

**Isaiah 64:5-12 (NKJV)**

**5 You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, *Who* remembers You in Your ways.**

**You are indeed angry, for we have sinned-- In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved.**

**6 But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.**

**7 And *there is* no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities. /**

**8 But now, O LORD, You *are* our Father; We *are* the clay, and You our potter; And all we *are* the work of Your hand.**

**9 Do not be furious, O LORD, Nor remember iniquity forever; Indeed, please look--we all *are* Your people!**

**10 Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.**

**11 Our holy and beautiful temple, Where our fathers praised You, Is burned up with fire; And all our pleasant things are laid waste.**

**12 Will You restrain Yourself because of these *things*, O LORD? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?**

To keep the context of our text this week I wanted to do a quick review of last week. Our brother Ortlund does it very succinctly so I decided to use his words. He says,

“First, we're like an unclean leper. I could warn everyone I meet, "Hi, I'm Ray Ortlund, and I'm contagious with the leprosy of sin. You'd better keep your distance. I might mess up your life." Secondly, even at our best moments, when we do what's right, we're not as good as we look. All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. It's not just our sins that stink; our righteousness stinks. Thirdly, our vitality fades away like a brittle, autumn leaf. We're easily depleted. We just don't last. Fourthly, our iniquities, like the wind, take control of us and move us in directions we never meant to go. And we're not very good at taking hold of the only One who can save us. You and I do not need to be delivered from our **enemies**; **primarily**, we need to be delivered from **ourselves**. So we look to the very One we have offended as all our hope.”

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

So we begin in verse 8 with the realization of **what we bring to God's picnic**. We come understanding our deep seated needs.

We come realizing that we are like a **lump of clay** that looks very little like what we should look like. And left to our own devices and strength and resources we stand **no chance** of making the changes that are needed in our lives. We have seen that the **best that we can produce** through our own efforts has **nothing to be desired** and **much to be despised**.

It is important that we start from this understanding or we will trust **ourselves** for what we should only **trust Christ** for. Mike used to say that the only reason to come to Christ is our sin. This seems extreme, and it is not a bible verse, but think about it. If you come to Christ for any other reason, you will tend to come to Him for **what you hope to get from Him**. And if at some point He stops providing that thing, you will feel justified in abandoning your faith in Him.

But if you come to Christ because of **sin**, you will understand your relationship with Christ properly. You will come to Him on **His terms** appealing only to grace.

If you come to Christ for Him to **meet some other need**, there is no need to appeal to, or to appreciate Grace. It is like stopping at a **fair booth vendor** who is giving something away and you take it. It is a free gift that you did nothing to earn. But there is no fundamental need for grace. You would have no understanding that **you deserve** something completely opposite and awful and devastating. You would have no idea that repentance is required. You would not understand the magnitude of the gift you are receiving and all the implications that are involved in receiving it. There might be a hundred places you can go to have a more peaceful life, have less fear, have less worry, have a reason to live, have a friend who loves you, and even have hope for things to get better. There are lots of ways and places for us to **feel better in this life**. And those felt needs are often the things that drive us to look for an answer, for something better.

But it is our understanding of our **sin** that creates in us the proper attitude toward Christ and the salvation He offers. There is only **one** place to find true forgiveness of sin. There is only **one** place where the **sin that is us** can have its condemnation **of us** removed. And only as we understand that, and often it is a process, can we really get what true Christianity really is. Only then will we say, "Jesus, here I am. I am yours. And I feel eternally blessed to even get the opportunity to say this."

That is why, when we explain the Gospel, it is important for us to include this problem of sin. When we watched the video months ago about one method of presenting the gospel, it spoke of being **broken**. And that is helpful in understanding why our lives are so messed up. That helps us in a proper perspective of our behavior. That helps us understand our perspective. But we also have to mention **God's perspective**. While we are **broken** in our view, we are **damned** in His view. Our sin is so repulsive that He would be wrong to be in relationship to us as long as that sin remains an obstacle in our relationship. As we understand **that** we begin to understand what relationship we are being called into. God is seen no longer as a nice service provider to make our lives better. God becomes the only Savior to save us from that which condemns us, that which we could never overcome. We need far more than someone who will help us with the rough spots in our lives. We need a **complete overhaul** and we have to depend wholly upon **Him** to do it. I have heard people say that our presentation of the gospel does not really have to emphasize sin. We can appeal to the other reasons that people want to come to Christ. But I think they are fundamentally flawed. They might result in turning to Christ, but it will not result in coming to Christ in a way that **one is ready to follow Him to death**. Only an appreciation of grace results in a proper understanding of salvation. If there is no bad news, the good news will never seem good enough to deserve our all. Christ died to save us from **SIN**. And if it were not for that, He would not have needed to die. Think about that. Is Sin the only reason to truly come to Christ?

That is where we arrive this morning. We arrive at a point that sin will logically take us. Our sin, our lostness, our cleverness, our ingenuity, our willpower, our persistence will not do any of the things we desperately need done for us. So we are left with only **one** thing to rely upon. **The Potter**.  
**<sup>8</sup> But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand.**

This is the proper perspective of our lives.

Now how do we experience life? Do we experience it this way? No. Our seemers don't reveal this wonderful truth. Did **God give us** our homes? No, our seemers say we worked for years and are paying them off or have paid them off. Did **God cause us** to come to Christ? No. Our seemers say we decided to come to Christ for any number of reasons. Is it **God working in us** to will and to do according to His good pleasure. No. Our seemers say we see something we think we ought to do and we do it. We are deciding to follow Christ.

But as always our seemers are broken. Our perceptions are incomplete. We only see part of what is going on. And if God did not reveal the rest, we would never know it.

Our verse 8 begins with the word **but**. This is the **but** where our sin stops and God begins. **But God**. Those are some of the most wonderful words in scripture and we find them often. How fitting they would be for all of our tombstones. Jon Zeigler- But God.

Our salvations are all described as a "**but God**" situation. And look at the two parties here. Potter and clay. If you were describing how salvation happens in a human being, is this the imagery you would choose? It isn't what I would naturally choose. I would use an imagery that is more interactive. Sheep and a shepherd is even better than a potter and clay. The sheep might do stupid stuff but at least they do stuff. Maybe they show some good sense once in a while and do what they are told. But not clay. Clay just sits there.

A potter **acts**. Clay is **acted upon**. There is no give and take. One causes. The other is being caused.

We cannot help but visit Romans now.

#### **Romans 9:20-24 (NKJV)**

**20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"**

**21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?**

**22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,**

**23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,**

**24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?**

I have heard credible explanations of this passage that maintain an Armenian slant, but I don't think they are accurate. They may be faithful and sincerely held, but I think they are still wrong. Spurgeon said that as long as this passage is in the Bible he cannot explain salvation otherwise.

It is all of God's causing. And His sovereignty is shown reigning supreme. There is no adjustment to what the clay might someday do. He is shown **determining** what the clay will do. And it will do it.

And Paul went into detail to show that the base material God is working with has no difference. The clay is all the same. There is not some clay that is superior so it will respond to the gospel. There isn't smart clay and stupid clay. There is not pliable clay and stubborn clay. In fact there is nothing of the

clay that decides what will be created. Our salvation is **all of God**. He took the same clay and created two different kinds of vessels. Do we think we are smart to be here with our lives committed to Christ and depending upon Him for our salvation. Well there is absolutely no smarter thing to do, but it did not happen because we are smart. **God chose**. And we are the blessed receivers of His inexhaustible love.

Now back to verse 8 of our text.

**And all we *are* the work of Your hand.**

The prayer being offered in our larger text appeals to the Potter. And it is appealing to **the Potter's will**. It is not saying we are such desirable people that you should give us what we ask. It is more like, you made these pots to **serve a use** in glorifying you. So we have reason to expect that you will move in that regard when we pray according to that evident will.

As a side point, and one I, and probably all of us are prone to forget, is that every believer is the work of God's hand. God performed a miracle to bring that person into relationship with Him. So when we are dealing with each other, we need to consider that. Sometimes we become frustrated with each other. That happens in every family. But at the end of the day, we are still family. God has done something supernatural to make us family. We did not choose who His children are. He did. So we had better recognize that every time we are dealing with a fellow believer we are dealing with a person that God chose to bring to Himself. And the reasoning in First John is that if He loves His children, we better love them too.

We might not know how to best love them at times. And our best efforts may be a mix of encouraging and discouraging. But we cannot give up on one another.

We are all the work of the Potter's hand.

**<sup>9</sup> Do not be furious, O LORD, Nor remember iniquity forever; Indeed, please look--we all *are* Your people!**

Verse 9 answers this question. **What response from God do we deserve when we sin?** The answer- **God being furious with us.**

I like how King James puts it. Be not wroth very sore. It means exceedingly wrathful.

Are you considering committing a known sin? Consider this. What you are considering deserves God's ferocity. Is it really worth doing? Are we so spoiled that we must have our own way no matter what? That is an exceedingly dangerous game. Do you feel powerless over a particular sin? This is what God says.

## Romans 6:4-7 (NKJV)

**4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**

**5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection,**

**6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.**

**7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.**

We can say we sin because we like it, we want it, it surprised us, we were ignorant. But we cannot say we did it because we could not do otherwise. That is a lie we tell ourselves to our own demise.

Then Isaiah says

### **Nor remember iniquity forever**

We have talked about this a good bit lately in Sunday School. Omniscience means God remembers everything. So how can we hope he will forget something? How can God forget something and still be Omniscient. And the truth is, He cannot. But scripture often refers to forgetting, not as something that can no longer be remembered, but something that is **not brought in account against us**. When God forgets our sin, it is not as though He no longer knows that it happens, as though if an angel said to God, I saw this person do this, God would say "No it did not because I cannot remember it and I am omniscient." The great truth is that it will not be remembered **as evidence against us for judgment**. It will not be recalled as evidence. That is the beauty of it.

Isaiah is calling out to God that, because God has chosen a people to be His people and they have sinned, that God would not hold that sin in remembrance forever. Because Isaiah knew that as long as sin was remembered against them it would earn God's ferocity. The people needed God's forgiveness.

Now we get a few more cues about Isaiah's reasoning.

**10 Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.**

**11 Our holy and beautiful temple, Where our fathers praised You, Is burned up with fire; And all our pleasant things are laid waste.**

**12 Will You restrain Yourself because of these *things*, O LORD? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?**

Isaiah is looking at God's people and the promised land. This land and this people were known to be followers of the God Jehovah. In the surrounding lands, the **fate of the people** and the **fate of the land** would be reflections on the name of the God they served. **God's name** was being slandered due to the state of the land and the people.

That is the big deal. Did the people deserve what they got. Naturally. They got less than they deserved in the way they blatantly followed idols and would serve that idol, no matter how much it dishonored their God. So there was no issue with how the people were treated.

But there was a huge problem regarding what was happening to **God's name** and **God's reputation**.

So Isaiah was praying according to God's will, according to that which best served God's interest. He was praying, in essence, thy Kingdom come Thy will be done.

Isaiah is essentially praying, God you deserve better than this. You deserve the whole world looking at you in awe and praise. So rise up and **bring to yourself the honor you deserve**. And since you have been the potter that raised up this people, and since you have associated yourself with those people and the land you have given them, consider the state that both of them are in. Move to action to show yourself Holy.

The alternative is that you give us what we deserve. Which will you choose? Will you give us fully what we deserve? Or will you honor yourself and restore your people and your lands so you get the honor and glory you deserve?

That is the essence of what Isaiah is praying for. And it is a very good prayer to model after.

When we look at the state of the church in America, we should pray accordingly. **God deserves better**. The statistics of divorce and sex outside of marriage are nearly the same inside the so-called church as outside of it. Very few of the so-called church have ever told another person how to be right with Christ. The vast majority of kids coming out of so-called Christian families never go on to serve Christ. And these are just a few of the evidences of the state of the church.

**Christ deserves better than this**. So to pray in that regard is very fitting. Maybe we should pray that God purify His church. And normally His method for doing this is persecution. God certainly deserves better than what those who call themselves His are giving Him.

How about our lives?

Are all of our pleasant things laid waste? These people are looking back on the good old days when the people were faithfully obeying and serving God. They were the days when God was honored and obeyed in their families and in their worship of God. The land prospered. The fellowship with God and each other was rich. But something had happened. A distance had grown between them and their God.

Now they look back and those things are laid waste. They no longer hold what they used to hold. And what is the answer? Prayer and repentance. The problem is not one of style. It is one of substance. What the people **are** is different than what **they used to be**. At one time they would do what the Lord said because they loved Him. They did not care what it cost them. The Lord was their everything.

But love of something else replaced their love of God. They picked up something else that **they would serve** at any expense. They picked up something else **they must have** at any expense. They were no longer willing to do what God said because God said it. Now they had reasons and excuses for it not mattering what God said, what God wanted. And they were going to do what **their idol required** instead of doing what **God said** to do. Serving their idol became what all their thoughts and energies were focused around. The one true God became an icon that they had fond sentimentalities toward, but it would not move them to obedience when obedience distracted them from the worship of their idols.

And now when they look back, they do not have what they used to have. The pleasant things they had are gone. And one thing is for sure. It is not because God has changed.

This whole prayer we have been studying is one for renewal. And it is not complicated. Christian renewal is simple. It starts with repentance. It starts with telling the truth to God about ourselves that is very hard to tell. "I have sinned. I have willingly and intentionally and knowingly sinned because I wanted to. I wanted what I wanted more than I wanted what you wanted." That is us. That may not describe **all** of our sins. But it describes the ones that easily beset us. That is our flesh's default position. It should never surprise a mature Christian to see this sad truth about ourselves. We don't need to pretend. We don't need to skirt the issue. When we **dodge our guilt** we merely **waste our time**. Much of the time we have sinned because we wanted to sin. We didn't **have** to. We **wanted** to.

Can we say this about OUR sin? If we can't, we shouldn't expect to get far in our relationships with God. Truth is at the heart of all repentance.



When we have come clean with God, we can then begin to appeal to Him to do His will in our lives and in our surroundings. We can pray that God reveal Himself as who He really is in our world through us.

And guess what might happen? Christ may bring hard times into your life so He can show off what a person of faith does when they confront difficult circumstances. Christ may want to show off what faith **Christ deserves** from a human. He may want to receive glory by those who trust Him, no matter what happens in their lives. Will you invite Him to glorify Himself **in your life** if this is what is required? Is He really worth that much to you? Or do we see it as God's job to eliminate the hard things from our lives? Is He not really worthy of facing anything hard for Him?

What is our worship of God really like? What would someone watching our lives conclude about how important God really is to us? What is His worth? Do we regard God as the Sovereign Potter who controls all things? Do we long for His name to be glorified, no matter what the cost? Do we dedicate ourselves to His glory and do those things that will bring Him glory in our lives. Do we look like people who really get it, like we really understand the weight of the sin that Christ took upon Himself so we could live?

There is one thing for sure. God is worthy. Christ is worthy of a faithful life. And He invites us to call upon Him to work in our lives to produce glory for Himself. We can pray to this mighty Potter to perfect this clay production He has going. And God responds to those prayers.