

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, April 25, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

The Church's Greatest Need - Isaiah 64:1-8

Introduction: Look at this church on the screen. It's a small church. It's sort of run down and is in need of repair isn't it? Well, once a pastor of a small church such as this conducted a survey of the 25 church members. The only question was: What is the greatest need in our church? Here are the results:

Cleaning	Painting	Central heat
Central air	Paved parking	Fellowship Hall
A new roof	Indoor Bathrooms	Chandelier
Children	Youth	Young couples
Faithful members	More singing	Less singing
Be Friendlier	More Enthusiasm	More Tithers
Cut budget	Increase budget	More mission giving
Less mission giving	Louder preaching	Shorter sermons
A new preacher		

Sometimes that's the way it is whenever you're dealing with people? Everyone has their own opinion.

When it comes to thinking about the church's greatest need, perhaps we'd do well to listen to this little boy's prayer. He had been to church one Sunday, and that night before he went to bed he prayed, "God, I had a great time at church today. Wish you could have been there." OUCH! That's a real slap-in-the-face isn't it? Have you ever felt that way after leaving church? All the elements of worship were there, but you left wondering if God ever showed up. You wonder if it all was done without Him.

Well, it is possible, and I'm wondering how often it's happening in our churches. When you read reports that out of the 39 churches in our association, 6 had 0 baptisms last year and 5 others only had 1, it makes you wonder if the presence of God was in those churches. Listen, unless God shows up, our churches are going to dry up! That's why I want to tell you today that the church's greatest need is for a revival of God's presence.

We're a week away from the start of our revival services. We've been planning for it. We've held revival prayer meetings both here and in homes. We've advertised it. And to some degree, I've seen evidence of true revival stirring among us.

But I have to be honest with you, I'm wondering if it's actually hit all of us yet. I'm wondering if there may be some apathy among us. I'm wondering if some don't even believe that we need a revival because they're content with the way things are. I hope I'm wrong, but I know that when the church gets serious about revival, the devil doesn't like it and he'll use anything he can to put out the fire – even other people if he can.

But whether you're on board the revival express or not, it doesn't change the fact that the church's greatest need is for a revival of God's presence among God's people.

Turn with me to Isaiah 64. Here we find a plea for revival among the people of God. Let's read vs. 1-8 and see three things we need to know about real revival.

1 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!

3 For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved?

6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

7 No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.

8 Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Isaiah 64:1-8 (NIV)

The first thing we see here is that if we're going to have a real revival, then we need to know:

1. What Revival Is

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! (1)

Isaiah was praying this prayer because God's people in Judah were looking for protection, but they were looking in the wrong place. They were looking for protection from Assyria because the Babylonians had invaded their land, destroyed their Temple, and carried God's people away in captivity. So, by this time, their faith was weak, their commitment was shallow, their hearts were cold. Their troubles had caused them to become a bickering, backbiting, hard-to-please, and apathetic people. And all they cared about hearing was something that would ease their troubles.

When Isaiah cried out to God on their behalf, he prayed, "*Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down...*" (1). He was begging for a renewed awareness of God's presence among the people. That is what real revival is.

For you see, it was as if God had been tied down and closed up in His heavenly tent and hadn't been allowed to come out for a long time. Isaiah was saying "*God, if you have to rip the tent to get out and come down to us, we need to know you're still with us. We need you right here, right now!*"

Now Isaiah didn't have theological problems. He knew that God was everywhere, but he wasn't sure the people knew that. He was so concerned for their spiritual condition, and how far they had strayed from God, he was pleading with God to make them aware of His presence in a dramatic and powerful way. He wanted the people to see what revival looked like.

"Oh God, would you rip open the roof of this sanctuary and come down? We need to experience your presence. We need a fresh anointing of your Holy Spirit to move us from our complacency; to rid us of ourselves; and fill us with your presence. We want to be able to sing, 'Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. I can feel your mighty power and your grace. I can hear the brush of angels' wings. I see glory on each face. Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.'"

We need a revival of the presence of God again. I'm not talking about a revival in the sense of having series of meetings with toe-tapping singing and "*Amen shoutin*" preaching. Someone said, "*Revival is not some emotion or worked-up excitement; it is rather an invasion from heaven which brings awareness of God.*" That's the revival I want to see!

Well, the next thing we need to know about revival is:

2. What Revival Does

1. *Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!*

2 *As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! (1-2)*

What happens when God makes His presence known? Isaiah describes three things that real revival does in these verses. First:

A. Things Get Shaken Up. Isaiah prayed to the Lord and said, "*God, if you'd come down and make your presence known to your people, 'the mountains would tremble before you.'*" What Isaiah knew was that when a real revival comes, God shows up and things get shaken up.

Isaiah knew that a powerful display of the presence of the Lord would have a dramatic effect on these people. Perhaps he was thinking about the time when God showed up on Mt. Sinai and gave Moses His law. The Bible says that on that morning, as the people stood around that mountain, "*...there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled*" **Exodus 19:16 (NIV)**. When God showed up, the people were shaken up.

Acts 4 tells us that Peter and John found themselves in jail because they were preaching Jesus. But when the Jewish religious leaders let them go, they returned to their companions to tell them what happened, the Bible says that "*after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken*" **Acts 4:31 (NIV)**. Why? Because God showed up!

Jesus talks about His return to earth in the last days and says, "*...the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken*" **Matthew 24:29b (NIV)**. When God shows up, He shakes things up. Isaiah

knew that because he said the mountains would be shaken at His presence.

Now we all know what a mountain is - a massive fixture of dirt and rock that we can't move. Now we can climb mountains, tunnel through mountains, and even fly over mountains, but we can't move mountains. But God can as we heard about last week when the volcanic eruption happened in Iceland.

But there are also other types of mountains that may need a powerful display of God's presence in order to be moved. I'm talking about mountains we may have our lives or in the church. I'm talking about Mt. Indifference, Mt. Apathy, Mt. Non-commitment – Mt. Unconcern, Mt. Jealousy, Mt. Pride, Mt. Hurt Feelings, Mt. Control, or Mt. Anger, or Mt. Resentment? What's it going to take to move those mountains you may not want moved? It will take the powerful presence of God to shake things up and turn our lives and our church upside down.

But this is exactly why so many don't want revival. They'd rather keep things the way they are. They've grown rather fond of their mountain. They've convinced themselves that God is ok with their uncommitted and unfaithful lives, so they don't need a revival. They'd rather sit still than be shaken up. But I join with Isaiah and I'm praying to God, *"Come down and Shake up our apathetic attitudes. Shake us up from our sleep. Shake up our burden for the lost! Shake up our youth, our children, and our adults! Shake up our Sunday School, our music, our deacons! Shake up our passion for the things of God! Shake us up God, shake us up!"*

Well, in vs. 2, Isaiah continues to pray for revival. And what he's praying for is the second thing real revival does. When God shows up and things get shaken up:

B. People Get Fired Up. Isaiah prays, *"As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil."* for God to *"come down to make your name known to your enemies"* (2). God is referred to in **Deuteronomy 4:24 (NIV)** as a *"consuming fire"* And in **1 Kings 18:24 (NIV)**, Elijah told the prophets of Baal, *"The god who answers by fire - He is God."* So, when God shows up, not only do things get shaken up; but He fires people up as well.

Now, what is the significance of fire? Well, in God's Word, fire is symbolic of three things:

a) Judgment -God would often judge by fire. For example, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire (Gen. 19). Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire because they offered a sacrifice in disobedience to God. (Lev. 10:2) King Ahaziah who was the King of Samaria, sent men to inquire of Baal Zebub and God send down fire on them because he didn't consult Him. So fire is one of the judgments of God

But when God shows up in revival and He is seen in His perfect holiness, there will be a sense of awareness of sin and failure. And as God comes in and invades our lives, He will judge that sin and then there will be a great outpouring of remorse and repentance among God's people as they plead for God's mercy and grace and forgiveness. But also in God's Word, fire is symbolic of:

b) Refining - **Malachi 3:3 (NIV)** says of God that *"He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver."* Once a lady was invited to attend a Bible study in which this passage was going to be studied. She wanted to know what it meant, so she went to a local silversmith to observe the process of refining silver. When the demonstration was over, she approached the silversmith and asked him why he sat through the process. The silversmith said, *"I must sit with my eye steadily fixed on the furnace, for if the time necessary for refining is exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured. I know the process is finished when I can see my image reflected in the silver."*

That is what the refining fire of God does. He burns off the impurities in our lives. When God shows up even the hidden things in our lives are brought forth and dealt with. The refining fire of God can turn our carelessness into concern, our apathy into action, and our grumbling and griping into going with the gospel. Also, in God's Word, fire is symbolic of:

c) The Holy Spirit - The Holy Spirit's ministry is described in terms of fire in the Bible. On the day of Pentecost, Luke said those disciples *"saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit."* **Acts 2:3-4a (NIV)**. Paul tells us, *"Do not put out the Spirit's fire"* **1 Thess. 5:19 (NIV)**.

I don't know if He will actually look like fire, but when revival comes, God will show up as the Holy Spirit empowering God's people. He'll renew a fiery passion for Jesus and for people. He'll spark our worship and make it come alive. He'll light a fire under us and motivate us to want to serve and minister to others like never before. And He'll empower us to be bold witnesses for Him.

So don't be afraid or intimidated by the Holy Spirit. He's God! He's Christ! He's our friend & Comforter! May our prayer be as the song says, "*Blaze Spirit Blaze set our hearts on fire.*"

But there's one other thing that real revival does. When God shows up and shakes us up and fires us up, also:

C. God's Name will be Revered – Isaiah prays in vs. 2, for God to "*come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!*" **Isaiah 64:2 (NIV)**

When I was thinking about trying out for football, I quickly dismissed the idea the day one of the players came up to me and was talking about Coach Chappell, the head coach. He said, "*You know, Coach Chappell, He'll put the fear of God in you.*"

Well, a lot of people may think of God in those terms – as a mean old man who's ready to pop us with a lightning bolt every time we mess up. But that is not the kind of fear Isaiah is talking about. The word used here is the Hebrew word "*ragaz*" which is translated "*quiver.*" It literally means "*to stand in awe of.*"

When I thought of this, I remembered the scene in the Wizard of Oz where Dorothy and the Lion, the Tin Man, and the Scarecrow meet the Wizard of Oz. And one-by-one they all approach the great Wizard shaking and quivering.

When God shows up there will be a great sense of awe and honor and respect for who He is. It won't be a dread or a paralyzing fear of Him, but rather an awesome and humbling reverence for Him. It's the kind of reverence that causes a grown man or woman to kneel at an altar and pray. It's the kind of reverence that will compel us to come to worship even when we don't feel like it. It's the kind of reverence that will keep us from using any old excuse to miss church.

Let me ask you, how many times have you said, "*Well, I don't think I'll go to church today 'cause there ain't nothing for me there?*" What? Are you saying God is nothing? Do any of you go on to work when you're sick? Having a reverence for God will keep us from using those excuses and makes us hunger and thirst for His presence. That is the kind of reverence we'll experience when God comes down. Even so Lord Jesus, come!

Finally, if we're to experience revival, we need to know:

3. What Revival Requires

4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved?

6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

7 No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. (4-7)

God's people had gone down a slippery slope of rebellion and apathy toward the things of God. In these verses Isaiah clues us in on three requirements to bring down God's presence. First, we need to:

A. Send the Prayers Up – In vs. 7 he says, "*No one calls on your name.*" This describes a desperate plea to God for His presence and help. Jim Cymballa, pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle began his ministry there with 20 Christians in a dead church. God lead him to teach the people to "*Call upon the name of the Lord*" in fervent prayer. Now there is not a building large enough to hold the crowds! We like Isaiah must begin to cry out to God for personal revival. And we have. We've tried to saturate this revival with prayer. And I hope it won't stop once the meetings are over. May it continue on! I pray that it will never be said of Sonoraville, that "*No one there calls on you, Lord.*" Second, we need to:

B. Wake Ourselves Up – In vs. 3, Isaiah says that God "*did awesome things we did not expect...*"

Isaiah is saying that even though these people had experienced God's power and presence in previous times, lately, they were content with their lives and were not even aware of their sorry condition. This was a call for them to stir themselves up and wake up!

We need to heed what Isaiah is saying. Too many times we wait for the choir to thrill us with a moving song. Or we wait for someone to move us with a powerful testimony, or we wait for a preacher to stir us up with a sermon. But all the while, God is saying "*Stop waiting to be moved, and move yourself! Wake yourselves up!*" Wake up to what is happening in your church! You don't like when people aren't committed? All you can do

is wake up and be that example of commitment and faithfulness! You are concerned that we're not seeing folks saved and baptized? Wake up and go yourself and tell the good news of Jesus. The harvest field is ripe, but we're asleep in the house. We need to wake up and get out into the field. Finally, we need to

C. Reach Our Hand Out - Isaiah said in vs. 7 that "*No one... strives to lay hold of you.*" Reach out to God. How? Just do what you know to do. If you don't know how, learn! Tell us what you like to do, what you're gift is, and we'll find you something to do. Make a bold move toward God. Discipline yourselves to pray and seek God. Commit yourself to God's church. James says if you "*draw near to God, He will draw near to you.*" So reach out to Him in prayer and worship. Make your song this week be "*Revive me again, fill my heart with Thy love. May my soul be rekindled with fire from above. Hallelujah Thine the glory. Hallelujah Amen! Hallelujah Thine the glory. Revive me again!*"