

PRAYER: Pleading with God — Part Two

Isaiah 63:7–64:12

Recall that last week we began imagining a scenario where God would agree to give us everything we wanted — meaning good things, like peace, and righteous leaders, a morally upright culture, and salvation for our children, and prosperity — he would give us these things, but because we would not fully returned to him, he would never draw near again. We would have all the stuff of life that we wanted, but we would not have his presence. As Isaiah pours his heart out in chapter 63 and 64, he certainly doesn't have everything he would want for the nation, but he has gotten to the heart of the matter in crying out for what they need most: God himself.

As a reminder, and to help you see it as we read it in the text, recall that as he starts out, he first recounts or remembers who God is and what he has done. He does this for two reasons:

1. so that he and God's people will be reminded of who God is, and
2. to lay a foundation on which he will appeal that God come back and act with loving zeal toward his people again.

He deals honestly with their dreadful spiritual condition, which is a result of God withdrawing his presence and blessing. And he deals honestly with why God has withdrawn his presence and blessing: They rebelled. They were harboring sin. They were living as though God did not see or care what they did. So God fights against them until they are disgusted with their sinful pursuits and are desperate for God alone.

Isaiah then continues, reminding God of his kindness and of his glory. He delivered them they may worship him, and that he may make for himself an everlasting name, a glorious name! That is the foundation that he lead to move forward on. This week, we move forward, and I want you to both see and feel what Isaiah prays that we may learn and move forward in prayer — that our God's name may again be revered as glorious in our world — that he would again act zealously toward his people. Let's read the text.

Isaiah 63:7–64:12 — ⁷ I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

⁸ For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their

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Savior. ⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. ¹¹ Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, ¹² who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, ¹³ who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. ¹⁴ Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

¹⁵ Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me. ¹⁶ For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. ¹⁷ O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. ¹⁸ Your holy people held possession for a little while; our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. ¹⁹ We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name.

64:1 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! 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. ⁵ 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.

⁸ But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. ⁹ Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people. ¹⁰ Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. ¹¹ Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised you, has been

burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins. ¹² Will you restrain yourself at these things, O Lord? Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

PRAY

Where Are Your Zeal and Might? — vv 15–19

God, look down! Remember, what you did for your people and why you did it! In vv 18 & 19, Isaiah paints the stark contrast between what and where they were when they walked with God, and where they are now. God had established the place that represented his throne, his reign on earth, in the sanctuary. His people were set apart and protected by him. The surrounding nations spoke of the God of the Hebrews and acknowledged their incapacity to fight him. The glory of God was known throughout the world because God became their Savior — he redeemed them, as v 16 says. He had drawn near with great zeal, and might, and love. God had brought them out of slavery to serve and worship him in the land. Now in exile, all connection to God’s redemptive work and purpose is lost. His glory is no longer on display in his people, and he is not receiving the worship he is due from his people. The symbol of his rule, and reign is trampled down by the enemies of God. They are living in a time when God is so far removed that there is no recollection of who he is or what he can do in the culture’s memory. What do you do if you find yourself living in such a place?

Look very carefully at how Isaiah comes back to appeal to the glory of God! In v 17 he pleads with God to return for the sake of his servants — those he has loved... But the greatest appeal is to the glorious rule and reign of God himself. Isaiah doesn’t make any effort to say, “Hey, we’re not all bad.” He doesn’t say, “Well, I know I’m not perfect; we’re basically good people and it looks like you could help us out a little bit.” He makes no claim that sinful people have any merit, or any reason to expect anything other than judgment. His appeal is exclusively to the kindness of God, and the glory of God — return and put your rule and reign on display. Let your glory be over all the Earth. It is as though he is saying: Come show the wicked nations that have treated you and your people contemptuously that you were God. Show them who is truly in charge.

Do you pray like this? Last week I asked you to begin a simple journal, perhaps, just a spiral notebook by your Bible in which you write what you see God doing as you read the Scripture. As we work through the Gospel of John in our community groups, how many times do you see the glory of Christ on display there? How do you see the glory of Christ on display in your own life and family as

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you see and experience the salvation of the Lord, playing out in your family? In a few minutes, I want us to note how we have seen God work in the Scriptures, and how we have seen God work in history, and how we have seen God work in our own nation and culture when he acted toward us with zeal. I want us to take account of those things so that we can do what Isaiah did.

Oh, God, you raised up through Southern Baptists the greatest missionary sending organization that the world has known. You blessed the nation with your presence through revivals using the means of strong preaching of your word, and the means of the prayers of your people. Hundreds of thousands were brought into your kingdom as you drew near and moved with power through your servants 150 years ago. Your people prayer and feared. Now your church languishes divided, distracted, disinterested, often disobedient. The world mocks your bride, and despises your holy word. Return, oh Lord, and revive your people that the streets of this land would ring with the praises of God as your people joyfully declare your glory and make known your great salvation in Christ.

Would you plead with God in this way, as Isaiah did?

Three points from chapter 64:

1. Isaiah is not content to have God simply clean up the mess, then stand at a distance. He pleads with God to come down *right now*; he pleads in a way that we almost hear his voice breaking and see tears streaming down his face: Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down! That you would come down! We must have ***you!*** It is not enough that things calm down and get back to normal. We must have you, not just an easier existence. Nicer shops, safer streets, and higher CD rates — that won't do. We must have God.

Of course anyone with much background in the Old Testament understands that he is appealing to Mount Sinai when God came down and the mountains quaked, and there was thunder and rumbling as holy God established himself in the middle of his people.

Isaiah keeps appealing to God's glory: You came down and made your name known to your adversaries. The nations trembled at your presence. You did awesome things that could not even imagine. No one has ever seen or heard of a God besides you. You are what we pray for. You are what we must have. We simply cannot continue to exist without the God who saves sinners, who makes dead men live, who does exceedingly abundantly all that we can think or imagine. We must have you God. Else we die.

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Do you pray like this? Oh, that you would pray like this! Do you think God will be stirred by this kind of praying? The end of v 4 — he acts for those who wait for him. Will you learn to pray like this? What will this church and this community look like in a year if we will pray with such fervor for God?

2. Sin is confessed with brutal honesty — no pretense, no hedging. Vvs 5b–7 details that they sinned. Then they sinned more. They've been sinning for a long time. They have no basis on which to expect anything other than God's anger and judgment. "Shall we be saved," asks Isaiah rhetorically.

As God's prophet, he stands in the people's place and honestly confesses that they're all unclean. Any righteous thing they try to do is completely polluted. He acknowledges that their sin has had a withering effect on them. They are exhausted; they are spent. They are perishing. Sin brings death — always has, always will. He says they've simply given up because they think that their sins have swept them farther that God's grace can reach.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you believed that the magnitude of your sin is greater than the forgiving and reconciling power of the cross of Christ? If you have believed this, you have believed a lie from the pit of hell. Isaiah is saying how grievously their sin has impacted them, and they are feeling the consequences of it. This is prophet making a rhetorical appeal. But here is the same prophet in Chapter 9 saying, "The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light." Those Gentiles he speaks of are us! That light is the Lord Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, who has drawn near — he came into the world to save sinners. He died the death we deserve in order that we may experience his eternal life. Look away from sin and self in faith to the redeeming Savior who washes clean — whiter than snow.

An application point before I close. God's arm is not shortened that he cannot save, but our sins have separated us from God. As Isaiah confessed, in a brutally honest way their sin, so let us confess our sin. And where do we do that? We fly, with confidence, to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace. As we confess our sins, he is faithful, and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Do not hide from God. Do not hide your sin from God. Both of these are futile. He calls us to come and be cleansed.

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Lastly, in asking God to come again and be with them, he appeals directly to God's character in v 12 — Will you restrain yourself at these things, O Lord? Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terrible? He began by appealing to God's love and fatherly care for his people. He's an appeal to God's glory, and the renowned of his name. He now appeals to the very heart of God himself. Will you restrain yourself at the disastrous state of your children and your people? Will you, as our father, say nothing while we with her away under our own sin. This is incredibly bold praying on Isaiah's part. And it's the kind of bold praying we need to do. God, you are our Father. Do you not care that we perish? In summary: God withdrew his presence from his people when they walked away from him in rebellion and contempt. He gave them over to their own lusts and desires and it destroyed them. Let's be very clear in our thinking: they have a God problem, not a political problem. They have a God problem. Is it any different for us? If the answer is no, then the solution is to move forward in prayer that latches hold of God and will not let go until he comes down and acts zealously toward us as our compassionate father.

PRAY

A Model for Revival Praying — Isaiah 63:7 – 64

Recount / Remember — 63:7–9

The Lord's love and goodness — how he has acted toward his people in the past. Moved with pity, He became their Savior. He does this so that God's people are reminded of who God is, and to lay a foundation on which he will plead with God to return and act with loving zeal toward his people.

Rebellion Acknowledged — 63:10

"They rebelled." An acknowledgement of the root problem.

Rebellion described (Isaiah 65:1–5)

- They do not walk in God's highway of holiness as he called them to do, but follow their own ideas, walking in their own godless way.
- They create and serve their own idols, rather than the living God.
- They live as though God's law does not apply to them.
- They design their own religion and justify themselves according to their own standard.
- They love that he became their Savior, they loathe that he demands to be Lord. ("Yes!" to salvation; "No!" to serving God. "Yes!" to forgiveness of sins; "No!" to turning from sin.)

An appeal based on God's Mighty Acts — 63:11–14

An appeal based on God's Glorious Name — 63:12b, 14b

... to make for yourself an everlasting name... a glorious name.

An appeal based on God's Fatherly Compassion — 63:15–17

Where are your zeal and might?

An appeal based on God's Glorious Rule and Reign — 63:18–19

... our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.

A desperate plea for God himself, not just the things of God — 64:1–5a

... rend the heavens and come down...

A transparent confession of sin and its consequences — 64:5b–7

... our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

An appeal to God's merciful character — 64:8–12

... you are our Father... Will you restrain yourself?