

Oh that You would rend the heavens

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[0 : 00] Now, with the Lord's help, let us turn back to the portion of Scripture we read together from the prophecy of Isaiah, focusing in particular on Isaiah 64, and reading verses 6 and 7.

Isaiah 64, verses 6 and 7. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all who righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind take us away. 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. We notice from the very beginning of this prophecy of Isaiah, that the waywardness of the people to whom Isaiah has been sent, that is, the people of Judah and Jerusalem, that they have turned their back upon their God.

Despite the number of ways in which the Lord has expressed his kindness and covenant commitment to them, down through the years, it's as if they've forgotten that, and turned their face away.

[1 : 42] See, for example, in chapter 1, at verse 2, the prophet says, Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken.

Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. Well, that's a really damaging statement, isn't it?

It sums up the kind of people to whom the prophet has been sent with the word of God. Then when you go further down in chapter 1, even at verse 6, it says, From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it.

He's talking about the nation. But bruises and sores and raw wounds, and so on. He likens the community to whom the Lord has sent him, to a bruised and battered individual.

[2 : 58] And sin has been behind that bruising and battering of these people. And then when you go through the prophecy, all the way up to chapter 53, for example, there is a pointer there as to the way the people just did not listen to what this man from God was saying to them.

Chapter 53, verse 1, the prophet says, Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

It's as if, despite the powerful message of this man of God, the people's ears were deaf to what he was saying.

Their heart was hard against what he was bringing before them. They were a people having turned away and turned their back on the Lord.

But despite that dark report about them, the prophet here and there throughout the prophecy highlights greater and better things to come to these people.

[4 : 14] For example, in chapter 53 itself, at verse 5, it talks about the coming Messiah, the Savior, who alone is able to save these people from their sins.

And it says in verse 5 of chapter 53, He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.

It's as if he is looking at what is still to come in the past tense, because it is surely coming. The Savior is surely coming.

And the work of salvation he is surely going to fulfill on behalf of his covenant people. And in chapter 63, just before I come to what we highlighted in chapter 4 as our text, at the beginning of chapter 63, who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, He who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength, it is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.

This is the Lord's mighty fighter coming to save the community of Christ. He is the one coming to deal with the sin that has caused such havoc among these people.

[5 : 51] And he is coming and he is going to fulfill the glorious work that the Lord God entrusted to him. Jesus says in the gospel, I have finished the work that you gave me to do.

Well, this is the Lord's servant in chapter 63. In the eye of the prophet, looking down the century, 700 years, until the coming of Christ the Savior, and he sees him as the one who was coming to deal with the problem of sin that had ruined his people.

Now coming to chapter 64. And it's as if the prophet comes, as it were, to the reality of the present situation.

He's surrounded by all of these people that are sinful and turning away from God. And it's as if he brings a prayer of confession before the Lord on their behalf.

And I'd like to say a few words about the confession that he makes and that the people of God among this reprobate nation are making to God.

[7 : 12] What are they saying about themselves? A prayer of confession. Verse 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. 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. That is their confession. But then secondly, in a word or two at verse 8, their hope.

Verse 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.

And so on. So just these two points. There's so much else we could speak about. But I'm just going to focus on these two points. First of all, the heart of the problem that left these people spiritually bankrupt.

[8 : 26] It is their sin. The same as the problem we ourselves have. Because each one of us are a carbon copy of what these people say about themselves.

We have all become like one who is unclean and so on. And we ought to be able by God's grace to see ourselves in what he says here about Jerusalem and about Judah in Isaiah's day.

It is something that is common to mankind down through the centuries. We have all become like one who is unclean.

If you think back to the Old Testament ceremonial law. The law it saw certain people because of their certain activities as unclean and in need of cleansing.

For example, if someone either inadvertently or deliberately touched a dead body that person became ritually unclean and needed to go through a particular process to be ceremonially cleansed.

[9 : 50] If somebody had a running issue like a discharge from some part of his body or her body that person was ritually unclean like the woman with the issue of blood who for 12 years had visited every doctor she knew and spent all her money to try and get a cure but she wasn't better at one whit but she became gradually worse with the passing of time and she heard of Jesus and she was convinced in her heart through the teaching of the Holy Spirit that if she could touch but the hem of his garment she would be made clean and so she did touch the hem of his garment and power came from him into her and immediately she felt she was healed of that plague.

Sin is a contaminant. sin leaves its awful mark upon us because we are sinners by nature and practice.

We have original sin the guilt of Adam's first sin attaching to us at the very point of our conception within our mother's womb and when we come into the world we have sins of thought and word and deed and each one of these aspects of law breaking or non compliance to the law of God leaves us ritually unclean.

We are unclean in the presence of God because sin contaminates and the prophet here admits we are all unclean.

We all stand in need of cleansing and as was through with the Old Testament ceremonial ritual of cleansing with water and blood and so on so we stand in need of the cleansing power of Jesus Christ because the New Testament reminds us that if we confess our sin he is faithful and just to cleanse us from our sin and from all of our unrighteousness.

[12:22] The blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin. And then he goes on and he says all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment a garment that is totally obnoxious because of the pollution that is on it.

And I was thinking this afternoon of the poison that was used down in Salisbury recently to try and murder these people. And it is now they're discovering that there are areas of that particular city that have had this chemical somehow or other adhering to cars and furniture and so on.

And they have to go through a particular process to try and eradicate that particular thing. And so it is here. All our righteous acts are like a polluted garment.

even our very best efforts in our own strength are not acceptable with God. In fact God hates them. Self-righteousness is a sin that leaves us so contaminated and unclean and unlike the character of a holy God that God doesn't bear to look upon it.

[13:52] all our righteous deeds. The Pharisees thought they had it all sewn up. They were able to keep all these different laws in their own estimation.

The Pharisee went up to the temple to pray and he commended himself repeatedly to God and thanked God that he wasn't like this little tax collector who stood at a great distance and he couldn't even lift his eyes up into heaven.

But he struck his breast and said sin is where I am. Have mercy upon me the sinner. Remember always S-I-N sin.

I is at the center of sin. Sin is where I am where you are. Even in your best acts we are laced with sin like a polluted garment.

man. But then it goes on. We are all feared like a leaf. A leaf in autumn. It's quite different to our leaf in springtime, isn't it?

[15:06] In springtime it seems so vibrant and so full of life. But when the autumn comes it begins to shrivel and eventually it will fall off the tree.

You know we have decay within ourselves because of our sin. Even as Christians we have spiritual decay.

We have spiritual declensions. We have spiritual deviations from the standard of scripture and the requirements of the word of God.

Have you ever thought of yourself in this particular light? That we are like a leaf that is fading. Is your Christian life as vibrant as it once was?

love. It is said to one of the churches in the New Testament in Revelation that she had left her first love. It's as if the leaf has begun to grow brown and starting to fade.

[16:27] Well that's what happened to this covenant community of Jerusalem and Judah and Israel as he mentions in another place.

They were God's people. The Lord had come and identified himself with them in a particular way. He made a covenant with them and told them I'm going to be your God and you must be my people. But they broke faith with God. And like a leaf fading they are shriveling. some people say well there is beauty in a shriveled leaf.

Well I don't think there is anything beautiful about it in comparison to a vibrant living leaf on a tree. Our iniquities like the wind take us away.

It's as if he says the wind is blowing in this nation and it is moving this people away from God.

[17:38] The wind of sin the wind of worldliness the wind of selfishness the wind of materialism the wind of idolatry various directions from which the wind of sin and darkness will blow and the focus of that wind whichever direction it blows from is to move us away from God.

A wind will come and seek to blow you away from your prayer life. A wind will come and seek to blow you away from your reading of God's word on a regular basis.

peace. A wind will come and try and stop you from coming to the house of God. A wind will come and try and break you away from your Christian friends.

The wind blows us away from all that is good. The wind of sin. And they have identified that as being the prime cause of their problem.

We have all become like one who is unclean. All our righteous deeds like a polluted garment all fade like a leaf. Our iniquities like the wind take us away.

[19:02] And then he says this amazing statement there is no one who calls upon your name who rouses himself to take hold of you. What an amazing statement that is.

It's as if there is no prayer life among the people. it's as if the Lord isn't hearing them. Because they are not rousing themselves to take hold of him.

The Lord elsewhere throughout this prophecy talks about the watch men on the walls of Zion. and they are not to give him rest until he establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. And that's the duty and the privilege that each one of us as those who profess his name ought to take to heart that we not give him rest but that there be a body of prayer rising from every heart and every home seeking his blessing.

And we come back to the beginning of chapter 64 and the prophet himself says oh that you will rend the heavens and come down. He's praying and that's the example we ought to follow.

[20 : 33] Ask the Lord in the darkness rend the heavens and come down. Well he did come down. He brought these people back from the captivity of Babylon.

That was an aspect of him rending the heavens and coming down. But he rent the heavens particularly and came down in the person of his son.

Remember when the angels came to visit the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. And the heavens were filled with angels from heaven and they sang unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

He came down. And when you think also of his baptism by John the Baptist later on the very beginning of his public ministry when he came up from the water the scripture says that the heavens rent open and the spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove.

And on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured upon the church. Oh that he would rend the heavens and come down. Jesus has come down.

[22 : 01] He has finished the work that the father gave him to do. But it is up to us to seek that he comes down in gospel blessing. It's very interesting the way the gospel blessing may work so secretly and silently and unobtrusively in the hearts of individuals.

No great drama seen outwardly but the Lord works secretly in the hearts of his people and that proves that he has come down to them to bless them.

The end of verse seven is a powerful statement isn't it? You have hidden your face from us and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

who would want to be in such a horrible and hot group as the iniquities of our souls and the iniquities that surround us melting as it were into submission to themselves.

Lord may we be in your hand and come with ourselves to your keeping that we might not be swept of our feet in a day when so much is spoken against you throughout our nation.

[23 : 41] But then verse eight but now oh Lord this is the encouragement at least one aspect of encouragement that this man cherishes as he prays.

Now oh Lord you are our father we are the clay and you are our potter we are all the work of your hand.

First thing you are our father you have given us being as a covenant nation you have drawn close to us and given us that relationship with yourself.

We are the clay we are like the earth we are really in ourselves invaluable or not valuable we really are of no concern to you so far as we are in ourselves but you shaped us into something you are our potter and you gave us form that magnifies and glorifies your name glory amen this is what the Lord always does when he comes in gospel blessing he stamps his own image upon those whom he blesses and this is what he is asking we are the work of your hands we are the clay but you are the potter please shape us so that we will glorify your great name I'm sure every child of God is able to echo that desire for themselves you be the potter

I am the clay mould me and make me in such a way that I will magnify your name and that I will be a vessel of honour in your church in the world that I might be used for honourable work to magnify and glorify and elevate the name of Jesus Christ the only saviour to whom I look for cleansing for forgiveness for restoration we have all become like one who is unclean notice the repetition of the word all we are all unclean all our righteous deeds like a polluted garment we all fade like a leaf and our iniquities like the wind take us away may God answer the prayers of his people by rending the heavens and coming down that the mountains might quake at his presence the mountains the mountains of sin and iniquity within me the mountains that surround me that are not at all in sympathy with gospel outlook and gospel blessing the powers of evil raising mountainous objections to my seeking to live for the Lord in my life when the fire kindles the brushwood and the fire causes water to boil to make your name known to your adversaries that the nations might

tremble at your presence may we have this prayer even if that's all we take with us from this evening's meeting that the Lord would rend the heavens and come down and if he would come down to my heart and you that he would touch the uncleanness that I might be cleansed that he would cleanse the iniquitous heart and that he would take away everything that is offensive to himself and everything that would cause a problem with my Christian witness may we continue to call upon him and may we know him answering us in our time of need let us pray