

**Salvation in Answer to Prayer**  
**Isaiah 65: 1 – 16**

Our sermon text this morning will be Isaiah 65, verses 1 to 16. We'll pray before we take that reading. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, we pray that you would bless your word to us. We pray, Father, that we would be given ears to hear and eyes to see, and hearts that are meek and that will understand and obey your word. Father in heaven, I pray that you would help me as I speak, and that you'd help us all as we listen. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 65, reading verses 1 to 16: “<sup>1</sup>I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by my name. <sup>2</sup>I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; <sup>3</sup>a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; <sup>4</sup>who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig’s flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels; <sup>5</sup>who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.’ These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. <sup>6</sup>Behold, it is written before me: ‘I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their lap <sup>7</sup>both your iniquities and your fathers’ iniquities together, says the LORD; because they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds.’

“<sup>8</sup>Thus says the LORD: ‘As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, “Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,” so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all. <sup>9</sup>I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains; my chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there. <sup>10</sup>Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me. <sup>11</sup>But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, <sup>12</sup>I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in.’

“<sup>13</sup>Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; <sup>14</sup>behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart and shall wail for breaking of spirit. <sup>15</sup>You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord GOD will put you to death, but his servants he will call by another name, <sup>16</sup>so that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.’” Amen, and may God bless His word to us.

Isaiah chapter 65 takes the form of God’s answer to Isaiah’s prayer that started back in Isaiah chapter 63, verse 7. Remember Isaiah chapter 63, verses 1 to 6, if you want to just quickly have

a look back at it, Isaiah was confronted with the vision of a blood-stained Savior, and the Savior was blood-stained because He had been enacting judgment against His enemies. He was spattered with their blood. And starting at verse 7, Isaiah starts to pray: “<sup>7</sup>I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD.”

We looked further into his praying last week, through to the end of Isaiah chapter 64, noticing that Isaiah was praying for mercy from a sovereign God. In each stanza of his prayer, he acknowledged that God is sovereign over all things, and even so, he begged that God would have mercy on His people. He begged for the mercy of God, for the restoration of the people of God.

Well, in Isaiah chapter 65, there’s kind of irony here. God basically says to Isaiah, “I am answering your prayer,” and even at the same time as He says, “I am answering your prayer,” He says, “and I’m not answering your prayer. Your prayer is being answered; and your prayer will not be answered.” And I hope you’re immediately thinking, Okay, how is this? How can that be?

Well, let’s think of Isaiah. What was Isaiah praying for in his own mind? In his own mind, Isaiah’s praying for the people of God, and in his mind, the people of God are the offspring of Abraham. He’s praying for the tribes of Israel. He’s praying for the offspring of Jacob. That’s what he’s praying for. “God, strengthen, build up the people of Abraham. Return to us and be our God, as you before were our God, the God who rescued us from Egypt. Be our God. Be faithful to us. Remember your people.”

And God’s answer to Isaiah is, “I am going to be faithful to my people. I am going to rescue the offspring of Abraham, but the offspring of Abraham are not going to be the blood of Abraham. The offspring of Abraham are going to be found amongst those who share the faith of Abraham. And so the answer to Isaiah is, “I’m answering your prayer. Fulfillment is coming. The promised revival will come. The promised life from on high will be poured out upon my people. It’s coming! But it’s not quite what you’re expecting, Isaiah.”

Isaiah is still thinking very much the same way that the disciples were thinking, even right up until the day that Jesus departed from them. Just turn quickly in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 1. Jesus has risen from the dead. They’ve had forty days of intense Bible study with Jesus, the risen Savior. And it’s time for Him to ascend to heaven, where He will be seated at the right hand of the Father.

Look at Acts chapter 1, verse 6: “So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’” What were they thinking? “Surely now’s the time. Surely now’s the time that God will rule the world through His holy people, the blood of Abraham, from Jerusalem, that God will establish this kingdom that fills the whole world.” They’re still thinking like Isaiah was thinking.

It's obvious when you get to Acts chapter 2 and the sermon that Peter preaches, suddenly Peter's changed his tune. Suddenly the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has opened the Scripture to him, and he realizes that the gospel is going out to all the world. Just turn over to Acts chapter 2, looking at Acts chapter 2, verse 39, Peter preaching: "For the promise is for you and for your children," there he's speaking to the Jews, "and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Now in that context, he's preaching in the temple court in Jerusalem, and he says, "This promise is for all who are far off." He wasn't speaking of this promise being only for the house of Israel. This promise is for all the world. Nations will be called to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah's been praying for the salvation of the people of God, but in his mind, the salvation of the people of God, as I've said, is the blood of Abraham. That's the people of God. And God's answer to Isaiah, I hope we will see, is, "I've got a bigger people than that. I've got more in mind than just the blood of Abraham. The old covenant is never going to be re-established in all its glory. It's never going to be that way again—people worshiping in the temple of God in a capital city somewhere on this earth, with sacrifices of sheep and goats and oxen. That's not what I've got planned. I've got something greater than this planned. I'm bringing into place the new covenant, the new covenant of eternal life through Jesus Christ my Son."

Now obviously, "the new covenant of eternal life through Jesus Christ my Son," is not what's said to Isaiah. Those particular words are not used, but as I said, I'm hoping we'll see that that is what God indeed says to Isaiah. And just as I close this introduction, this immediately made me think of the passage we started the service off with this morning in Romans chapter 8, verses 26 and 27. What did we read? We read that though we do not know what to pray for as we ought, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, that our prayers are according to the will of God.

And so Isaiah's praying for the tribes of Israel, and God says, "Really, Isaiah, you're praying for my people, who are my people through faith. You're praying for more than just the offspring of Abraham, in the way that you're thinking of it. And I think there's a little picture there of that kind of intercession. Isaiah prays for something, and God says, "I'm going to answer, but the answer's not going to be what you expect." There might be something there in that for all of us to learn in our Christian lives. The answer may well come in a way that we're not looking for it. The answer might be something that we don't expect.

Let's have a look. I've divided it into three portions: Verses 1 to 7, The Tribes of Israel Rejected; in verses 8 to 12, we'll see The Nation of Israel Is To Be Saved Only Through a Remnant; and in verses 13 to 16, New Covenant Israel Is Revealed.

Let's have a look, then. Section 1, verses 1 to 7: The Tribes to be Rejected. Reading from verse 1 of Isaiah 65: "1 I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by my name. 2 I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people."

Turn now to Romans chapter 10, which read earlier, looking at verses 20 and 21 at end of the chapter. The Apostle Paul says, “<sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, ‘I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.’ <sup>21</sup> But of Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.’”

So here we have it in Romans chapter 10. We have the Holy Spirit-inspired interpretation and application of Isaiah’s prophecy. We know exactly what Isaiah said. We know exactly what it means. How do we know that? Because it’s in Scripture. Paul tells us there in Romans chapter 10 that the first two verses of Isaiah tell us that the gospel is to go out to the world, that Gentiles are to be called to salvation, and the Jews themselves, who have been a rebellious people, are to be rejected—not totally rejected, not utterly rejected; there is a remnant of them. Even today, there is a remnant.

Are the Jews being saved? Yes, all the Jews who put faith in Jesus Christ are being saved, just as the Apostle Paul was saved, just as the disciples were saved. They’re being saved through faith in Christ. God has not rejected them in terms of the offer of salvation, although in terms of being the covenantal people who stand at the end of the nations, in terms of old covenant blessing, well, they are under old covenant cursing. As I hope we see in our passage as we read through it, they are under the fulfillment of God’s old covenant promises.

God’s old covenant promised salvation and deliverance, and it promised cursing for the breaking of His law. Basically, God’s old covenant said, “You don’t keep this law, you don’t keep the land, you don’t stay at the head of the nations, you don’t remain my chosen people, you will become the offscouring of the world.”

That’s what we see in the world today. Israel is not the head of all the world, though Jews themselves are saved and though Jews themselves are still in the world. Why? Well, God promised to Abraham that He would always be saving Jews—a certain amount of Jews, a certain number. And so they’re being called even today.

“I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask me,” back at Isaiah 65. “I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by my name.” You see, the only nation up until this point that had ever been called by the name of God was Israel. They were the people called by the name of God. They were the nation of the living God.

And God says, “I’m ready to be found by those who were not seeking me. I’m ready to be found by other nations.” This is God’s covenantal cursing coming into play. “I’m taking the blessings I had promised you and taking them away. I’m going to pour them out upon a people in whom I have faith.” Verse 2: “I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people.” All the day. The picture here is a God of incredible patience, of incredible longsuffering grace and patience.

How many hundreds of years did He keep sending prophets to the people of Israel? How many hundreds of years did He keep sending people to call them back to faithfulness? It would seem that it did not matter how far into sin they fell, God was willing to receive them if they were willing to receive His word with faith. He was willing to restore them if they were willing to repent. Day after day after day, His prophets and the good kings of Israel would attempt to lead the people back, but look at what it says as we read on.

We now get an explanation, from the remainder of verse 2 through to the end of verse 7. We get an explanation of the way God looks upon these people: They walk in a way that is not good; they follow their own devices; they're a "people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks."

What's that mean—"Making offerings on bricks"? Well, the law commanded that in any altar that the Jews made, there was to be no hand-worked stone. They had to make their altars of native stone, unworked stone. In other words, they had to search the hillsides and the deserts and find stones that were in and of themselves a suitable shape to build into this structure that they called an altar.

But, no, they thought they knew better. They knew better than God. They made altars according to the design of man. And if you're going to build something, ask any builder, it's much easier to build from things that are nice and square-cut, right angles and standard lengths. You know, they lock together. It's much easier to build an altar from manmade bricks than it is to go searching far and wide for stones that you can fit into this structure. And God says, "No, no. You don't worship me your way; you worship me my way. You worship me the way that I have laid down in Scripture, and I said you make your altars out of uncut stone."

"You sit in tombs and spend the night in secret places." This is probably a reference to seeking messages from the dead—necromancy, the occult, people supposedly spirit-possessed, bringing messages from the dead. "You eat pig's flesh and the broth of tainted meat is in their vessels." Now, were they literally eaters of swine? I don't know; probably. I mean, every other kind of lawbreaking and uncleanness is being done here, and pigs are certainly, you know, a convenient animal to grow. They live on almost anything. They're fairly robust. They grow fast. It's an easy way to get your meat. If you want to get meat, grow pigs. But even if they're not literally eating pigs, what God is saying is, "Because your worship is unclean, as far as I'm concerned, everything about you is unclean. Even if you weren't eating pigs, as far as I'm concerned, you're an eater of pig's flesh. You are unclean, and the broth of tainted meat is in your vessels."

"You say, 'Keep to yourself, and do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.'" My, my. Imagine that. Here's the message to God: "Don't come near us, we're cleaner than you. Don't come near us, we're holier than you. Don't come hear us, we know better than you."

How could that be? How could people think that way? Well, how often do you hear people criticize God's law—criticize God's law, God's judgments? "He's cruel. He's vengeful. He

hates people. He's not merciful. His law includes the death penalty for any number of crimes." And people imagine that they are more compassionate than God. "Don't you understand, people, as these people obviously do not understand?"

Everyone's under the death penalty—everyone. Everyone comes to the end of their days. Everybody in this world is under the death penalty. It's God's decision who dies, when, and how. And if God chooses judicial death, who is there to say that God does not have the right to say that a person ought to die a death for a specific sin that they have committed?

But I know people—"We're holier than God. We're more compassionate than God. We're more loving than Jesus. We're more loving than Jesus. Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.' Oh, that horrible, exclusive man! You mean He says that not all religions are the same? You mean He says that the faithful Jew, the faithful Buddhist, the faithful Muslim, the faithful Hindu—you mean He's saying that people who are living according to their best lights are not saved?" That's exactly what He's saying.

"Oh, no. No, no. I'm more compassionate than Jesus. I know more than God. I'm too holy for God. Keep away from me! I'm not going to submit to this law and to this word. I'm not going to submit to your commandments and your judgments. I'm wiser than you are, God. I know better than you." And that's the kind of people Isaiah is addressing, or God is addressing through Isaiah—these people that live in and amongst the nation of Israel.

We won't turn there, but in the book of Jeremiah, the worst has happened. Babylon has come, the temple's been destroyed, and Jerusalem is a slaughterhouse and a wreck. And Jeremiah says to the survivors, "This has happened because you made offerings to your idolatrous gods." And the people said, "No. This happened because we didn't make *enough* offerings to our idolatrous god. We're going to start it up all over again. We know better than God."

This whole world is filled with people who basically, every day of their lives, say, "We know better than God. I know better than God. I am wiser than God. I have more love than God. I have more compassion than God. God—do not come near to me, for I am too holy for you." In other words, "I'm God. God, stay away. I'm God. I've installed myself as God. I've installed myself as the captain of my own providence. Stay away from me."

And God says, "These people are smoke in my nostrils and a fire that burns all the day." "Smoke in my nostrils"—what's that getting at? Well, in the law in the Old Testament you find about forty-two times a phrase when people made offerings and gave worship according to the commandment of God, God said He found those offerings to be a pleasing aroma—a pleasing aroma in His nostrils. He said it was pleasing to Him. But these people aren't pleasing to Him. They're just smoke. They're just an annoyance—this smoke in his nostrils, and a fire that burns all the day.

Looking at verse 6: “Behold, it is written before me: ‘I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their lap <sup>7</sup> both your iniquities and your fathers’ iniquities together, says the LORD; because they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds.’” The judgment of God. They’ve rejected their covenantal relationship with God and so receive the covenantal judgments of God.

Just turn back very quickly to Isaiah chapter 40, which I’ve told you before is, in a way, the beginning of Isaiah’s gospel. Notice how Isaiah’s gospel begins. Isaiah chapter 40, verse 1: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” There are those to whom God had Isaiah preach comfort, and the promise of comfort was, “Your sins are paid. Your sins have been paid for. I look upon your sins as having been cleared away because someone, somehow, has paid the price.”

And so, you see, there are those who indeed literally repay the price, or suffer the price in their flesh and in their own body; and there was one who received that payment on behalf of the people of God. “‘I will pay into their lap both your iniquities and your father’s iniquities together,’ says the Lord.” The judgments of God, God’s covenantal judgments. A nation who should have been His people were faithless. They hated God.

Let’s have a look at the next section, verses 8 to 12. The Nation Shall Be Saved Through a Remnant. Let’s read it, starting at verse 8 of Isaiah chapter 65: “<sup>8</sup> Thus says the LORD: ‘As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, “Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,” so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all. <sup>9</sup> I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains; my chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there. <sup>10</sup> Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me.

“<sup>11</sup> But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, <sup>12</sup> I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in.”

What’s the promise of the remnant? Well, read there again what it says about the wine and the cluster of grapes, looking at verse 8: “‘As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, “Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,” so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all.’”

We need to look at a previous passage in the book of Isaiah just to clarify this, so turn back to Isaiah chapter 5. There’s a passage there that’s called “the song of the vineyard.” Isaiah chapter 5, starting at verse 1. We’ll read the first seven verses.

“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a rock, and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

“<sup>3</sup> And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. <sup>4</sup> What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? <sup>5</sup> And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. <sup>6</sup> I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

“<sup>7</sup> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!”

Now flick it back over to Isaiah 65 and see what God is saying. If He finds a good cluster in the vineyard, He will preserve it. He will preserve the good grapes. There are going to be sour and bitter grapes. He’s going to reject the vineyard, because the vineyard does not produce good grapes. But “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,’ so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all. <sup>9</sup> I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains; my chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there.”

The vineyard is rejected, but not all the grapes are rejected. A remnant is to be saved. Where God finds good grapes, where God finds true faith, they are to be preserved. They are to be saved. And look—He says he “will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains.”

Think now of Jesus. Of what tribe was Jesus born? The tribe of Judah, who traces back to Jacob. God has brought forth offspring from Jacob, and He has made Judah the possessor of His mountains, through whom? Through Jesus Christ.

When we read the beginnings of particularly the gospel of Luke, notice that in the gospel of Luke, in a basically apostate nation, Luke wants us to understand something: There were faithful people there. There were the parents of John the Baptist. There were the people in the temple waiting upon the Lord day by day, praying for the coming of the Messiah. There were people like Mary, the mother of our Lord, who was holy, who was obviously a student of the Scriptures, and longed for the day that God would send forth His deliverer.

You see, in that nation which was apostate, the judgment of God was that Judah was to be destroyed. Jesus says that again and again and again in the Scriptures. They are to be destroyed. Yet in that nation, there were clusters—to use Isaiah’s picture—there were clusters of good

grapes. They were to be preserved. From that cluster, from that remnant was born the church. And we ourselves, don't forget, are called the offspring of Abraham—not because we're of the blood of Abraham, but because we share the faith of Abraham. We ourselves are the offspring of Judah, the seed from Jacob.

Think also of the parable of the true vine, John chapter 15, verses 1 to 8. The Lord willing, we'll look at that next week in the gospel of John. What did Jesus say? "I am," what? "I am the true vine." I am the true vine. What's he saying? "I'm the Israel that God was looking for. I'm the Israel that God was seeking for. I'm not the Israel that God tore down the hedges, and that God left open to the elements, and that God rejected because the grapes were sour and bitter. I'm the Israel that brings forth the good grapes—the grapes, the fruits—that the Father wants. That's me. I am the true vine."

So once again, Isaiah's praying for a deliverance. He's praying, remember, for a salvation. He just didn't realize exactly the salvation he was praying for. He knew that a Savior was coming, and that Savior was also the judge of his own nation.

Let's look at the final section, verses 13 to 16. My title is, New Covenant Israel. The church is called often in the New Testament "Israel," the chosen people of God. I'm not saying that the church replaces Israel. I'm saying that Israel is folded into the church, and I'm saying that the church is folded into Israel—that God's faithful people have always been His church; that God's faithful church has always been His Israel.

There's a phrase out there called "Replacement Theology." It's often used against anyone who follows Reformed Theology. They say, "You're saying the church replaced Israel, and that God has rejected His people." That's really not what I'm saying. Scripture tells me that God has judged old covenant Israel. It tells me that He rejected them because they did not keep His law. It also tells me that He kept a remnant of them, and that from that remnant, the church was born, and that the church is one with the remnant, and that the remnant is one with the church. That's what Scripture teaches.

So let's read verses 13 to 16: "<sup>13</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; <sup>14</sup> behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart and shall wail for breaking of spirit. <sup>15</sup> You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord GOD will put you to death, but his servants he will call by another name, <sup>16</sup> so that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.'"

You see what God is saying through Isaiah to the people of Israel. What's he saying to the people of Israel? Always remember context, and remember that Paul in Romans gave us the true interpretation of our passage. "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask me. I was

ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by my name.” Who was that speaking of? The Gentiles, the non-Jews, God calling the peoples of the world to faith and repentance. Verse 2: “I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people.” Who is he speaking of? The Jews—the Jews who have broken covenant with Him.

So as we look at verses 13, 14, 15, and 16, let’s ask ourselves the questions: Who are the ones that eat, and who are the ones who go hungry? Who are the ones who drink, and who are the ones that go thirsty? Who are the ones that rejoice, and who are the ones put to shame? Who are the ones that sing for gladness, and who are the ones that cry out for pain and wail for the breaking of spirit? Well, according to the context of the chapter itself, it’s fairly clear.

Those who are called from out of the nations have become those upon whom the blessings of God reside. They are the ones who receive all the good things. All the promises that God has ever made, they’re being poured out upon God’s people in the church. Those who are suffering and lost, they’re the ones who rejected His covenantal promises. They’re the ones who broke His law. In this passage, it’s obviously the Jews.

I’m thinking of Matthew chapter 27, verse 25. As the Jews gave up Jesus for crucifixion to Pilate, it reads, “His blood”—that’s the blood of Jesus—“His blood be on us and on our children!” They called down the curses of God upon themselves. They rejected their Savior, they rejected the servant, they rejected the Messiah, and they called down the curses of God upon themselves. Why? Because that’s the way God works. That’s the way God works.

God’s punishment comes through the actions of the people who are being punished. They were being rejected, and because they were being rejected, they rejected God. They rejected God in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And in rejecting God, they called down upon themselves, they literally called down upon themselves the curses. “His blood be on us and on our children!”

I’m sure they thought that was hilarious, even as they said it. They really did. They thought that was crazy. “Ha-ha-ha! He’s a nobody to us. He’s a nothing. He’s a nobody. He’s a sinner! Yeah, let His blood fall upon us. It means nothing to us. Who could care about His blood?” That would’ve been the attitude with which they said it. But that’s not the attitude with which God heard it. You see, the very promises of God are being fulfilled, even in the things that they say. They’ve called down the curses of God upon themselves.

Notice—let’s just look at the tail end of verse 16: “For the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.” Because the former troubles are forgotten and hidden from my eyes. Why is it that these blessings can be poured out upon the people of God? Why is it that people can be called to faith and repentance, and that they will rejoice, and that God will watch over them and care for them, and He will be their God and they will be His people? Well, because the former troubles are forgotten. God no longer looks upon them.

Turn to Jeremiah chapter 31. Most of you probably already realize that I'm turning us straight to Jeremiah's explicit pronouncement of the coming of the new covenant. Jeremiah 31, verses 31 to 34. Let's read it. Jeremiah 31:31: "'Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.'"

I'll just stop there, but it says the covenant is with Israel and Judah. Okay, if you turn to your New Testament, the book of Hebrews and chapter 10, there you will see that this covenant is the covenant by which the Christians in the book of Hebrews are saved. It's explicit. It's scriptural. There's no need for me to jump to any conclusions, or try and show you that I'm making this up. You've only got to turn to the book of Hebrews, and you'll see that this covenant is the covenant upon which the church is founded—the church that's filled with Gentiles.

"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,"—and I just make one more point. Why was the church, therefore, called Israel? Why? Because God calls it Israel in His Old Testament—"31 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD." And now look at this: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

In this work of conversion that God does, where He places the law which was once external, and was once seen by the people to be a burden that they could not keep, He places this law within their hearts. He changes their very nature so that He will be their God and they shall be His people. And notice at the very end there, the last part of verse 34 of Jeremiah 31: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Now turn back to Isaiah 65, and look at the last part of verse 16: "because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes." They're forgotten. "I will remember their sins no more. I will look upon them as righteous in my sight. They shall be the faithful and the justified. They should be the people in whom my Spirit dwells, the people with a changed heart, an obedient and faithful heart."

So though Isaiah doesn't actually use the phrase "new covenant," Isaiah is preaching of this new covenant, this new relationship that God will have with His people, where people are transformed, where people are brought into the kingdom through the work of God's Holy Spirit. All this is in answer to his prayer. All this is in answer to the prayers of God's faithful, throughout all eternity.

Though they may not have known exactly what it was they were praying for when they prayed that God would revive His people, that's what they were praying for. When they prayed that God would save His people, that's what they were praying for. When they were praying that the

offspring of David would rule over all the nations, that's what they were praying for. They were praying for the coming of the Savior. They were praying for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were praying for the Messiah.

And isn't it amazing that when Jesus walked this earth, so many of the people of God who had prayed for the Savior to come rejected the Savior who came! Why? The answer's here. They weren't counted faithful by God. They were rejected on the basis of God's old covenant relationship with them. Yet, there was a remnant, a faithful remnant, who were saved and faithful. Those faithful ones longed for the arrival of Jesus. What did they do when they came into the presence of the baby? They worshiped. They bent the knee. They worshiped: "Here is the answer to our prayers. Here is God, come down to dwell among His people."

We pray for many things in our Christian lives, don't we? We pray for much. We pray that evil would be restrained. We pray that the wicked would be cast down. We pray that God would strengthen His church. All of these prayers will be answered, my friends, but they may be answered in ways we ourselves are not expecting.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. He who searches hearts and minds knows what is the will of God. He intercedes for us, and He makes our prayers more than we have ever known or imagined. You know, ultimately, every time we pray for things to be set right, we are still praying for the Messiah to come. We're praying for the Messiah to come back to this earth and set things right, once and for all. We're actually praying for the end of this present evil age.

And in the meantime, we're praying that people would be saved, that when Jesus comes, He will find faith on the earth. To quote Jesus Himself: "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" That's what we're praying. We're praying that He would come, and that when He comes, He will find faith on the earth.

The Holy Spirit is making our prayers greater than we are. And isn't that a good thing? Because, I don't know about you, but I feel like a fairly feeble little worm, when it comes to this Christian faith. I don't feel like I'm one of God's great warriors. I don't feel like one of those ones that goes out and knocks the giant with a slingshot and a stone. Sometimes I look at my Christian life and wonder if I'm a Christian at all.

But, my friends, are you praying? Do you have a prayer life? I'm not saying are you the greatest prayer warrior on the face of this earth. That's not the question. The question is only this: Do you have a prayer life? Do you pray? Do you speak to God? Do you put things to prayer? Is your response to the stimuli that God brings before you in this world, is your response first and foremost prayer?

I don't know how many of you keep up with news from overseas, but during this week, a governor of a state in the USA basically spoke for infanticide—a born, living baby being put to

death after that child was born, upon the basis of a discussion between a mother and a doctor. Infanticide. I mean, they're not even pretending now that it's not a baby. You know, it's just a clump of cells whist it's within the mother's womb, but after it's born—they're even dropping that pretense. Did that bring you to prayer? Did that bring you to prayer? I'm not asking was your prayer perfect, godly, saintly, with words wise and clever. Did you pray? "Lord, God, forgive us. We dwell in such an evil, evil society."

And if you don't realize it, where they go over there, all the propaganda, driveling drones here in Australia, they follow them lockstep. They look for their footprints, and they put their own feet in exactly those same footprints. Wherever they go there, the fools here follow, because America is so wonderful and advanced, and Australia's got to follow the geniuses in America. Did you pray? If you heard about this, did you pray? Did you pray that Jesus would return and put an end to this evil and wickedness? Did you pray that the fool who spoke these words would either be silenced or converted? You know, you are allowed to pray that way. You're allowed to pray that God does something about it, silence the man, save the man, whatever, but stop him from spreading his evil in this world. Did it inspire prayer?

You might be praying for more than you know. You might just be hastening the day of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But that's a good thing. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Do you pray, my friends? You don't have to be particularly eloquent in prayer. You have to be honest. That's what you have to be. And you have to be a people of prayer.

When stuff at work was driving you insane, and people weren't doing what's right, and you felt like you were the only one carrying this joint, did you pray? Instead of wingeing and whining and bitching about it, did you actually pray? Instead of pouring out curses upon those incompetents who surround you and can't do the job right, did you actually pray? Did you pray? When you saw the wickedness of this world and the foolishness of the people therein, did you pray? Or did you cast them off?—"Well, look at that sinner there. Express ticket to hell." Or did you pray?

We've got to pray, my friends. We're called upon to pray. We're called upon to speak to God, knowing that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. We may be praying for things that we don't understand, and God's answer may not look like the things that we thought it was going to be. But I'm telling you, He hears, He answers. The prayers of the saints have been appointed by God as a means by which He brings about His own will. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, our Lord and our God, we do ask and pray that you would make us a people of prayer, that our first response would be to pray, to commit things to you and into your hands, to ask that you would show your glory in all the things that come our way.

Father, we do indeed pray for the salvation of souls. We do indeed pray that the preaching of wickedness would be silenced throughout our land, and throughout the world. We pray that those who encourage bloodshed and murder would have their mouths stopped, by whatsoever means you see fit in your goodness and in your justice. Let them be silenced. Let them learn to fear you.

Father, we ask these things and commit the way it is done into your hands. You alone are just. You alone know what is good. You will do according to your will. All of these things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.