penalty for our sin and rose on the 3rd day. So this peace that we have with God is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's the difference between the wicked who will have no peace and the lowly and contrite who are reconciled to the Lord. It's not that the lowly and contrite are better than the wicked. For we are all wicked. We are all sinners. But the lowly and contrite are repentant. Their eyes have been opened to see the sinfulness of their sin, the heinousness of their sin, the shame and misery of sin. And they have come to know that the only hope of salvation is in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's through Jesus Christ that our holy God can remain high and lifted up and also draw near to sinners like you and me.

The Lord Revives the Repentant

In this last point I want to talk about repentance and revival. The Lord promises to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. So it's important for us to reflect a bit more on both of those things. What is repentance? And what is revival? We'll close by trying to answer each of those questions.

What Is Repentance?

A helpful place to go is the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, which is part of our church's Statement of Faith. In the chapter on repentance it says, **"This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, being by the Holy Spirit made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, doth, by faith in Christ, humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrency, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavor, by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things."** So repentance involves godly sorrow. We are deeply saddened by our own sin. We detest it. We hate it. We despise ourselves for our sin. And then repentance also involves turning away from sin, renouncing it, and pleading for God's mercy to forgive our sin and to give us the grace to kill sin in our lives. We also see in this statement that repentance and faith go together. They always go together, because they are two aspects of the same thing. Repenting of sin and trusting in Jesus Christ are two sides of the same coin. Repentance is turning our minds and hearts and lives away from sin, and faith is turning toward Christ. Repentance and faith are two aspects of the same action. Thus, John Murray speaks of "penitent faith" and "believing

repentance.”³ As we come to hate our sin and mourn over it and realize the hell that we deserve for it, we look to our Savior Jesus Christ who died to absorb God’s wrath against our sin. And as we come to hate the deceptive lies of sin, we turn to Jesus and the sure promises of joy and peace that He holds out to us.

The next sentence in the Statement of Faith says this: **“As repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof, so it is every man’s duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly.”** Two points here. First, repentance is a continual process. It’s not a one-time thing. It’s not something that happens once at the beginning of the Christian life. It *is* the Christian life. Penitent faith, believing repentance. This is what it means to be a Christian. To renounce sin and trust in Jesus Christ—this is the ongoing struggle of the believer in this life. Although we are now new creatures in Christ, we still find ourselves inclining toward sin in many ways. Therefore we will struggle, and must struggle, against sin every day, every moment. And we must continually repent of our sin. 1 John 1:8-9 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Secondly, we must repent of our particular known sins particularly. We can’t just repent generally, admitting that we have sinned against God. More than that, we need to identify specific sins that come to light, and we need to humble ourselves before God and acknowledge how grievously we have rebelled against Him in these specific ways—how we have distrusted Him, dishonored Him, turned away from Him to cherish other things. What sins have you been intentionally overlooking in your life? Maybe there are sins of bitterness or anger, and you feel justified in holding onto that bitterness or anger because of how badly someone has treated you. Maybe the sin of selfishness is evident in your life, but you feel that there are certain things that you are entitled to. Maybe you have justified the sins of lust or gluttony or greed or immodesty, because you look at other people and say, At least I’m not as bad as that person. Brothers and sisters, we need to stop making excuses for our sin, and repent of it.

I’ll read you one more sentence from the Statement of Faith. It says, **“Such is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of grace for the preservation of believers unto salvation, that although there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation, yet there is no sin so great that it**

³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 113. Quoted in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pg. 714.

shall bring damnation on them that repent, which makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary.” I love how this emphasizes the seriousness of our sin and also the immensity of God’s grace toward those who repent. There is no sin so small but it deserves damnation. In other words, even the sin that we might think is so insignificant, we deserve to go to hell because of it. But then it says, yet there is no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent. In other words, if you’re here this morning and you think there’s no way God could forgive you for the horrible things you’ve done, there’s hope. There’s hope because through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, there’s forgiveness. Jesus’ death on the cross is sufficient to atone for your sin. If you humble yourself to that place of contrition, acknowledging your sin, and seeing the sinfulness of it, and crying out to Jesus for mercy, you will be forgiven.

What is revival?

How does repentance relate to revival? Why does the Lord say that He will revive the heart of the contrite? Revival is something that excites me very much. I love to think about revival, pray for revival in my own life and in our church. I long to see God revive His people. I believe I’ve seen glimpses of it, and I long for much more.

Just think of it. What an exciting thing it would be to see God glorify Himself in this region in such a way that this church and other churches would be strengthened and believers would be remarkably sanctified and large numbers of unbelievers would be radically converted and marriages would be reconciled and families united and brothers and sisters in Christ would evidence deep love for one another and the ripple effect would reach to the ends of the earth. Let’s plead with Him to do something great here in our midst, that would bring glory to His Name. My hope is that as we’re talking about repentance and revival, God will come and show us our need for Him and that we will cry out to Him, asking for Gospel passion, asking for revival.

Just to be clear what we’re talking about here, we have to distinguish between man-made results and a genuine working of the Spirit. Ian Murray, in his very insightful and inspiring book, *Revival and Revivalism*, helps us to understand what real, God-centered revival is in contrast to man-centered revivalism that many of us may be very familiar with. Revivalism is based on techniques and methods used to stir up emotions and manipulate people in order to produce a certain response, a certain decision, a certain action. But real revival is something that God does, and only God can do. Ian Murray writes, “Such is man’s state in sin that he cannot be saved without the immediate influence of the

Holy Spirit. Regeneration, and the faith that results from it, are the gifts of God. Therefore, wherever conversions are multiplied, the cause is to be found not in men, nor in favourable conditions, but in the abundant influences of the Spirit of God that alone make the testimony of the church effective. No other explanation of revival is in harmony with the truths that are ‘the essence of the Christian scheme—the utter depravity of man, the sovereignly-free grace of Jehovah, the divinity of Christ, the atonement in his blood, regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit.’” (21-22)

It’s not favourable conditions that bring about revival. It’s not the techniques of men that cause revival. It’s the Spirit of God that is effective in reviving a people. To further clarify this, Murray also says that **“what happens in revivals is not to be seen as something miraculously different from the regular experience of the church. The difference lies in degree, not in kind.** In an ‘outpouring of the Spirit’ spiritual influence is more widespread, convictions are deeper, and feelings more intense, but all this is only a heightening of normal Christianity. True revivals are ‘extraordinary,’ yet what is experienced at such times is not different in essence from the spiritual experience that belongs to Christians at other times. It is the larger ‘earnest’ of the same Spirit who abides with all those who believe.” (23) So when we pray for revival it’s not as though we’re praying for something different than what we’ve already experienced to some extent. But it’s that we want much more of it.

I like the way Ray Ortlund puts it. He says, “When you drive by a church displaying a sign, ‘Revival here next week,’ you can bet there won’t be a revival there next week.” He goes on to talk about revival in this way: **“It’s a season in the life of the church when God causes the normal ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power. It is not foolish hysterics. It is God becoming overwhelmingly real to us.”**⁴

Oh, I long for a surge of spiritual power in our midst. I hope you long for that too. I hope you will pray for that, and depend upon the Lord for that. And it begins with repentance. It begins with a contrite heart. It begins with each of us looking seriously and honestly at our own besetting sins and confessing those to the Lord.

Let’s look to Him this morning. He is the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy, who dwells in the high and holy place and who also dwells with those who are of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. Let’s be those people, by God’s grace. Let’s be the people who are broken over our sin

⁴*Isaiah*, Ortlund, page 375.

so that we depend entirely upon Him. Maybe the place we need to start is by praying for that brokenness.