

**“Longing For God’s Deliverance – Oh Lord, May You Rend The Heavens
and Come Down!” – Isaiah 64:1-12**

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In 1906, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born. He died 39 short years later in 1945. As a youth of seventeen years of age, he began his formal studies at Tübingen University. He acquired his doctoral degree by the age of 21. Three years later, he sailed to New York to begin a teaching fellowship at Union Theological Seminary and began preparing for ministry. He was ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 1933, the same year that Adolf Hitler was installed as Chancellor. Two days after Hitler’s installation, Bonhoeffer delivered a radio address on leadership attacking Hitler. He was cut off on air.

His resistance, along with countless others, brought an end to the horrifying racial injustice levied against the Jewish people by the Nazi regime. His influential book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, about Christianity’s role in the secular world has become a staple and classic of modern Christians seeking to integrate their faith and action.

What compelled Bonhoeffer so deeply that his stand against Nazi injustice would eventually cost him his life? He credited his experience within the African American community of turning his “phraseology of Christianity into reality.”¹ During his time of teaching at Union, his heart was captured for the oppressed by befriending an African American student named Franklin Fisher. This friendship led to him attending and even preaching at an historically black church in Harlem. During this time, he immersed himself in reading about the plight of the African American. He read about the history of lynching, the “black Christ” and “white Christ” of poet Countee Cullen. Bonhoeffer regarded the Negro spirituals as “the most influential contribution made by the black man to American Christianity.”² It was in the pain and plight of the African American spirituals sung with powerful hope in a Redeemer that caused Bonhoeffer to crate a box of albums of spirituals back to Germany; of which he repeatedly played for his students and congregation to bring about influence and change. Because of the hope of his beloved African Americans, Bonhoeffer was able to stand against the oppression of the Jews.

We have been in a sermon series entitled God’s eye view of you. Let me first start by saying, God is not aloof to our pains and longings; He sees you. He sees our country crying out for deliverance from the injustices that have plagued us for far too long. Today we going to learn from the 64th chapter of Isaiah how to **Long for God’s Deliverance** while **Dealing with Sin** and yet **Waiting in Hope**. We will continue to cry out with those who are hurting for God’s powerful hand to act and promised presence to comfort.

¹ David Ford, *Modern Theologians*, p. 45.

² James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, p. 41-42.

Longing For God's Deliverance:

We want deliverance and breakthroughs for the pains in this life. When I began preparing for this sermon 2 weeks ago, race riots were not erupting all over our county. When I read the opening phrase, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down," I sensed the Lord asking me: "What do you long for?" The opening word "Oh" is an emotive plea of crying out for God to tear open the heavens and come down. The Israelite people had had their beloved homeland destroyed by the ruthless Babylonian empire and now were being forced to live in exile. They had been cut off from everything familiar, and now with their temple destroyed, they were cut off from God himself. Isaiah pleads for God to come down. In the minds of Ancient Near Eastern people, God was regarded as living in the heavens above, yet at special times in the Old Testament man could go up to the mountain top and God would come down to uniquely manifest his presence.

Two powerful manifestations were on Mt. Sinai and Mt. Carmel. In Ex 19:16-20 we read that Moses went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain...He told Moses to consecrate the people and that he was going to show himself to the eyes of the people. "When it was morning, there was thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud over the mountain ...All of Mt Sinai was wrapped in smoke because Yahweh went down on it in fire...and the mountain trembled greatly. He said to Moses, "I *am* Yahweh, your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves." From this awesome display of power, God gave the 10 commandments to Moses.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah was in a battle with 400 prophets of Baal over whose god was real and whose god had power. The prophets of Baal cried to their god the entire day, but nothing happened. After having his sacrifice doused with water, Elijah prayed to God, "Let it be known this day that you are God in Israel...may these people know that you, O Lord, are God...then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces."

Each of these times when God showed up, there were immediate, effectual, and drastic displays of God's mighty power to act. Three times in the opening verse of Isaiah 64, Isaiah describes the awesome power of God's presence: (1) the first that the mountains might quake - as when fire kindles brushwood and causes water to boil. Brushwood burning and water boiling are immediate actions that are effectual; (2) Isaiah pleads that the nations who are adversaries might tremble at God's presence - he wants the enemies of Israel defeated; (3) when you did such awesome things that they didn't even look for - the mountains quaked at God's presence.

Two weeks ago, God was asking me, "Darin, what do you cry out for?" I had to admit it is so easy to get so busy in life to cry out to God for something took the Lord grabbing my heart with that word "Oh!" God, what I really want is for you to manifest your power in a dramatic way in the health issues that are plaguing my child. May you act now, and may it be effectual! God, I want you to bring my two family members who are so far from you into a saving relationship of faith. Now I stand here asking God, Lord would you please heal our land! Come in a powerful show of fire that burns up water, causes rocks to melt, and shakes the mountains. The injustice against my African American brothers and sisters has to stop.

For what are you needing to search your heart and cry out to God that He will deliver? He wants to manifest his powerful presence in your life, and he's asking you to come up the mountain and do business with him.

Dealing With Our Sin:

As Isaiah longs for God's deliverance, he acknowledges the sin of the Israelites. He begins in verse five, "in our sins we have been a long time...we have all become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment....there is no one who calls on your name." Isaiah had been warning God's people that their stubborn hearts and disregard for the poor and oppressed would be met with God's judgment. Now they were forced against their will to serve a pagan king; God was dealing with their sin.

Actually admitting to God that we have sinned is a huge deal. We are so prone to qualifying our actions and giving excuses for why we might not have been totally upright. Realizing that God has hidden his face from us and made us melt in the hand of our iniquities (Vs 7) is actually quite a gift. A father disciplines his children because he loves them. For God to convict his people of sin through the words of Isaiah is indeed a gift. Isaiah cries out, "We have ALL become like one unclean; We ALL fade like a leaf; There is NO ONE who calls on your name. (Vs. 6-7)

Notice the collective nature of Isaiah's words, "We all - all are unclean, all fade, no one calls." There is a collective nature of sin. Several years ago, I traveled overseas to the Middle East, when asked by a national why I was invading Afghanistan in Operation Enduring Freedom. As a 25-year-old civilian, I wasn't personally invading Afghanistan; but to a national's outsider eyes, I am an American and therefore I represent the whole country. I am responsible to answer the question. Isaiah isn't quantifying how much sin he personally had in comparison to some other Israelite, he was owning that they all collectively fell short of God's standard.

This week some dear Christian sisters that I really respect were commenting on the race riots. They said, "What should I do? I'm not responsible for the injustices of bringing Africans over as slaves, I can't undo the past." Yet to not understand what I represent as a white person is to not understand what I represent as an American, a Louisianian, or as member of the Travis family. Because I'm Arthur Travis' grandson, there are certain things that are true of me whether I am aware of it, like it or not. I inherited a midwestern-Indiana value system, I know how to shuck corn, and every May I watched Indy car drivers go in circles for 500 miles. Whether I choose to embrace it, value it, or understand it - I was born and raised in Indiana. I was also born white, I only began understanding what it meant to be white when after college I intentionally set out on a journey to love African Americans.

Another sister said, "Preachers should not be preaching about race from the pulpits this weekend, because it sets up a divide that is not there; we all came from one man, we are the same race - we just have different pigments. It's about justice, not about race."

Yet to deny that race makes us different is to deny that God made us as spiritual AND physical beings - when we get to heaven, we will not be ethereal spirits floating on white clouds somehow strumming harps. We will have physical bodies and will forever dwell in a material place - this earth beautifully restored. We will worship around a throne with every tribe and

tongue represented. (Rev 7:9) How will we know every tribe will be there? Because we are different races.

After college when I was first actively entering into the long journey of understanding race, my friend Rasool once gave me a 15-minute lesson on the theology of black men's hair. I had no idea. God made my friend Rasool a bold, strong, godly black man, and to not see his hair and **only** see him as a brother in Christ, would deny how uniquely, beautifully, and wonderfully God had physically (and culturally) made him different than me.

Isaiah owned the sin of his people and cried out to the Lord, "But now, O Lord, you are our Father; behold, please look, we are all your people." Notice that Isaiah's appeal isn't based on what they have done to make things right. Isaiah's appeal uses the words "you are our Father" and "we are your people." His appeal is based on the covenant promises of God: We are your people, these are your cities where your name is to be made great. He's saying, "God we can't get it together. Don't rescue us because of our merits....rescue us because we are yours....your name is upon us." When dealing with your sin before a holy God, whether it be over having racist tendencies or failing to slow down long enough to even know what your heart truly longs for, come to him based on his promises. By grace, he has given his Son as payment to make you spiritually right with him; only when that payment is personally received can God bring about the changes in your actions that he also wants to deal with.

Waiting in Hope:

The final verse in this passage ends with only questions to God, "Will you [continue to] restrain yourself...Will you [continue to] keep silent?" The Israelites had been warned by the prophet Jeremiah that if they did not repent, they would be held captive in exile by the Babylonians for 70 years. (Jer 25:11) The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, ransacked Jerusalem 2 different times. The second time in 586 B.C. is when he destroyed the temple. The people hearing Isaiah's words knew that their plight was of their own doing. 70 years is a long time to suffer, and there was still the impending threat recorded in Lev 26:14-26 that un-repentance could extend the punishment. We know now from history that King Cyrus allowed the Israelites to begin returning to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. and that in 516 B.C. the new temple was dedicated; but what we know now, the Israelites didn't know at the time.

It is a difficult thing to drive one's car on the road of hope and not fall into a ditch on either side: on one side the ditch of despair that says "things will never get better" or the ditch of denial that says, "everything's fine, or this will pass over."

Isaiah waited in hope that his God would rend the heavens and come down. We know that God is everywhere: he is omnipresent, but he came down on mountain tops and manifested himself in powerful ways with men who go up. In the land of Judah there is a hill, on the top of that hill is the city of Jerusalem. At the top of that hill in Jerusalem, sat a temple: in that temple a thick veil separated man from the Holy of Holies - the place where God's presence literally and specifically dwelt. The word for what God did to that veil when Jesus died on the cross is the word rent - God came down from the heavens and tore through the sin that separates us by the sacrifice of his beloved son. It has been accomplished and it will be culminated, we just have to wait.

There is a beauty in actively waiting on God to act. Jesus said, “blessed are those who mourn.” (Matt 5:4) While we cry out to God longing for his deliverance and are dealing with our sin - mourn with those who are oppressed. Mourn not out of pity, but out of a posture of humility. Poverty takes different forms. We typically think of someone being financially impoverished, but one can be relationally impoverished (not being welcome at the family table), educational impoverished (lacking the educational prep to get into a quality higher-learning establishment), physically impoverished (by illness both physical and mental), and the manifestation that most secular establishments only glance over - spiritually impoverished. The African American community understands mourning in a way that shows me to be woefully impoverished.

I walked up to a dear friend’s car in a parking lot a month ago. The radio was blaring inside, and Miss Dee was animated. She opened the door, to which I said, “You were having a party in there.” Her response, “Oh Mr. T, I was getting my praise on. God is so good, I got paid today and I’m going to be able to make my car payment.” I had gotten paid that same week, but I didn’t have a praise party in my car. I left her thinking to myself, “Oh Lord, may I be so aware and grateful for every tangible gift you give my way as well.”

Paul said in Galatians 6:2 “bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.” Stand with our African American brothers and sisters and help them drive down the road of hope without falling into the ditch of despair or denial. It can start with simple things. When I shop in Walmart, I purposefully seek to make eye-contact. I felt the Lord prompting me to call an African American friend to simply say I am grieving with her as I watch racism unfold in our country and to ask how she was doing. Tomorrow, on Monday June 8th, the EPC is calling us to observe a day of fasting and prayer. Join. Plead with God to stop the injustice. Hold out hope that God is not aloof to our longings.

Maybe you’re sensing the Lord asking you to give more of yourself, to give your power away. Contact our church member Annette Lamond. Ask her about how to get involved with Kids Hope USA. Our church partners with Kid’s Hope to mentor and equip at risk youth in the public-school systems, many of which are of color. Give your time to changing one life at a time. Many of you so generously gave financially to our ministries of the Gardere Christian School and the Christian Outreach Center. For those who haven’t, we’re still accepting donations on their behalf for the critical work that they do to end the systemic injustice of racism. Most of all, ask the Holy Spirit to move in your heart.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer discovered how beautiful and resilient the African American community is and it caused him to change the world. I close my exhortations with his quote, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will **not** hold us guiltless. **Not** to speak is to speak. **Not to act is to act.**” Brothers and sisters, Christ has acted on our behalf, He rent the heavens and came down. Now we must continue to act on behalf of others.