

Sermon on Isaiah 63:15-64:12 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

I have to make a confession... I am not all that “good” at prayer. I do okay with some intercession (praying for specific requests for other people ie: Auntie’s health, or my own momentary needs like a parking spot.) But when it comes to the big, revival-sized prayers, the kind I think I want to pray; I don’t find myself in that arena often and ill equipped when I do.

Not that my prayers are the vital link in causation but God has revealed through Scripture that he intends for his people to pray... even big audacious prayers.

So we go looking for models, just like the disciples did as they walked with Jesus.

Right after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a workshop in prayer. He says we shouldn’t be like the hypocrites who are all show and no authenticity. OR the Gentiles who pile up empty phrases as if the more words means more chance of being heard.

Instead when we pray it is to be like this:

Matthew 6:9–13 “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 also have forgiven our debtors. [13] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (ESV)

If we can’t trust the model of prayer that the Savior of the world gives us, what hope do we have! What ends up happening though is I see this as a remedial prayer and have in my mind some super-spiritualized rendition saved for, well the super-spiritual. Or I focus on the parts about me and prayer becomes “give us this day our daily parking spot...”

Don’t get me wrong, daily provision and the forgiveness of sin, deliverance from temptation, these are good things. But I end up neglecting the bigness of the holy name of God, what it means for his kingdom to come - to be present on earth as it is in heaven.

Isaiah helps us here. The prophet calls us to the bigness of prayer and serves as a model for us. Today we want to mine it that we might be stirred to kingdom-coming, presence of God-sized prayers. Prayers that precede the eternal reign of Christ.

Revival prayer is the humble crying out in hunger for more of God.

Isaiah 63:15 - 64:12

Lay of the land - we have been progressing and nearing the finish of this amazing Book of Isaiah. The tail end has been glimpses of renewal, the final restoration of God's people among the nations, the future glory of life with the Messiah - the one who will stand as judge and who extends mercy.

This then is the prayer that follows these promises. The watchman taking no rest in petitioning the Lord.

What we see is that it is a prayer which is Humble, Historical, Hungry, and Huge.

1) Humble

There is a plea for mercy, for deliverance from the difficulty of adversaries and the judgment of God but it is not done from a position of accomplishment. "Oh God save us we are so great!" but rather a posture of humility, of ownership of sin and a lowness before the Holy God.

I think sometimes in prayer we think we won't be heard until we are cleaned-up. Once we get our act together then God will move... there is humility here that seeks action based on who God is not who we are.

Those wandering from the ways of God, hard of heart toward him... **Isaiah 63:19** "We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name." (ESV)

Listen, the very idea of prayer should be a humbling thing. When we rightly see who God is, his authority, his creative power, then we realize we stand like a flea

before the ocean. This is the heart of the watchman in Isaiah... there is nothing of their effort to build up the walls, to earn a hearing, but it is in their lowness they come to the king.

Isaiah 64:5–7 “You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? [6] We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. [7] There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.” (ESV)

Merely the clay in the hands of the potter.

But the humble can come and seek the Lord because they know who he is, the know of his covenant with the people and how he has worked on their behalf.

2) Historical

The watchman cries to God to return for the sake of servants, his people and then comes the “Do It Again!” language. To come and work among the people just like:

Isaiah 64:2–4 “as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! [3] When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. [4] From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.” (ESV)

“The intercessor is following God’s own command in Isaiah 62: 7-8 to remind God of his past actions and to give him no rest until he saves his people.” A. Davis

That is something key in prayer. We don’t seek help from a God who has never been in this business before.

I feel for new doctors... it's one of the reasons they "practice" medicine for so long. If you have a major issue and need to be cut into, you are far more comfortable with the woman who has had 6000 successful operations doing the exact thing she will do to you versus the dude trying it for the first time.

Like getting dentistry done as the dental school - it is cheap for a reason!

But when it comes to the hand of God, his ability to bring his kingdom forth, to serve the purpose of his glory and the good of his people, to launch revival, he has plenty of experience and is the ONLY one who can produce.

This is one of the things I love about studying church history and revival movements, because he has done it before, he can do it again.

One author was recounting the experience of 1963... the nation torn against itself, violence, hatred... And God moved, through a bunch of long-haired hippies and they came to Jesus in droves. Some of you were saved in churches or ministries that tie their existence to that move of God.

The watchmen in Isaiah remembers the stories of God making a fool out of Baal. When the camp followed the pillar of fire and smoke. And he longs for it again.

Oh that the Spirit would give us a historical vision of what God is up to. Dare I say we are poised. A real sense of this sitting in Mexico watching football on Thanksgiving... revival is coming. 'Do it again!'

We want it... when the Lord moves us from a self-centered religion to a Jesus-centered relationship, we want more of him.

3) Hungry

"The prayer is most likely to pierce heaven, which first pierces one's own heart."
Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

Isaiah pleads for the presence of God. “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down...” We don’t quite get the sense from the English here but it is an expression of deep longing for God to act.

To be met by God, to see and hear the God who acts for those who wait for him.

Tragedy of American Christianity, we are more inclined to strategize than seek the Lord for his presence, for his kingdom to come. ‘Don’t pray for me but give me six steps to success.’

But what we have before us is a Spirit-ignited hunger for the things of God, for his way, for his glory, for the expansion of his kingdom.

I don’t know if you have ever had your blood sugar spike and you get woozy and off. Makes me so hungry... and one bite won’t do. I want to binge to solve the hunger.

When our souls are stirred, one nibble won’t do, we need more... we long for God to rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at his presence. This is a huge request.

4) Huge

The reality behind Isaiah 64:1? The felt presence of God. This has been my prayer as of late... increasingly asking for God’s presence. What use to be requests for little divine acts to solve small problems has become a desire to know his presence.

This is a prayer that takes us beyond self and strategy to the enormity of the very presence of God himself. Mountain shaking, heavens rending presence. This is where we see God acts, the Spirit move and Jesus glorified, when his presence is known.

The Lord has in mind for us a passion for his glory that is unrestrained, that we would hunger for his presence coming down into our experience in new ways.

This is huge because typical North American religiosity isn't enough to meet the challenges of our day. We need God to come down.

“God wants us to pray with boldness and passion for the growth of his kingdom. Isn't that what the Lord's Prayer emphasizes? Before we pray for our daily bread, we're taught to pray that God's kingdom will come (Matthew 6:9-13). God also invites us to make our requests about everything known to him (Philippians 4:6). If it matters to us, it matters to him (1 Peter 5:7). God invites us to tell him everything. He's listening. But how can we overlook the main thing God tells us to pray for —the power of his kingdom today? When we're passing around prayer requests in our small groups, is his cause the first thing we mention? Are we praying with God's priorities? Do we understand that all our own happiness is in the victory of God? Are we longing for the descent of God upon us at our church? What could be greater for you, for your family, for your city?” R. Ortlund

This is the type of prayer we see paired with revival, with the historic moves of God. Bold cries for the very presence of God to stir his people and bring him glory.

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Are you inclined toward this kind of prayer? Hungry for it?

If so, we can't proceed without getting historical ourselves. Praying for the presence of God is a big deal and this is what the remnant was praying in Isaiah, waiting on the Lord.

As we reflect on this prayer on the first Sunday of Advent, a season of waiting on the Lord, we must be reminded how this prayer was first answered in the incarnation of Jesus. That Immanuel, God with us, was born taking on flesh, in the most humble of experiences so that he could deliver his people.

His life lived obediently, joyfully working righteousness. Remembering the Father and his ways. Taking on a death our sinfulness deserves and in doing so, making the earth shake. God himself walking out of a borrowed tomb breathing

new life into creation and all that believe. The king who came and is coming again.

“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down...”

“This dramatic plea is fulfilled ultimately in Jesus Christ, in both his first and second advents. At his baptism the heavens were torn open (Mark 1: 10), but amazingly instead of a God of terror throwing lightning bolts to ravage the wicked of the earth, a single dove descended peacefully and landed on Jesus, the Lamb of God! God did tear the heavens open, but instead of wrath for sin, the world received a dovelike Spirit and a lamblike Savior.” A. Davis

“That is why Jesus Christ, our Mediator, must ultimately be the intercessor whose prayer alone God the Father will answer. His righteous acts are alone perfect in God’s sight. Then, in Jesus’s name alone can we fulfill the role of intercessor. Apart from the work of the Spirit, none of us intercedes, none of us strives to take hold of God. Apart from the work of the Redeemer, God would most certainly hide his face from the most righteous intercessor we would choose from our number (v. 7). So the faithful prayer warriors among the church must intercede for God’s elect with humility and total reliance on the finished work of Christ (Heb 10: 20).” A. Davis

Because of Jesus we have access to pray hungry prayers and trust something will happen (it might start in a stable but it is the presence of God at work).

His first arrival gets us to a place of petition because he prayed in the garden before his death for the Father’s will... we stand righteous. We can seek him and his presence in prayer.

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In Isaiah we have now another model of prayer we can lean on in our petitions before the Lord. If you don’t think you are up to it, take heart, the disciples would have been familiar with Isaiah, yet they still ask Jesus how to pray.

So that is our plan, to keep asking, to keep pushing in.

Seek the Presence of God

In yourself - his presence freeing you to believe in his life, death, and resurrection for you. That forgiveness of sin is had in the name of Jesus. That all who call on his name will be saved.

That his presence would transform you. “God is committed to us. The work of Christ on the cross is finished. The Holy Spirit has come. The Triune God never changes. But our experience of him does change, and he is the one who changes it. That’s why we should pray.” Ortlund

In others - That revival would come. That a generation of believers would place their trust in Jesus. That the glory of Christ would penetrate the idolatry of self and his kingdom come. Pray for God to do his will through the power of the gospel without restraint. That he would have his way with us all, and that he would make us part of the movement of grace in our day.

“Pray like this! But pray from a new-covenant perspective, based on Christ’s finished work. Pray based on God’s history of love toward his church, especially now in light of Christ’s saving acts toward the church (63: 7-9); pray with genuine and humble confession of sin, that our sins have grieved the Holy Spirit (63: 10); pray based on Christ’s resurrection from the dead as the fulfillment of the pattern of the Red Sea crossing (63: 11-16); pray with a deep lament for our wandering ways and our hardened hearts, knowing that only in the new covenant and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit can the heart of stone be removed and the heart of flesh given (63: 17-19); pray for God to tear open the heavens and come down—in gentle, saving love toward his elect now (revival!) and in wrath toward his enemies at the second coming (64: 1-5a); acknowledge that even our best acts would be unclean apart from the blood of Christ and that we are pathetically weak in intercession (64: 5b-7); and ask God to move out powerfully on behalf of his elect people, saving the unconverted and transforming the converted from often sinful to increasingly holy people (64: 8-12).” Andrew Davis

Isaiah 64:1–2 “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence— [2] as when fire kindles brushwood

and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!” (ESV)

Do it again, Lord, do it again!