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Let God Come Down!

A Burden for God's Glory

ISAIAH 64

This is revival, dear people! This is a sovereign act of God! This is the moving of God's Spirit, I believe in answer to the prevailing prayer of men and women who believed that God was a Covenant-keeping God, and must be true to His Covenant engagement. —*Duncan Campbell*¹

We say our prayers, but have we ever prayed? Do we know anything about this encounter, this meeting? Have we the assurance of sins forgiven? Are we free from ourselves and self-concern, that we may intercede? Have we a real burden for the glory of God, and the name of the Church? Have we this concern for those who are outside? And are we pleading with God for his own name's sake, because of his own promises, to hear us and to answer us? Oh, my God, make of us intercessors. —*David Martyn Lloyd-Jones*²

IN ISAIAH 64, Isaiah had seen the very courts of heaven. But his job was to preach to a very earth-bound people. Isaiah

had a burden. His burden wasn't just for Israel. His burden was for the glory of God:

Oh, that You would rend the heavens!
That You would come down!
That the mountains might shake at Your presence—
As fire burns brushwood,
As fire causes water to boil—
To make Your name known to Your adversaries,
That the nations may tremble at Your presence! (Isa. 64:1–2)

Casting a Vision

When a new minister takes up his sacred post, many in the congregation may wonder about his vision for the church. Will he build upon the past or move in new directions?

Vision is a word that is not only overused but also misunderstood. In today's culture, *vision* implies carefully crafted statements, ranging from the simple to the sophisticated, for just about any corporation or organization. Everything from a Fortune 500 company to a small, family-run business has its own vision statement. And there is much to be commended in having one. However, a vision statement alone doesn't ensure success. In recent American corporate history, Enron Corporation had a laudable vision statement—before it became the biggest bankruptcy in U.S. history.

Of course, a vision statement for a church is vastly different from a vision statement for a corporation. The church's vision statement, its very identity and purpose, must be thoroughly grounded in the Word of God. Nothing else will do.

A church can have a finely crafted vision, but be completely out of the will of the Lord, unbiblical, and lacking in the power of the Holy Spirit who attends his Word. A church can be an

ecclesiastical Enron, all puffed up with religious smoke and mirrors, but having nothing of eternal value—or, as Paul put it, “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5).

The overriding purpose of this book is to cast a vision for the church, for God’s holy bride. That vision must be weighed on the scales of Scripture. Or, to put it another way, the church’s vision must stand with the Bible: “To the law and to the testimony!” (Isa. 8:20).

Before going one step further, there are three caveats. First, when casting a new vision for a church, you must recognize that there are powerful forces of good already in place in the church where you are placed. Dreams dreamed long ago and visions cast before you were born are still at work today. Second, recognize that it takes time to formulate a vision. Be patient. Ministers and lay leaders should spend the early months of their ministry listening to what God has been doing and is doing in their midst. Third, this book is not just for ministers and lay leaders. This book about the church is for all of us who are believers in Christ, who are members of that holy bride that Christ is perfecting. Now, more than ever, we need to think biblically about the church. She is under attack from without, and often, unwittingly, from within.

I have found that, as a minister serving as a seminary leader, I am often called upon to enter into discussions with believers about various challenges facing congregations. In most cases, the problem has something to do with the nature of the church in our day. It may involve a lack of understanding of role relationships in the church, or the express signs of a true church, or the scripturally revealed purpose of the church, or the biblically disclosed methods for the church to realize her glorious goals in the world. It may just be that we fail to understand the eschatological vision of the

church—that we are not where we are going, but we are on our way by God’s grace.

The Burden: A Holy Dissatisfaction

When the Word of God is read in its entirety, you come to understand that it begins with a burden. That burden, simply stated, is God’s burden for his own creation. Man was unable to keep God’s law and fell away from his Creator. This grieved God. According to Ephesians 1, God saw this before the foundation of the world and took steps to remedy the problem. After the fall, the rest of Scripture is a record of God working out his covenant of grace; that is, God, by grace, has been doing for man what man could not do for himself. It is a record of God ordaining that he would come down to fulfill the requirements of his law and to pour out his wrath for sin upon himself as a propitiation for the sins of man. God was burdened for his own creation.

So the vision of the Bible begins with a burden. Therefore, any outline for a church’s vision must begin with a burden. When believers come to understand that burden, when they develop a heart and a passion for something that grieves them, that pains them, that creates desire, then vision emerges. A biblical vision is a divine solution that lifts the burden.

Turning to Isaiah 64, you see that Isaiah was a man with a burden for God’s glory in his own generation. You begin to understand what that burden entailed when you read the prophet’s plaintive words, “Oh, that.”

Job uses this phrase more than anyone in Scripture. He cries out from the depth of his soul, “Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!” (Job 19:23).

David uses the same opening in his exasperation over the sin of the wicked: “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Ps. 107:21). And Isaiah the prophet cries out, “Oh, that You would . . . come down!” (Isa. 64:1).

“Oh, that” expresses a holy dissatisfaction with the way things are in comparison with who God is. The prophet has seen God, experienced his glory, known his salvation, desired that Israel would know him, and so was dissatisfied.

There is evidence throughout the Bible that Christians are to be dissatisfied. Christians are enjoined to be content—but that refers to our circumstances, not to God’s glory!

Moses had a burden. When he first had a burden for his Hebrew brethren, he took matters into his own hands and ended up herding goats in the back forty of Midian. But then God manifested himself in a burning bush, and when Moses took his rod and marched into Pharaoh’s court, that man had a burden for God’s glory.

Paul knew God’s glory in grace and could never be content with ordinary religion. He would sacrifice all, count every gain as rubbish, put himself at risk, and take on any earthly power. For what? That he might know Christ and the power of his resurrection. Paul was a burdened man. He was burdened for God’s glory. He had experienced Christ and thought that the world would be unworthy until every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father.

Thus, every vision begins with a burden, a holy dissatisfaction. “Oh, that” is the cry of a person or a church that has known the grace of God, has come to know the joy of a life surrendered to the compassionate Christ, and is discontent until God is glorified and worshipped and enjoyed.

The church today must have a burden. We must stand like Isaiah and say, “Oh, that God would come down in our community. There are people who need Christ. Oh, that God would come down to our nation. Oh, that God would come down to the Muslim people, to the African people, to Hispanics in Los Angeles, to smug, comfortable, pretend Christians who are not living to give God the glory.”

The church must be burdened—burdened for the glory of God.

Isaiah’s “oh, that” reveals his holy discontent, but the unfolding passage reveals more.

The Relief: Genuine Revival

The person who has experienced the living God is burdened for his glory in revival. Isaiah writes, “Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!” (Isa. 64:1). Isaiah is dissatisfied. He is burdened, and the relief that he seeks is genuine revival.

When Isaiah writes, “Oh, that You would . . . come down,” do you think he is just interested in springtime revival meetings by a visiting clergyman? Nothing could be further from his mind! The prophet is burdened by a lackadaisical religion. Isaiah doesn’t want religion. He wants God! In this passage, we see mountains trembling, fires setting the forest ablaze, water boiling. It is a veritable eruption of divine presence on earth that this man of God yearns for.

This, beloved, is what you must pray for. Pray for revival in this generation—a genuine movement of God in which he is honored and glorified in this hour of world history.

Paul Johnson, in his book *History of the American People*, notes that American history is a history of revival. As you look upon our nation—our desperate need, and our evangelical

churches going from one faddish program to another, just to grow membership roles—we must cry out, “Oh, that God would come down!” We need genuine revival, a moment of God that transcends our natural abilities and makes everyone know that he has come down.

The church today must have a burden for revival in our time.

The Result: Reformation

Note further that Isaiah longs for even more. He reveals the focus of his burden for revival: “Make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!” (Isa. 64:2 NIV). Isaiah is burdened for reformation as well as revival. The person who has experienced the living God is also burdened for reformation.

Reformation, in the biblical sense, is the transformation of society as the result of the transformation of the human soul because of God's own work. It is the burden of a child of God who has come to know the glory of God's holiness. The child of God, like the prophet, is offended that men continue to sin in the face of this holy God. Christians are people, like the prophets of old, who are filled with righteous indignation because God is not worshipped and honored properly. First you have a burden for the glory of God, then for revival, and then for reformation in our day.

As a child, you must have encountered bullies. Sandy was such a bully. He was known principally for his almost uncanny command of an ever-growing volume of curse words. No child ever had a more filthy mouth. But other kids began to pray for Sandy, and one child invited him to church. There was a new preacher at the church, and that was an excuse for Sandy to go. Over time, Sandy was saved, and he

changed—radically. He eventually led his entire family to Christ, felt the call to ministry, and today is a widely known Baptist preacher. The point is, reformation came to Sandy's house, and as his heart was changed, his speech and behavior were changed.

You must have a burden for God's glory in our world today. Are you tired of vulgarity on the airwaves of our nation, horrified by abortions being given legal protection, struck with righteous indignation over our great Christian churches ordaining unrepentant sinners to the pulpit, and offended by the sexualizing of everything and the open attack by Madison Avenue on our children's innocence? If so, you have a burden for God's glory in the land.

The church must be burdened by the ugliness of sin in our generation and by the bondage, pain, and brokenness that accompany it. The church must long for the reformation of our land and pray that God would come down and do something in the hearts of our countrymen, that God would supernaturally renew the minds of the people in our family and our community.

The Method: Salvation

But the question comes then, How can we be saved? Indeed, this is Isaiah's question in Isaiah 64:5:

How then can we be saved? (NIV)

And we need to be saved. (NKJV)

The answer is found in Isaiah 64:8:

But now, O LORD,
You are our Father.

Why can you expect an answer to the prayer, "God, come down"? There are two reasons.

Because of the fatherhood of God. "Oh, God, come down!" That statement is our hope. You must fix your eyes on the very nature of God as he reveals himself to us. He is our Father. The fatherhood of God assures us that he will answer our prayers.

God as Father desires the salvation of his children, our healing, and the transformation of this world more than any pastor could. This is the testimony of Scripture:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. (2 Cor. 5:19)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. (John 3:16)

Benjamin B. Warfield of old Princeton Seminary taught that the emphasis of John 3:16 is on the love of God in comparison to the wickedness of the world. He "so loved the world." God's love is greater than our sin. His grace and mercy are greater than our little rebellion.

When a pastor is burdened for God's glory in revival and reformation, he wants what God wants. And those prayers are bound to be answered, for God's own nature, his fatherhood, assures us that he will come down.

Jesus assures us of this truth when he says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

Because of the work of the Son. The other answer is in Isaiah 64:9: “Do not remember our sins forever” (NIV).

He didn't. God, before the foundation of the world, made a sacred pledge to himself, a covenant of grace, that he would assume the sins of his people himself. Thus, on Calvary's cross, the central act of cosmic history took place. Paul wrote, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21 NIV).

Your burdens were lifted at Calvary. And therein lies your hope, your answer, and the vision of your life, your church, and your family. The love of God in Jesus Christ gives you optimism in your day. God will be successful. You may begin the work of prayer, of preaching, and of witness in our day. You may not see the salvation en masse that you long to see, but God's kingdom will be successful. He will bring all of his people in. This gives you unbounded confidence in your work in the church. Believers stand on the winning side.

Conclusion

Isaiah 64 draws a surprising beginning. It teaches that developing a vision begins by confessing a holy dissatisfaction with the way things are and hungering for God to be glorified. You must admit your longing for revival and reformation, and recognize that the answer to that longing is found at the foot of the cross.

A story will illustrate this point. A minister once preached a message on the soul's desire for God. After the service, an elder came to the minister and said, “I go to church. I pray. I do everything a good Christian is supposed to do. But when you talk about desiring God, I'm lost. When you talk about panting for the presence of God, I have no idea what you are talking about. I know the catechism, but I don't know

about this passion for Christ or this love for him. Can you tell me what's missing?" What that man was missing was a true awareness of God's glory, of his own sinfulness, and of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ at Calvary's cross. Over time, he came to know God's love and grace. For to know him is to love him and desire him. To desire him is to long for him, to be burdened for his crown rights as King of kings and Lord of lords in our generation.

Isaiah was burdened for the glory of God because he had experienced God's glory in his own life. Similarly, if the church doesn't know God's grace, if its leaders don't experience the glory of God in prayer, if families don't know his mercy and his peace through seeking him in prayer and worship in their own homes, then the church will have no burden.

Before you can cast a vision for your church, you must come to know your sin, your need, and his holiness. You must also know his love in sending his own Son to die for your sinful condition. When you know him in that way and you look out on a world of brokenness and sin and shame—across the ocean, across the nation, across the city, and, yes, across your own living room—then your soul will be burdened to cry with Isaiah, "Oh, that God would come down!"



Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect on your church's vision, even if you have no official statement of it. What do the leaders and congregation expect from the church? Are their expectations grounded in the Word of God? Are their expectations in alignment?

How can the church encourage unity and holiness of vision?

2. Do the visions of past leaders play a role in your church's decision making? If they do, evaluate them. Are they hindering the church's true mission, or do they help to focus and unite the church? How might those in leadership communicate their vision and their predecessors' vision to the congregation?
3. Consider how you can pray for vision and revival. What burdens might your church be called to lift? What are the concerns and passions of the congregation? How could your church's location come into play?
4. Write the rough outline of a vision statement for your church or revise the current one. How can you personally contribute to this vision?
5. Examine your heart. What motivates your desire for revival? How must the gospel change you?

Prayer

Oh, that my heart would be burdened for your glory in this generation; oh, that you would send your Spirit to renew and revive me and your church to take the gospel of the cross to this generation!