

Isaiah 64:1-12

"From Rags To Righteousness"

We last left off w/a person, a perhaps people of prayer pleading for God's intervention. What we discovered in the last few Vs of Ch 63 wasn't what we refer to as "good" or even "accurate" theology. It was (however) the accurate reality of someone who is truly hurting emotionally. – & It was out of this place of pain, this place of sorrow that this person was reminded of how things *used* to be & how he desired them to be once again.

* & This is the love of God. He allows us to reap the harvest of our ways that we might see the futility, the vanity of it all! We hit the proverbial bottom & there's no direction to look except up... It reminds me of the parable of the Prodigal that Jesus taught. The son who wanted his inheritance early. Wanted to get out of the house & lead his own life... So that's what he did. & He began to party, to squander his inheritance. He was everyone's favorite friend. He provided the *place* to party; he supplied the substance to party *with*... He was living for the moment w/no thought for the future. But when his money ran dry all his buddies strangely disappeared... No one would help him out, give him a hand up or a place to stay. He found himself in a desperate way. & It was from that place of desperation, desolation & despair that he came to his senses & made a decision to turn from his own ways & come back to his father... Believe me, godly sorrow over sin is a *good* thing.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians he said, "*Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*"¹ * & Like the prodigal, the desperate way of the people or person of prayer in our present passage has led them to repentance, a return to the God of our salvation.

Vs 1-4

We're picking up on the *passion*, almost (understandable) *impatience* of this prayer. "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!" He's envisioning the sky like a garment that God rips through in coming to their rescue. It's kind of the O.T. equivalent of, "Come quickly Lord Jesus!"

& When we're in a "way", we don't *want* the Lord to *delay*, we want things tended to *yesterday*! It's hard for us to see the proverbial forest for the tree in front of our face.

¹ *The New King James Version* (2 Co 7:9-10). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

& It's not that it's wrong to pray like this, but we do well to remember that our lives are like one thread in the tapestry of human history & there's a big picture that God is orchestrating & facilitating.

& I love the coalescence of scripture. Meaning; we're reading Isaiah's "prophetic prayer". He's asking God to "rend the heavens", to shake & move mountains... In Rev Ch 6 we find the 6th seal being opened unleashing God's wrath upon a Christ rejecting world. We read of a great earthquake, the sun becoming black, the moon like blood, the stars of heaven falling to the earth... Then we read, *"Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.* (Nuclear activity?) *And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'"*²

Ladies and Gentlemen: the day is coming when God will rend the heavens & mountains will be moved from their place! God's going to do it! But here's the thing, He's not going to do it predicated upon *our* timetable, but the time in which *He's* appointed. So often we find ourselves in that mode of, "God, how much longer must this go on? Why don't You just wind down & wrap up this whole thing? Let's get the righteous reign of J.C. going already!" *"Make Your name known to Your adversaries, that nations may tremble at Your presence!"* We have that passion & (understandable) *impatience* about our prayers... Listen, God is going to do everything He said He would do... but remember that "big picture" we spoke about? (Leave Isaiah 64, turn to **2 Peter 3:1-13**).

Did you pick up on the uncanny parallels? Water, fire, elements melting, the earth *dissolving!* All of this revolves around the "day of vengeance", the "Day of the Lord", the righteous wrath of God being poured out upon those who've renounced & rejected J.C. But I want you to pick up on the "why" behind God's "waiting". We wonder, "Why wait!? Let's go!" God, in His mercy says, "I'll tell ya 'why wait'".

To Ezekiel He said this, ** "As I live," says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.'"*³ It doesn't give the Lord some sadistic sense of pleasure to see the wicked perish. It's *His heart* that they turn from their wicked ways! That they find life in J.C.

² *The New King James Version* (Re 6:14-16), (1982). Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version* (Eze 33:11), (1982). Thomas Nelson.

– Don't forget where *you've* come from! Where would you be had the Lord returned 5 yrs ago, 15 yrs ago, or maybe even last year? How grateful we are when it comes to the Lord's longsuffering & patience *w/us*. But how we want to end this thing now that we're on board.

& I'm not saying that we shouldn't want to see God right wrongs. Nor am I saying we shouldn't pray, "Your kingdom come!" In fact, Jesus exhorted us to do just that! I'm simply pointing out the *patience* of God & how grateful we should be... If you have family that are unsaved, you're praying for them, hoping the Lord holds out just a little longer. I'm just glad that decision is in the hands of a loving, holy, gracious & righteous God... not me. *

Vs 4

It would seem doubtless that Paul the apostle was drawing from this scripture when he penned, "*But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'*"⁴ & I have no doubt that there is more than enough application *w/regard* to the eternal state of man that's contained in that verse. However, the context that the Vs is couched in pertains to the gospel. *At no point did it ever enter the heart/mind of man that God loved us so much that He would send His only begotten Son (something so past our expectations) to die for us that we might live forever w/Him. "Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the children of God."*

-- & There's something in this phrase at the end of Vs 4, "*Who acts for the one who waits for Him.*" In Isaiah Ch 40 Vs 31 we read, "*But those who wait on 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.*"⁵ He's speaking of the appropriate disposition of waiting on the Lord. -- Think of a waiter at your favorite restaurant. It's not stagnate, apathetic nonresponsive passivity. It's active, attentive attention to the need of the one being served. When we wait on the Lord, we're not in any way *passive*, we're *active*.

Here, Isaiah speaks of the sanctity of *stillness*. This is the balance we're always seeking/striving to walk in. We don't want to get out in front of the Lord. Being busy for the sake of being busy (some people think that hard work is what God wants, & that's all that He wants. If you're not sweating, you might be sinning.) & There's nothing wrong *w/a* hard day's work. Surely in all labor there's profit. The Bible is clear.

⁴ *The New King James Version* (1 Co 2:9). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version* (Is 40:31). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

Yet the Bible is also clear that it's not really *perspiration* that God is after so much as it is *inspiration & motivation* unto *sanctification*. It's easier to work than it is to wait. But it's important to wait, to watch & to see what God is doing, how God is moving & step in *stride* w/His Spirit rather than always *striving* w/the Spirit.

Vs 5

You see what's happening here, right? The person/people Isaiah is prophesying of are searching out a matter. "What kind of person will the Lord answer in prayer?" It's a great question, isn't it? Because there are people who will tell you of the fact that they're praying all time! Praying that the lottery ticket they just bought is one that's going to end all their worries (because they'll give 10%, maybe even 20% of it to God 😊). Praying that their car doesn't break down or that they get to work on time w/out a speeding ticket... Does God hear every prayer uttered in any fashion? No... The Bible is clear that God hears the prayers of some & doesn't regard the prayers of others.

Well, we'd do well to know then, what kind of prayer (or what kind of person) will God hear? Vs 4 told us that God acts for the one who "waits" for Him. So that's 1 qualification. What else are we learning? "You meet him who rejoices & does righteousness." #1 Wait *on* the Lord. #2 Rejoice *in* the Lord. #3 Do righteousness. & #4 Remember His ways (or walk/live in obedience to His Word). So, there ya go! Seems easy enough, just wait *on* the Lord, rejoice *in* the Lord, do righteousness & walk in obedience...

Only 1 problem, did you see it there in Vs 5? "We have sinned – in these ways (sinful ways) we continue; & we need to be saved." We have here what we refer to as a "catch 22". On the one hand God will regard the prayer of the righteous man. On the other hand, it's not the righteous man that gets himself in an inescapable mess through sin in his life so that he needs to be saved! So, here's the dilemma. God hears the cry of the righteous, I'm in a mess because of my *unrighteous* ways, so I cry out to God, but what good will it do me if He only hears the cry of the righteous? How then can I be saved!?

(BTW, if the final portion of Vs 5 isn't the perfect set up to share the gospel, I don't know what is! "We have sinned, we *continue* to sin, & we need to be saved!" Well, I have good news for you friend, God provided a Savior in the Person of J.C. The cross is God's solution to the sin dilemma... Kind of circles us back to the wonder of God's love we were discussing earlier in Vs 4).

But pertaining to our *present* topic, it goes farther still... We've spoken of the need for righteousness, but even in that, we fall radically short. (I hope you all are buckled in because this might shake you up a little bit).

Vs 6-7

Wow! Fairly graphic reality there, wouldn't ya say? Unclean, filthy rags, full of iniquity, no stability & no one calls on Your name... That's who we are!

We're caught in this catch 22. God will hear the prayer of the righteous, the one who remembers the Lord in his ways (meaning who walks obediently to the Word of God). The problem is... we've sinned! There are none who are righteous, none who seek after God, *all* have sinned & fall short of the glory of God... *all* we like sheep have gone astray!

He says, "I get it! You respond to the righteous. But I'm not righteous. I'm not clean, I'm not pure & there are none who are!" He says, "But we are all like an unclean thing & all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags". Ok... When he speaks of an "unclean things" there are ceremonial inferences contained in that. Under the Mosaic law, if a person was rendered unclean (for whatever reason), he couldn't go up to the house of the Lord. He couldn't offer sacrifice. So long as he was unclean, he was out of fellowship & communion w/God.

But beyond *that*, * there's an acknowledgement here of the intrinsic impurity of sin that taints *everything we do*! It's found in the words, "& All our *righteousnesses* are as filthy rags". (& Just so you know, the words translated "filthy rags" are a literal reference to horribly unclean menstrual rags). He's saying, because we are all like an unclean thing, even when we try to do what we consider to be "good", even *that* is heavily polluted. The "righteous acts" we perform issue forth from an *unclean, impure* sin nature. Now think about *this*, if our *righteousness* works, the *good* we do is horribly unclean & unacceptable before God, what must our *unrighteous*, sinful, unclean acts be?

& This is the destructive deceit of "works based righteousness". Because our righteous acts: "I pray this much", "I witness regularly", "I give above & beyond the tithe", "I don't drink", "I don't cuss", "I serve in the church & in the community"... "Surely God will accept me..." Listen, that completely disregards the fact these "good things" are coming forth from a *sinful* nature. You can't bring a "clean thing" from something unclean.

This was the problem of the Pharisees. They did everything right! Followed the law to the letter! They were focused on how everything appeared outwardly & completely neglected the inward reality of their self-seeking, sinful hearts!*

It's why Jesus said, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.*"⁶ & Again, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*"⁷

*This is also the danger of downplaying our sin (like we're so prone to do in our culture today). "It was a little mistake". "I zipped, I should've zagged". We look for ways to rationalize & justify rather than (like what we're reading here) acknowledge it (& confess it) as the dark, destructive reality that it is, setting us at odds w/God!

I think this is also healthy for the human ego. Some people think they have a lot to offer God, He's really lucky that they're on His side... The very best you can offer God in & of yourself is like a filthy rag in His sight. How's that for an ego boost? ☺ This is why it's so important (like the song we sing), "I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but *wholly* trust in Jesus name." "When He shall come w/trumpet sound, Oh may I then in *Him* be found. Dressed in *His righteousness* alone, faultless stand before the throne." *

*Now, in Romans Ch 7 Paul wrote, "*I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) no good thing dwells.*" But here's the thing, most people *don't* know that... They think they're a pretty good person. That people are basically good, but certain circumstances will draw bad out of people. The Bible teaches just the opposite. There are none good. If people were good, you wouldn't lock your doors at night. There would be no need for military, everyone would have plenty, greed wouldn't prevail.

& To continue to snowball the matter, our *resistance* to sin is all but nothing. Our resilience is basically zero... Have you found that to be true? I know I have! If you're not allowing the Holy Spirit to *give* you victory, you don't *experience* victory! Our resilience is equivalent to the combative force of a leaf being carried away by the non-relenting winds of an F-5 tornado! "We all fade as a leaf, & our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." We're instable & unable (on our own) to stand against it!

& For all that, we're still lazy & complacent before the Lord. "There is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You..."

⁶ *The New King James Version* (Mt 23:25-26). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version* (Mt 23:27-28). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

& This is the sinful condition of man... What's the result? (Vs 7) It breaks fellowship w/God & it invites (even demands) the righteous judgment of God. *

Vs 8-9

The understanding is this, "I know I *deserve* judgment. What I'm begging for is *mercy*." "You are our Father." He's crying out for mercy as a child to a loving parent. He says, "I confess my sin & I submit unwaveringly to You." The idea is, "I'm like soft, pliable, fully yielded clay in the hands of the Master Potter." "We submit to Your sovereignty; mold us & shape us according to Your mercy."

In Vs 9 the idea is, "We know that You are just to be furious, but we confess our sin & beg You for Your forgiveness..."

Vs 10-12

The question is, "Will we always be subject to what we deserve? Or will You look *upon* us, have compassion & show mercy *toward* us?" **CLOSE**

*What it comes down to is this. On what basis can God's righteousness & justice be upheld & He still be gracious & merciful in forgiving our sin?

Takes us back to that "Sin Dilemma" we were talking about earlier. There are none righteous, none who can stand in the gap, none who can make perfect atonement for sin because none are perfect in righteousness... except for God Himself.

So God Himself becomes a Man in the Person of J.C. & as a Man He stands in the gap, pays the debt He didn't owe out of His great love for us because we owed a debt we **couldn't pay**. If by one man's offense sin entered the world resulting in *condemnation* for all, then by One Man's righteous act grace can abound resulting in forgiveness & justification leading to *salvation* for all... If by Adam many can be made sinners, then by J.C. many can be made righteous. From filthy rags to perfect righteousness by grace, through faith, only in Christ Jesus.*

Prayer Points:

God, we marvel at Your perfect wisdom! Surely eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which You have prepared for those who love You. – God, we love You. We thank You for Your Love, Your Mercy & the precious gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord...

Don't buy the lie. "I figure I'm a pretty good person. My good deeds will outweigh the bad I've done & I figure God will understand & let me in." – We have sinned, we continue in these ways & we need to be saved. Jesus came to seek & to save that which was lost. Believe on Him & be saved.