

A Prayer for Revival: Isaiah 64
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Today we'll conclude this sermon series through the great Old Testament book of Isaiah. Our focus this morning will be chapter 64, which is not the last chapter in the book. But it is very close to the end.

Let me begin by saying a few brief things about what we've learned from Isaiah through this series. We've seen the Gospel throughout this book, beginning in chapter 1 with that beautiful imagery of our sins, though they are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are like crimson, they shall become like wool.

In chapters 2-5 we learned about the day of the Lord and how the Lord will be exalted and the people humbled. And then chapter 6 recounts the riveting vision Isaiah had of the holiness of the Lord and then the commission Isaiah received from the Lord to go and preach.

Chapter 7 has a prophecy of the virgin birth. Chapter 9 foretells the child to be born who would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

In chapter 11 there's a description of a time to come when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Another wonderful and hopeful statement that we looked at in chapter 25 says: "He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth . . ."

In chapters 36-39 we learned of God's kindness to King Hezekiah. The wicked king from Assyria, King Sennacherib, was coming against Judah. He was a very intimidating foe. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. And the Lord miraculously, mysteriously, defeated the great Assyrian army.

It was a month ago that we came to Isaiah chapter 40, a great chapter of comfort. And that was the perfect chapter for us to meditate on that Sunday as we were all grieving the loss (and still are) of our beloved deacon Mark Moyer who had passed away suddenly just a few days earlier.

That chapter begins with the words, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." And the chapter ends with the promise that "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 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." What encouragement, what comfort we find in God's Word. And in

these writings that God ordained to be written even so long ago . . . thousands of years ago! This is not a dusty old book! It's God's living Word that meets us right where we're at today. And it points us to the comfort and the hope that is found in Christ.

Chapter 40 began a new section of the book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39 are geared toward Isaiah's own time period in the southern kingdom of Judah. Chapters 40-55 look to a future time when the people of Judah would be carried into exile in Babylon. And back at Easter time we studied the famous chapter 53 which so clearly describes and prophecies of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant. A couple weeks ago, then, we studied chapter 55, the last chapter in that second major section of Isaiah. Isaiah 55 is a call to delight yourself in the Lord. Another clear Gospel message in that chapter.

And now we've come, for the last 2 Sundays and today, to the third and final major section of Isaiah—chapters 56-66. In this section the prophet looks even further into the future. He is gazing into a time period that is future still for us. He is looking to the culmination of all things.

In chapter 57 we looked at repentance and revival, and in chapter 61 we considered the theme, liberty to the captives (a passage that Jesus quotes and applies to Himself in Luke 4).

And now we'll conclude with chapter 64, a prayer for revival.

Read Isaiah 63:15 – 64:4

Three things that prompt us to pray for revival. That's what we're going to look at in these verses I just read.

Our Great Need

The first thing that should prompt us to pray for revival is our great need. Can you hear the desperation in the words of this prayer? When there is desperation like this, when there is an awareness of one's great need, then there is much hope. Even though the situation may seem very bleak, if someone recognizes how very bleak it is, then that's a good sign.

Think of the description in Romans 1 God delivering people over to their sinful passions. Three times it says it. "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity . . ." "God gave them up to dishonorable passions." "God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."

The prayer here in Isaiah 63 is basically a prayer to God not to do that. Do you see it in verse 17? Don't let us continue down this path. Don't leave us to ourselves. Please, God, why have You let us slide as far as this? Don't let us go over the cliff. Don't let us get to the point of no return. Don't let our hearts become so hardened that we will never turn back to You.

But do you see the hope in this? At least there is an acknowledgement that our hearts have been hardened. We have wandered from God's ways. We don't fear Him as we ought. And in verse 19. Here's an acknowledgement that we are not acting like God's people. We've strayed to a point where it could appear that God has not called us. It could appear that He has no influence or authority over our lives. And that's a scary place to be.

What a convicting passage this is! It should impact us in at least a couple ways. It should make us examine our lives and consider in what ways we have strayed from the Lord. In what ways have our hearts become calloused, hardened toward the things of God. In what ways are we not fearing the Lord or submitting to Him as we should?

And then another way this should impact us is to prompt us to pray for revival. We should cry out to God, like the prayer recorded here. This is the passion for revival that we need. There should be a holy dissatisfaction with the status quo. Crying out to God saying, I can see that things are not as they should be, and I really don't want it to stay like this. Please change me. Change us. We need You!

Acknowledging our great need is what prompts the prayer for revival in 64:1. "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down . . ." That is a desperate cry for God to act. The exclamation "Oh" at the beginning of verse 1. And you see that the translators use an exclamation point at the end of the sentence, at the end of verse 2. They're trying to convey the intensity of what's being expressed here.

This is not like a service request you might send to a business, or a book request you make at the library. Oh, hello could you change the oil in my car. Oh, could you locate this book for me. That's not the kind of request we're hearing in Isaiah 64:1. The stakes are very high here. And therefore the intensity level is very high. And the prayer is coming from a place in the depths, from a place of humility and desperation.

"Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down."
Can you feel the passion in these words? Have you ever felt that passion within your own soul?

In talking about revival, that's a great definition right there of what we should be thinking about with the concept of revival. Revival is God coming down to make His presence known to us, to allow us to feel His near presence and influence.

And as we talked about 2 weeks ago in chapter 57, there is a close connection between repentance and revival. The Lord revives the spirit of the lowly and the heart of the contrite.

We read of an example of this in **Acts 19** when Paul was ministering there. It says, **“Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”** (Acts 19:18–20, ESV)

That’s a very clear and public evidence of repentance. And it’s evidence of revival happening among those believers. They were desperate for more of God. And therefore they wanted to get their secret sins out in the open and rid themselves of those idols.

This past week I listened to a sermon by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the great preacher in London who passed away in 1981 at the age of 81. There are still many, many sermons of his that you can find online, and they’re very edifying. I found one this week on Isaiah 64. He preached it in 1959 as a way of commemorating the revival that happened in the UK 100 years prior to that. The revival of 1859.

After listening to the sermon I did some reading to find out a little more about that revival. And one of the key pieces, as you might imagine, was repentance. There was a widespread and deep sense of need. People were deeply convicted of their sin and cried out for God’s mercy. And this spread from town to town around northern Ireland and Wales and Scotland and England. Large numbers of people were converted, renouncing their sinful ways and clinging to Jesus as their only hope. It was a time when God came down in a unique and powerful way.

That’s what we should pray for, and it begins with a recognition of our own personal need for God, our desperate need for Him.

God’s Great Deeds

This relates to a second thing we see in our text that prompts us to pray for revival, and that is remembering God’s great deeds in the past. Learning a bit about the revival of 1859 is an example of doing this. Or other times of revival like it through the ages. Thinking back to Pentecost. Thinking back to the Reformation.

There have been times when God has come down in unique and powerful and memorable ways, and in ways that have made a long-lasting difference. We praise God for it. And as we marvel at those examples of God’s great mercy, it prompts us to ask Him to do it again.

We can also think personally in our own lives of those times when God seemed especially close, when His presence was

powerfully felt by us. Maybe it was during a time of intense suffering, and you felt God holding on to you and comforting you. Maybe it was during a time of much learning – it seemed like the Scriptures were opening up before you, and you had such a passion to know God better! Maybe some of you are experiencing times like that right now. Others of us can look back and remember seasons of personal revival. All of us should be thankful that God does revive His people, and it should set us to plead with God for more reviving, for a new season of revival personally and corporately.

For Isaiah, he could think back in Israel’s history to events like the Exodus. In verse 3 of our text it says, “When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.”

In the previous chapter, 63, in verses 7 and following, it says, “I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord,” and the passage goes on to recall God’s continued mercy to His people in spite of their rebellion. There are references to God sending Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and the miracle of the Red Sea parting for their escape.

We look back on God’s great deeds, and that reminds us that God is so very powerful, more powerful than we expect. He can do things that we’re not even looking for, not even thinking to ask for. Like the doxology at the end of Paul’s prayer in **Ephesians 3**, “**Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think . . .**” That’s the God we’re praying to. He can do awesome things we’re not even looking for. So be inspired to pray big prayers. Be encouraged to ask for God to do mighty deeds.

In that sermon by **Martyn Lloyd-Jones**, on this chapter of Isaiah, he said, “**Shame on us for our puny prayers, for putting our limits to God’s illimitable power!**” Amen. Shame on us for expecting so little of our great God.

He has done great things. He is doing great things. Let’s ask Him for great things that will revive His people and awaken unbelievers and that will glorify His Name.

Let me tell you a story from that revival of 1859. I find this encouraging. Because as we think about the great things God does, those great things don’t all look the same. His great deeds include many, many things that may seem kind of small in and of themselves. But they’re all part of a great plan. And every believer gets to play a part. What’s particularly encouraging about the part of the story I’m going to share with you is that sometimes what we see as unfruitful is in fact being used by God to bear much fruit, maybe not immediately, but the seeds are being sown.

I read an article on the Banner of Truth website about the beginning of the 1859 revival. Here's part of the story:

“In the spring of 1856 an English lady by the name of Mrs. Colville came to [a particular town in Northern Ireland] because she had ‘time and money to spend for God’. She began a programme of house to house visitation with a view to winning souls for Christ. In November she returned to England in low spirits thinking that God had not acknowledged her labours and feeling that her work had been unfruitful. However, she was wrong. Just a few days before she left she had visited a certain Miss Brown . . . On calling at this house, she had found two other ladies present as well as a young man called James McQuilkin. McQuilkin . . . worked in a linen warehouse in the town. Miss Brown and her companions were involved in a discussion on the subjects of predestination and freewill. [Are you following? Mrs. Colville is doing door-to-door visitation, looking for opportunities to share the Gospel. She comes to this house where Miss Brown and 3 of her friends are discussing predestination and free will.] When she entered the house, the others asked Mrs Colville whether or not she was a Calvinist. She did not answer this question directly but rather spoke to the little group about the importance of seeking a personal interest in the Saviour and the need of the new birth. What she had to say concerning the Saviour left a profound impression spiritually upon James McQuilkin and a short time afterwards he came to a saving knowledge of Christ. An unusual, unknown, earnest Christian lady was used by God in the conversion of James McQuilkin who was to become one of the most significant figures in the 1859 revival . . .”¹

Isn't that a wonderful little piece of the story! God is at work, brothers and sisters. Don't be discouraged if you feel sometimes like there's little or no fruit in your ministry. You don't know, you can't see, what He is doing behind the scenes. Press on, and pray for much fruit. He has done great things. He is doing great things. And He will continue to do great things as we watch and pray.

God's Lack of Need

Next we come to verse 4 and must consider God's lack of need. We started with recognizing our great need. The other side of that is recognizing God's lack of need. And this, too, prompts us to pray for revival. Because God is able. God needs nothing. He has absolutely no lack, no deficiency. He is an overflowing fountain of love and grace toward us.

¹<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2009/the-beginning-of-the-1859-revival-in-ulster/>

Back in 2010 we had the privilege of having Bruce and Jodi Ware here at Three Rivers Grace. They led a conference here for us on marriage and parenting. Some of you may remember that. The conference was on Friday and Saturday, and then on Sunday Bruce preached for us. And the title of his sermon was, **“Beholding the God of Self-Sufficient Fullness.”** You can find it a listen to it on the church website. God is completely self-sufficient. He doesn’t depend on us. He doesn’t need us. He is not lonely without us. He’s infinitely happy within the fellowship of the Trinity. He doesn’t receive. He gives.

And that makes Him entirely unique. As verse 4 begins, “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you . . .” In other words, You, O God, are unique. There has never been, there never will be, anyone like You.

Turn for a moment back a several chapters in Isaiah, to chapter 46.

Read **Isaiah 46:1-4**

Do you see the stark contrast between Babylon’s idols and the true God of Israel? Babylon’s idols have to be carried. They can’t help anyone. They need the help of others. But God—the One true God—is entirely different. He doesn’t need to be carried. On the contrary, He carries His people. He doesn’t need to be helped. He helps and saves.

This is the wonder of the Gospel, friends. You don’t come to God carrying something in your hands to give Him, something you think He needs from you, something you think will put Him in your debt. That is the anti-gospel. The Gospel, the message that is truly Good News, is that we come with empty hands, open hands, to receive from Him. Therefore to come to Him rightly, we must understand our desperate need and His complete lack of need.

Bruce Ware, in that sermon on “Beholding the God of Self-Sufficient Fullness,” had a great quote from **C. S. Lewis**, from his book on the Problem of Pain. Lewis described God’s love as **“bottomlessly selfless, by very definition; it has everything to give and nothing to receive”** (p. 50). The Apostle Paul, when he was addressing the Areopagus in Acts 17, said this, **“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”** (Acts 17:24–25, ESV) You see, He doesn’t need anything. He doesn’t receive things from us that would shore up some deficiency. For He has no deficiency. He gives. He overflows.

You cannot, you must not, come to God as though you can give Him something He needs. You cannot have a relationship with God that way. You must come to Him acknowledging His self-sufficiency and your utter dependence on Him.

And do you know why it must be this way? Because this way God gets all the glory, and we get none of the glory. Isn't that beautiful!? God acts for those who wait for Him. God works for those who wait for Him. He does the work, and therefore He gets all the credit. He gets the applause. He gets the glory, as He should. We don't get any glory. We need to learn how good that is for us, not to get any glory. We don't need glory. We think we need it. But we don't. What we need is help. We need to be rescued from ourselves. We need to be given more of God. We need, and what we really truly want, deep down, is to know the joy of being in God's presence.

And that should set us to praying for revival. Oh, God, please cure me of my addiction to self. Please convince me of my need for You, and help me to see the beauty of Your self-sufficiency.

Isaiah 40 ends with that great verse about waiting on the Lord, "those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." In my sermon on that passage I shared a few points from Charles Spurgeon about what it means to wait upon the Lord. Those points are helpful again here as we read that God acts for those who wait for him. What does it look like to wait for the Lord? Does it mean we sit around and do nothing? No. Here are 3 important aspects.

Waiting on the Lord

Spurgeon speaks of *waiting* in terms of *dependence*, *expectation*, and *patience*.

First, **dependence**. And here he gets right to the heart of the Gospel. "They rest in God's righteousness as their righteousness, and they receive the great sacrifice provided by God to be their atonement and their acceptance. No man is really a Christian who finds his hope and confidence within himself; he must be looking out of himself to God in Christ Jesus." So you see to wait upon the Lord is to look outside of yourself to a comfort and salvation that you cannot earn but can only be given to you. We depend upon the Lord.

The second thing Spurgeon talks about is **expectation**. "We wait upon God as the birds in the nest wait upon the parent bird, expecting from her their food. Before she comes you hear

their cries, and when she comes if you look into the nest you will see nothing but so many gaping mouths, all waiting, expecting to be filled by the mother-bird. Now, that is just what a church of God ought to be—a company of wide-opened mouths waiting to be filled by the Lord alone. . . . Do you not think that some churches, and some Christians, with very small expectations, have scarcely learned to open their mouths at all? . . . Oh, friends, let us expect more of God, and we shall receive more.”

That’s like Lloyd-Jones’ comment about puny prayers. Let’s not pray puny prayers. Let’s pray big prayers to our big God.

Finally, Spurgeon speaks of **patience**, “that we may endure affliction, persevere in holiness, continue in hope, and abide in our integrity.” This is the sometimes painful part of waiting upon the Lord. There are hard times. There are challenges in life. There are temptations. There are situations that pressure us to compromise. But waiting upon the Lord means we are patient and persistent in following Him. We must submit to His will for us and continue to follow His lead even when it’s difficult.

Let’s close by considering this, by considering prayer and patience, and what those might look like in our lives in the coming week.

Prayer

This sermon has been about praying for revival. I hope you’ll consider that in your own life. Spend some time examining your own heart, your spiritual needs, and the areas where you’ve become calloused or hard-hearted. Repent of those things and beg God to do a mighty work in your life. Look to Him and His self-sufficiency.

In the hallway are prayer guides that we began using a couple years ago as we’ve prayed for God to use us to have an increasing impact in this region for the glory of Christ. You might want to take one of those on your way out. Read over the Scripture passages and use those verses to direct your prayers.

Patience

And in terms of patience, waiting for the Lord. Waiting is difficult for us, isn’t it? Mrs. Colville had trouble with patience as she was reaching out to people. She became discouraged and wanted to quit, because she wasn’t seeing the results she had hoped for. But God was using her.

When it comes to ministry, when it comes to parenting, when it comes to driving in heavy traffic and many other situations, let’s pray for God’s grace to make us patient people. That ought to be a direct outworking of our waiting upon the Lord. He’s the One who is able. He’s the One who will accomplish all

of His purposes, and He will get it done in just the right timing that He has planned. Therefore we can follow Him and obey Him and cheerfully busy ourselves in the tasks He graciously gives us to do. And we can lay our heads on the pillow at night and fall asleep knowing that He is getting His work done. We need not fret ourselves with that. Our role is not to work for Him, but to wait on Him.