

Our Urgent Need for God's Intervention

Isaiah 63:15-64:12

November 24th, 2019

Big idea: We need God's intervention because of the natural tendency of our hearts to harden in disobedience.

Intro

Every parent of multiple kids knows this experience. You are in another room from your kids and you hear a conflict growing. You wonder, will this need my intervention? Will they sort this out on their own or will it turn into a flaming tornado of juvenile rage? Hopefully, as kids grow in maturity and put into practice the tools that you are imparting to them, the need for intervention gets less and less. But sometimes there is an urgent need for your intervention.

This passage in Isaiah describes the people's urgent need for God's intervention.

The problem is not sibling squabbling. The problem is that they have made a wreckage of their lives as a community and they cannot pull themselves out.

This has the language of lament, crying out to God in pain and hurt, expressing feelings and perceptions

Psalms 13:1 How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?

Has God forgotten him? No. Does it feel like it? Yes.

Laments are psalms that cry out to God, often with raw emotion, and yet express trust in darkness.

Mark Vroegop: Lament is the language of people who believe in God's sovereignty but live in a world with tragedy.

1. Lord, it feels like your heart is restrained. (63:15-19)
 - a. Begins with a request, "Look down and see us from your glorious place. Life is hard here."
 - b. It feels like God's heart and compassion are restrained – do you even care?
 - i. The same words are repeated here in the beginning and end of this lament.
 - ii. Please, don't restrain your compassion and heart toward us! Lord, we need more of You not less of You! The only answer is more of God.
 - c. Abraham and Jacob (Israel) wouldn't recognize them – they've drifted. They've changed. They're like a people who have never even been ruled by God (v. 19). They need renewal. They need God's intervention.
 - d. Is Isaiah blaming God for their straying and sin? (v. 17)
 - i. No, they have wandered, they don't fear God. They are responsible for that. But he recognizes something of God's discipline, God's hardening.
 - ii. "When we wander from his ways, God may teach us a lesson by handing us over to the power of our sins and hardening us, so that we can't come back."
 - iii. We cannot trivialize God and expect Him to simply bail us out. Sometimes He "delivers us into the power of our iniquities" as He will say in 64:7 and we will return to then.
2. We need You to intervene in an unexpected way again! (64:1-5a)
 - a. Powerful, emotional language in v 1 – "Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down!"
 - i. Crying out to God in passionate appeal

- ii. Recognizing that even as we go about life in this normal, material world there is a spiritual realm just behind a curtain. Asking God to tear through that, “come down” and intervene. Undeniably supernatural.
 - 1. God, what we need is You! Not just more moral instruction, not just tips on how to live, not a little more money, or better time management skills, but God.
 - iii. God is different than His creation but He can break into it if He chooses.
- b. He references another time when God had torn the heavens and come down – during the Exodus.
- i. **Exodus 19:16-20** So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. ¹⁹ When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. ²⁰ The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.
 - ii. God had made Himself known to His adversaries, in that case the Egyptians who would not let His people go. He gave them 10 opportunities to do the right thing, but Pharaoh refused.
- c. God did awesome things which they did not expect.
- i. “Awesome” as in “awe inspiring” or “terrible” - not as in, “that backflip was awesome!” Showed a power that was not of this world and the people were terrified.
 - ii. God is not bound to our expectations. He acts consistently with His character and revealed word, but He often acts in surprising ways in the Bible.
 - 1. Israel cornered at the Red Sea – the water opens up – nobody expected that
 - 2. Whole world stumbling in darkness – Savior of the world born in a barn – no one expected that
 - 3. We all were condemned with inexcusable guilt – judge endured our penalty at the cross. Nobody was expecting that
 - 4. He was dead and buried and His people were shattered and scattering – he rose from the dead – nobody expecting that
 - 5. He poured out his Spirit to make murderers into messengers – no one was expecting that
 - 6. In the wildness of the hippy movement of the 60’s and 70’s, the Jesus people movement broke out and mass numbers of people came to Christ from unexpected backgrounds.
 - 7. Today, once obvious and accepted ideas about what makes someone man or woman are being challenged, productive conversations are difficult, what was once condemned is now celebrated, 7-10 churches close every Sunday in America. Lord, surprise us again.
- d. We can be hopeful because God is real.
- i. He is utterly and completely unique. There is no God like him. He is in a class by himself. No one has heard of such a God or seen one
 - ii. He’s real. Just because there is a mountain of fakes, doesn’t mean there isn’t a reality that is really real. Just like you can buy fake name brand goods overseas, doesn’t mean there isn’t such thing as a real thing.

- iii. **1 John 1:1-4** What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- ² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- ³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.
 - 1. John is saying, This is real. We heard him, we saw him, we touched him and now we're telling you about it.
 - 2. Del Tackett asked, "Do you really believe that what you believe is really real?"
 - e. God meets the one who waits for Him, but the waiting is active – actively and joyfully doing what is right.
 - i. Ortlund – God meets not the brilliant one, lucky one, but the one who is joyfully, humbly going along in the simple, ordinary path of obedience. That's where God can be found – not with a guru on a mountain top but right where you are, if you're willing.
 - ii. But this is where the dilemma comes in and Isaiah recognizes it for himself and his people. We don't do what is righteous. What follows is a remarkably full and nuanced doctrine of sin.
- 3. But we know our sins are **persistent**, deep, and withering. (64:5b-7)
 - a. Sin angers God
 - b. Sin may be continued much longer than we originally planned
 - i. Not merely briefly dabbled but continued in them
 - ii. The dilemma – if God meets those who rejoice in doing righteousness, what are we to do when we have continued in sins a long time? Our page is not blank but stained. How do we begin afresh?
 - c. Sin brings a sense of uncleanness that we often experience as shame
 - d. Sin runs so deep that even our good things are tainted and have become like filthy rags.
 - i. Total depravity or pervasive depravity
 - ii. You maybe know the feeling of doing something right and kind (bringing a meal, reaching out to someone hurting) but recognizing that your motives are mixed at best.
 - e. Sin has a way of withering a person's life like a dry leaf.
 - i. Oswalt -All their life is derivative and it has slowly ebbed away, leaving only the empty husk that the winter wind will blow away. It is interesting, and highly appropriate, that he equates our iniquities with the wind, because just as the dead leaf is helpless before the wind, so the human spirit becomes captive to its sins and is no more able to choose its course than the leaf.
 - 1. **Psalm 1:3-4** He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.
 - 2. ⁴ The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
 - f. Sin carries us along like a dry leaf on the wind
 - i. Maybe you know the experience of beginning something you know is wrong but thinking you can stop anytime. And then it becomes so tough to extricate yourself.
 - ii. They take us farther than we want to go with consequences we don't want to experience.

- g. Sin can lead to such spiritual passivity that we don't even want to take initiative to call on God for help.
- h. God can even "deliver us over" to them.
 - i. **Romans 1:24** Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.
 - ii. **Romans 1:26** For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,
 - iii. **Romans 1:28** And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

4. Remember that we are your **people**. (64:8-9)

- a. "but now" – the facts as Isaiah sees them have been rehearsed, he recognizes their need for God's intervention. He recognizes that their only help is the Lord.
- b. Move from God as moral judge to Father and Creator.
- c. In prayer, the people are remembering their identity and pleading with God to act on the basis of their relationship with Him.
- d. Potter and clay –
 - i. Jeremiah uses the same analogy to talk about God's dealing with His people.
 - ii. The book of Romans quotes it
 - 1. **Romans 9:19-24** ¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?
 - iii. What is the implication of this potter/clay arrangement?
 - 1. Next verse – we're your people so please remember us and save and have mercy
 - 2. Oswalt – can the artist simply toss aside the thing on which he has lavished care and attention, into which he has put so much of himself?
 - 3. We know part of this when we create something and have a hard time tossing it – deleting that sentence that you love but doesn't fit the article, tossing the bookshelf that you made 20 years ago, asking a child to toss her latest drawing – we feel attached to things we have created.

5. Will you restrain yourself in the face of our **need**? (64:10-12)

- a. Laments usually end with a promise to praise God or an expression of trust. This chapter doesn't. Why?
 - i. The place they would worship has been destroyed. Remember, this is looking ahead to after the destruction of the temple.
- b. The cities have been destroyed, Jerusalem (Zion) in particular.
- c. God, will you keep restraining yourself from helping? Will you keep discipling?
- d. The next two chapters contain God's answer.

6. God's answer:

- a. "I have **spread out** My hands to you!" (Isaiah 65:2)

- i. **Isaiah 65:2** "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk *in* the way which is not good, following their own thoughts,
 - ii. You feel like I have shut off my heart and compassion toward you? No, my hands are open wide. Come!
- b. "I won't keep **silent**, but I will repay." (Isaiah 65:6)
 - i. **Isaiah 65:6** "Behold, it is written before Me, I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will even repay into their bosom,
 - ii. You feel like I have been silent? Yes, but I will not keep silent. For those that will not repent there will be judgment.
- c. "I will look to the one who is **humble**, contrite, and trembles at My word." (Isaiah 66:1-2)
 - i. **Isaiah 66:1-2** Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? ² "For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.
 - ii. What do I want from you? Humility, contrition, trembling at My word.