

Isaiah 63:15 to 64:5a How much do you want of God?

Isaiah 63:15-19 (NKJV)

15 Look down from heaven, And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where *are* Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained?

16 Doubtless You *are* our Father, Though Abraham was ignorant of us, And Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, *are* our Father; Our Redeemer from Everlasting *is* Your name.

17 O LORD, why have You made us stray from Your ways, *And* hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, The tribes of Your inheritance.

18 Your holy people have possessed *it* but a little while; Our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary.

19 We have become *like* those of old, over whom You never ruled, Those who were never called by Your name.

Isaiah 64:1-12 (NKJV)

1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence--

2 As fire burns brushwood, As fire causes water to boil-- To make Your name known to Your adversaries, *That* the nations may tremble at Your presence!

3 When You did awesome things *for which* we did not look, You came down, The mountains shook at Your presence.

4 For since the beginning of the world *Men* have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

5 You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, *Who* remembers You in Your ways. You are indeed angry, for we have sinned

We are going to look at a prayer this morning. This is one of those prayers that we can enthusiastically join in praying. And we will know that we are praying a prayer that **God will answer**. And at the same time, it may not be a prayer that He answers **swiftly**.

Our lives are often full of troubles that get all of our attention. Over time we can easily begin to be absorbed by them and see nothing else. We forget about our bigger purpose. We even forget about the blessings God has showered us with. And all we can see is what is amiss. All we can see is what we do not have. All we think about is what we do not like.

And then a prayer like this comes along. And if we **allow ourselves**, we can be swept into a greater perspective, a greater purpose for our lives than our

temporary peace and happiness. Even the **difficulties** take on **purpose** as we see that **God is at work**. And He wants us to join in with Him on His greater purposes for our lives. We are not our own. We were bought with a price. Our lives are not primarily for **our** benefit. They are for **God's benefit**. As such, each day brings us God given assignments. We are to obey Him while trusting that the situation He has placed us in is exactly the assignment we must deal with today.

What would change in our lives if we accepted **every circumstance in our lives** as a **God selected assignment** for us in living out a life to please Him? How would that change our perspective on life? Would that not set us free from wasting so much time with all the "what if's" and "if only's" that just spin our wheels and keep us from moving ahead?

And at this point you might say, that is easy for you to say Jon. Your life is free of the stuff I face. And you might be right. In many ways God has given me light duty. But if it is true, it is true no matter what our experience is. Isaiah is going to show us things about God this morning. And Isaiah is going to show us what a true relationship with God should grow into.

We can break the text into 3 parts.

In 63:15 and 16 Isaiah longs for the love of God and then laments in verses 17-19 our hard heartedness.

In 64:1-5a Isaiah longs for the presence of God (this is where we will end this morning) and then Isaiah laments over our long standing sins in verse 5b-7

In 64: 8 and 9 Isaiah longs for the touch of God and in 10-12 He appeals to God for Him to respond.

Now let's jump in.

15 Look down from heaven, And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where are Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained?

I simply cannot begin talking about this better than our brother Ortland does. He says:

This prayer **begins** with Isaiah agonizing over the way God is withholding his compassion from his people, and it **ends** with Isaiah asking God to **stop restraining** his love and power. *The whole prayer is for God to visit us without holding himself back at all.* There He is in his holy and beautiful heavenly palace, as it were. We're down here in our mediocrity. What's the answer? Not more of us. The only answer is more of God.

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

Remember how Jesus taught us to pray.

Matthew 6:9-13 (NKJV)

⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

The prayer Jesus taught us to pray starts with God. And central in our prayer, right from the start is the status of the Kingdom of God. It comes before our **circumstances**, our **troubles**, our **trials**. That is how we are to **think**, that is how we are to **orient our lives**, and that is how we are to **pray**.

That is how Isaiah prays. And notice how Isaiah orients here.

First He recognizes the Sovereign God. He does not have a God who is **in trouble**. He does not have a God who **needs help**. His God is not out of control. No. He sees God as God is. He is outside of our realm. He lives outside of our experience. His is a Holy and Glorious habitation. How could it not be? This is our Father in Heaven who is Hallowed.

This is the kingdom we are to desire having on earth. This is where the proper perspective to our every thought **starts**. From **where God lives**.

Do you see the God you serve **like this**? Do you see Him **worthy of any sacrifice**? Do you see your life as **designed to serve His cause**? Do you see **His kingdom coming** as being **worth any price**?

How do we live?

And notice that Isaiah recognizes that this God he is praying to **sees**. Isaiah knows that he is not going to tell God anything that this God in heaven doesn't already know. He is not going to try to educate God on what God ought to be doing in His life **if He has any love for Isaiah**. **We** might think about God like that. But that is not how **Isaiah** thought of God.

Now we move to the million dollar question.

Where *are* Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained?

Are you ever troubled by the difference in the Christian life the New Testament describes and the life you live? Are we troubled by what the church in Acts did and what we do? Are we troubled with the difference of what **ought to be** and what **is**? Well that is a good thing to be troubled about. But the focus, in this regard, has to be a mixture of **internal** and **external**. If all I see is how **everyone else** ought to be changing, I am not in the struggle as I should be. With Isaiah, he started with himself and we should to.

And he did not make excuses. He did not pretend all was well when it was not well. He knew that His experience of God was not as rich as it should be. The power of God in His life was not as powerful as it should be. And he didn't start by looking around. He started by first looking at God and then looking at Himself. And He starts with a very good question.

It is essentially, **“why are you restraining your power and your mercy and your relational closeness from me? Why are you holding yourself back from me?”**

Now, when we are dealing with humans we are dealing with needy people. Sometimes they withhold closeness from us through no fault of our own. Maybe they are insecure, or afraid of intimacy, or they don't know themselves, or won't reveal themselves well enough to have a deep relationship. Or maybe they simply **don't want** closeness to us. There can be a million reasons. Maybe we, too, are guilty of those reasons I just listed. Who knows? But with God it is completely different. God **promises** us something completely different.

James 4:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.

This promise is basically that we have about as much closeness with God as what we really want. And we might think, no that can't be true. I want to be much closer to God than I am. And that might be true. We might sentimentally desire it. We can imagine it being much better than it is and we want what we imagine. But the cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts part..... we might not be so wild about that side of the equation.

Closeness to God is conditional. Mike used to say that if you aren't as close to God as you used to be, guess who moved? **God is consistent in offering relationship to us.** Sometimes our experience of his closeness ebbs and flows, but over all we have about as much of God as we are willing to cater to. The problems we have in our relationship with God are always on **our side.** Have you ever had a time of extreme relational intimacy with another human being? And what I am talking about has little or nothing to do with physical intimacy. It is those rare times on earth when you truly connect with a person. It is the time when you trust another human being enough to be gut level honest about those places that **you are most afraid of exposing**, those things about us that no one else knows. And the person you are with truly accepts you just as you are. These events often happen over camp fires or kitchen tables. But the thing they have in common is **trust** that leads to **risking all we** are on the other person. We give them a huge capacity to hurt

us. But we trust they will not. And when it goes well, those events are the highlights of our relational lives. That is the mountain top of Christian friendship.

And while all of us probably want that emotional high point, we might not be so willing to pay that cost, to take that chance, to dig deep and tell the real truth about ourselves. We want to keep things in vague terms. We want the other person to do all the heavy lifting. But we don't want to be exposed. We don't want the risk to be ours.

Well it is sort of like that with God except that, along with being our heavenly Friend, He is also our Sovereign Lord. So when we approach Him in relationship we have to mean it when we say, **I am yours**. We have to mean it when we say, I will do whatever you command me. We need to mean it when we say I will obey you, with your help, in anything you ask me **to do or be or pay**. We must come to Him **fully exposed** and **fully open** to His direction, even knowing that this kind of thing is very scary. We can know that He is likely to ask us to do the very thing we have failed at 100 times before. He is like that because He wants what is best for His children.

Do you want closeness with God? Do you want closeness to God on God's terms? Test Him and see that the Lord is good. Try Him this week by coming to Him with this attitude. Lay down your resistance and struggling and kicking against the Lord and come to Him saying your equivalent of, Here I am Lord, your servant. No if's ands or buts. Just I am yours and I will do what you say. And see what the Lord will do. What will God do with a church of people who are all doing that. Things could get pretty exciting I think.

Back to Isaiah. He says **Are your mercies restrained?** He is saying, why are you holding out on me God? Why are you distancing yourself from me? He goes on.

¹⁶ Doubtless You *are* our Father, Though Abraham was ignorant of us, And Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, *are* our Father; Our Redeemer from Everlasting *is* Your name.

The wording in this verse is probably saying that Abraham and Israel are of no help to us. He is emphasizing that **God** is the Father of the nation. He alone deserves the credit, and He alone can be **depended upon** to enable it to continue. The emphasis is the **YOU** are our Father. **You** are the one who Redeemed us. **You** are the one who is forever. **You and you alone** are God. And you are distanced from this. And this is a real problem. You are the one **we need**. And you are the One **we don't have**. Now why is that?

¹⁷ O LORD, why have You made us stray from Your ways, *And* hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, The tribes of

Your inheritance.

18 Your holy people have possessed *it* but a little while; Our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary.

19 We have become *like* those of old, over whom You never ruled, Those who were never called by Your name.

This is a very interesting passage.

Is Isaiah blaming God for Israel's sin? Is he trying to get out of the responsibility for **his sins** as well as **those of the people**? After all if God makes us stray from His ways, who are we to resist God?

Well, have you ever watched a child be sneaky and pretend to obey their parents and then sneak their rebellious behavior? The parent would be foolish to pretend they are hoodwinked by their kids behavior. They would wish that their child would at least be honest and **openly defiant** so it becomes easier to address.

The same would be true of a spouse becoming more and more engrossed with another love. There is a jealousy that would long for the truth to be exposed. Well, when God's people become engrossed with **idols of their choosing**, but they still go through **the motions of true worship of God** and they even **convince themselves** that they are serving Him, God will see to it that their **actions** will reveal the condition of their hearts.

He will cause their **outward actions** to reflect the **internal heart condition**. They have already strayed from God **in their worship**. It is only a fitting discipline for them to follow that by straying from God **with their actions**, their behavior. Much as Pharaoh hardened his own heart and God hardened Pharaoh's heart, there is no loss of human responsibility. God is seeing to it that the people are bearing the fruit of **their loveless devotion to God**.

It is very dangerous to play religious with God. He will expose us when we do this. In Romans 1 there is a path of degeneration. It happens when people deny God. We will find that trend is true of us too, if we pretend a spirituality we do not live. We will find that any godless religion based on fleshly desires is just as likely to slay God's son as was the Pharisees religion, no matter what theology we might say we have.

Then Isaiah appeals for God to return for his servant's sakes. Maybe this is for the **true servant's sakes** or maybe this is in an effort to **restore** the true servanthood of the **followers** of God. He calls them **the tribes of Your inheritance**. And we were adopted into this family if we are believers. Now look at the progression here. The generations started as being true followers of God, the ones in verse 19 over whom God did rule. But they departed from a true love and service to God. They began their heart descent.

And God hurried it along. He caused this people to have no semblances of spirituality left. The **land is desolate** that was **designated** for the true people of God. It has been trodden down by the enemies of God. And the people have become just like everyone else. They are indistinguishable from the common idol worshippers that surrounded them. They no longer look like the people of God.

I wonder if this does not explain some of the problems with evangelism that we face. Could it be that the problem is not that **the world isn't dark enough** but that **our light isn't light enough**? Could it be that there is not a big enough difference between us and those who surround us? Could it be that we do not look like people who are **absolutely submitted to the rule and reign of King Jesus in our day to day lives**?

It is a question worth considering.

Whatever the case, we can see here the reason for God distancing Himself from His people. It was a result of their sinful choices. They have fallen away from God.

This prayer of Isaiah is truly a prayer for revival. It is a dramatic prayer for God to show up just as He is and to shake things up. And what we will see next is very powerful.

Isaiah 64:1-12 (NKJV)

**¹ Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!
That the mountains might shake at Your presence--**

In our culture we are surrounded by a view of Christianity that perceives **God** as being **the servant of man**. He should make us happy. He should protect us from all hard things. He should never allow misfortune to befall us. We should have a more pleasant life than those around us who are not believers. If God allows hard times in our lives we feel double crossed. We feel let down. He has not lived up to what we expected of Him. And that is reason enough for us to abandon our obedience and trust of Him and to live as if something is wrong with our God.

What Isaiah asks for here is the exact opposite of all this. He is calling upon **this scary powerful God** to show up in all His might and grandeur. He is calling upon God to show up in **His world**, in **His life**, in **His surroundings**. That is a foolish prayer to anyone but the person who is truly following Christ. Because our God is a God that shakes things up. He disrupts everything when He shows up. You don't pray this prayer when you want a safe life. You don't pray this prayer when you are in love with the things this life offers. If the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is driving anything that

you do, the last thing you want is for the Lord to show up. He will ruin that kind of living.

But if what you want is **God and God alone**, if what you want is the **presence of God** and the **Glory of God**, if you see your life's sole purpose as being **for the glory of God**, you will pray like Isaiah, God bring it on. Show up. Show up in my life. Show up in my church. Show up in my world. Shake it all up. Because it is all about your glory.

And we can bet **when God shows up, stuff happens**, stuff that is unshakable shakes. Hard hearts get broken. Impossible breaches in relationships get healed. People who are proud repent and confess their sins. Sin gets exposed. Events happen that cause us to change. Life gets uncomfortable but truly purposeful.

Think about this seriously. Do we really want to pray, "God come down into my home 24/7 and straighten out the things my family does." "God come down into our church family 24/7 and tell us exactly what you want us to do and be, no matter how much it costs us." Is that really what we want?

Well we already have His word and His spirit and His people around us. How do we respond to their interaction? That is a pretty good indication of how much we really want God to show up. How do we react now when the truth intervenes in our lives and directs us to do what God wants. To the degree that we want that, that is about the degree that we want God's presence.

² As fire burns brushwood, As fire causes water to boil-- To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence!

³ When You did awesome things *for which* we did not look, You came down, The mountains shook at Your presence.

Here we are reminded of what happens when God's presence arrives. Stuff shakes. Do we want stuff to shake. Call upon God. Do we want to be comfortable? God may not really be welcome with us.

God is scary. And we should never lose sight of that. But there is another aspect of God with which we can never lose sight.

⁴ For since the beginning of the world *Men* have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

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

This world has lots of imaginary "so called" gods. And they all offer a way to themselves through some kind of self effort, some way of reaching God by

trying hard, some way that allows us to slap ourselves on the back and say, oh boy, aren't I worthy?

But since the beginning, no one has seen a God like the true God. No one has seen a God who would send His own Son to take upon Himself the wrath that each of us deserved. No one has seen a God like ours. And what does He do?

Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

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

Remember what we looked at in Hebrews 11?

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

⁶ But without faith *it is impossible to please God*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

This truly is the kind of God we serve. He does not hold out fellowship and then give it to us sometimes, and withhold it sometimes, like a fickle girlfriend. No. God **acts** for the one who waits for Him.

But wait you say. That didn't work out so well for me. I waited on Him and things turned out badly. Well the obvious question is **how long is God worth waiting for?** And how **good are you at evaluating what is good for you for eternity and what is not good for you for eternity?** The good God has in mind for you doesn't limit itself to the 70 year age limit. He has good plans for eternity. And our waiting doesn't end at the **first disappointment** in this life. It end on **our last breath**. The next thing we will see after our last breath is the thing that we should **begin** our evaluation of God's goodness with. On that day no one is going to answer the question, "**was this worth waiting for?**" by saying, "**oh no. This is a huge disappointment.**" No. All of us will feel instant regret that we did not trust Christ more. We will wish we had trusted Him enough to do **anything** and **everything** He asked of us. Because we will see instantly that His **reward** for us, His **love** for us, His **preparation** for us will be worth infinitely more than we ever sacrificed.

God truly acts for the one who waits for Him. He responds to our trust in Him. And our trust is measured by **our enjoyment of Him** and **our obedience to Him**. We rejoice and do what He says. And we orient our lives around what God wants.

Now I think it is good to look at what God does not react to. He does not react to the one who simply **intends** to do things for God. He does not respond with favor to the one who **feels sentimentally positive toward God**, who like the **idea** of God. No. The real evidence of a person who knows God is a changed life. It is evidence of orienting real **day to day life** in the hassles and struggles

of real life to a Christ who has died in our place. It is a person who shows signs of new life by doing the **impossible things** of changing life patterns because of the **new life** that is in us and the **resurrection power of Christ** that was infused in us. There is no such thing as a **powerless resurrection** or a **powerless Christian life**.

Do you want more of God this morning? His promises are always true. And they are held out to you this morning. How much do you want of God?

Let's commit to praying this prayer to God this week- **Here I am Lord, and I will do whatever you want me to do.**

Are you afraid to pray that prayer? That is OK. Tell God that you are afraid. But pray it anyway. And let's see what God will do.

Pray

Now in honor of Phil Turner who has been a pastor for many years I would like to close with a benediction. That is how Phil always closed His services.

Numbers 6:24-26 (NKJV)

²⁴ "The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;

²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace." '