

Super Abounding Grace

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 64:7-12

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Let's look together in our Bibles to Isaiah 64 and my text is taken from verse 7 down to verse 12 and just as we have sung that hymn, "Grace that is greater than all our sin," I would like to speak with you on that super abounding grace. Super abounding grace. When I read for you a little while ago in Romans 5:20 where it states that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," that entire phrase "much more abound" in the original is actually one word that has different parts, but if you were to translate it literally, it would be "super abounded; over and abundantly abounded." That's the thought that I want us to consider today as we meet here before the Lord and open his word, what super abounding grace that there is for sinners such as we are in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see here in Isaiah 64, beginning with verse 7,

7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. 9 Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. 10 Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. 12 Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?

So the first thing that I would have us consider in this portion of Scripture with regard to God's super abounding grace is the need for it. As you may have heard me say before, light shines the brightest against the backdrop of great darkness and so when we talk about the grace of God and the super abounding grace of God, it is against that backdrop of just how sinful we are and I believe that's described here in verse 7. How sinful are we? Well, to such a degree that it says here, "there is none that calleth upon thy name." I know a bunch of people that would take exception with that today. They would say, "Now, wait a minute, aren't there a bunch of people around the world that are calling on God's name even now? Maybe they don't worship the way we do, maybe they don't see

things the way we do, but at least they're calling." Well, it says here "there is none that calleth upon thy name," and by implication it means in truth and the reality is that even us here today, we could not call upon the name of the Lord in truth were it not given us, were it not this super abounding grace of God given unto us that we might know God in truth and call upon his name.

The expression "to call upon the name of the Lord" is really a description of how men worship. If you go all the way back to Genesis 4, this was following the fall, this was following Cain having killed Abel, and the Lord raising up another seed instead of Abel, in Abel's place. You see, Abel was to represent that seed of Christ, that seed for which Christ would come and pay the sin debt. Cain slew Abel. There is a picture of the enmity that there is between the works of the flesh and the grace of God. Yet we read here in verse 26 of Genesis 4, "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos," and notice, "then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." You say, "Well, Abel had called upon the name of the Lord." Yeah, but it's in the sense of worship, how Abel was taught of the Spirit of God to worship, to come to God through that one blood sacrifice. That was the whole difference between Cain and Abel. That was it. He brought a lamb. As one old preacher said, "You can't get blood out of turnips." No matter how pretty those turnips are, they don't bleed. But a lamb shed, a lamb slain, that was a picture of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

So when it says here in Isaiah 64:7, "there is none that calleth upon thy name," it's saying that left to ourselves, none of us would worship God aright, and I believe that's so. You say, "How come there are so many different views among men as to how we're to worship?" Well, it's because of man's depravity. We're like that Indian proverb of the blind men all up next to an elephant and one feeling the sides of the elephant and saying, "It's a wall." And another grabbing the foot of the elephant and saying, "It's a tree." And another grabs the tail of the elephant and saying, "It's a rope." That's the way we would be, just blindly giving ideas as to how we're to approach unto God, but when it pleases God to reveal Christ in us, then by his Spirit we come in the way that God directs and that's because the Spirit of God cannot mislead. The Spirit of God always directs a sinner away from their works and fleshly approaches and ceremonies and outward show of religion. He directs them away from all that to the one way which is Christ.

But here is our need expressed here in how we worship, but go a little deeper in Isaiah 64, the need for God's super abounding grace, it says there is none "that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." Here, again, it describes what true worship is. It's not just showing up and going through the performance like you hear people say all the time, "I haven't been to church in a while. I guess I'd better go." Why? What is there about going to church? That's an expression you hear people saying all the time, "I've got to get back to church." Well, you can get back to a church, a congregation, a place of worship, you can even come to a place where the Gospel is faithfully preached and still be lost.

And I believe that's what's being described here in verse 7, there is none "that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." This matter of taking hold of Christ, left to ourselves, we

wouldn't even know where to begin, such is our depravity and such is our need. To stir one's self up, to be stirred up, to have a spirit of worship to even see Christ, to be able to lay hold of him. There are preachers that like to present faith as something just as simple as reaching out your hand and taking hold of him, but here you can see "that stirreth up himself." It's speaking of a heart work. It's not a physical movement toward Christ. You can walk down front of a church building and take hold of the preacher's hand without ever having had Christ take hold of you and I fear that there are many that have done so. But "to take hold of thee," to lay hold of him. That word in the original means "to bind fast and to gird tight; to make firm; to be strengthened in" Christ. That's a work of grace but such is our need because we wouldn't even know that we were lost unless the Spirit of God so taught us.

So in this we see the sinfulness of sin, our sin, to where, even as we saw last time in verse 6, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." The best that we could ever present before God being nothing but putrid rags. Does this sound a little bit like the Apostle Paul's preaching? When you look over in Romans 3, for example? It doesn't surprise me that Brother Isaiah and Brother Paul agree because both were raised up of the Lord and both sent forth to preach the Gospel. Paul writes the same thing here to these Romans as what Isaiah wrote to his generation. Look at it with me here in Romans 3, beginning with verse 9, "What then? are we better than they?" In other words, does being a Jew make us any better than the rest of the world? That was kind of their idea, if you were a Jew, you were a cut above. There are some that still feel that way about the Jews. They feel like they're still somehow God's favorite son. They didn't get that from Scripture. They didn't get it from Paul who was a Jew. Paul says, "No, in no wise," and if you ask for an application, us sitting here, are we any better because we're in a place where the Gospel is preached? The same thing, no, in no wise. It doesn't make us better persons because of it.

"For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." How many times when you read Scripture you think about somebody else? "Oh, I'm glad he's reading that because that applies to them." No, this is me. There is none righteous, not even Ken Wimer. "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." Not in truth they don't and you see how that relates to Isaiah? "There is none that calleth upon thy name. There is none that stirreth himself up to lay hold of him." Such is our depravity.

"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre." This context is talking about people that come together for worship and have God on their lips. Maybe they've memorized some prayers out of a prayerbook, maybe they haven't. Maybe they've learned how to pray publicly from somebody else. Who knows? But the Scripture says, just opening their mouth in their depravity is like opening up a sepulchre, like taking the lid off and finding inside nothing but dead men's bones.

"Their tongues they have used deceit." There is more deceit expressed in places of worship under false pretense than there is in a backroom Mafia meeting between the men that are dedicated to lying, cheating and killing, I believe, because men put on a show

when they come together in places of worship. They say things, they do things, they appear to be a certain way when in reality their heart is just as dead and cold before the Lord as physical death.

"The poison of asps is under their lips." I don't care how beautiful a snake looks, it's still a snake and there is poison under their lips.

"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known." Notice this, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." You know, fearing hell is not a fear of God. Preachers can stand up and preach hellfire and brimstone until the blood vessels are bursting out the sides of their necks. We've all seen that kind of ranting back and forth, get people stirred up and, as I heard one preacher say, "Yeah, I'm trying to scare the hell out of them." Well, you don't. That's not what it is to worship God. You'll not by force of threats cause men to fear God because there's no fear of God in their heart. Fear in the sense of true worship, of coming in the way that God has set forth.

So we see the need for this super abounding grace, not only because of the sinfulness of our sins but come back here to Isaiah 64. I don't know about you but this causes me to fall flat on my face before the Lord and to say, "Pass me not, O gentile Savior, hear my humble cry, while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by." Do you know that all God has to do is leave us alone? He doesn't have to put evil rebellion in our hearts. All he has to do is leave us to ourselves and I fear, that's why I said a little while ago, there are many who don't even recognize their lost estate even though they're lost because God has left them to themselves. That's what Isaiah 64:7 says, "for thou hast hid thy face from us." Why is it that people will believe a lie? Well, "thou hast hid thy face from us." Why is it that people continue to come in the way that they come through the works of their flesh regardless of what this Scripture says? Well, they're blind and it says there, "thou hast hid thy face from us."

There is here a picture of God's righteous reprobation. He doesn't have to save any one of us and so when we talk about the need for his super abounding grace, yes, it's because of our sin but we also need that super abounding grace because of his wrath that were God to choose not to show us grace and to continue to hide his face from us, we would be consumed, but notice in verse 7, "because of our iniquities." You see, that's what it takes for God to judge sinners. It's because of their iniquities or by the hand of their iniquities. All he has to do is turn you loose and leave you to yourself and you'd be wandering just like Cain was all his days saying, "My judgment is too heavy to bear," but never having any repentance; never having any spirit to lay hold of Christ.

So you can see there the need for God's super abounding grace, but let's look at the second aspect of God's super abounding grace. Not only the need but how he shows it and in this we see that he's sovereign. God's sovereign super abounding grace. Notice in verse 8, "But now." Oh, what a blessed word that word "but" is in contrast to what we deserve. "But now, O LORD, thou art our father." There is here an expression of hope that no matter what our sin may be before the Lord, he has purposed to save a people and

that people that he has purposed to save are his children and they are so by that super abounding grace, sovereign grace, grace according to God's will and not according to man's.

You can see how it's described there, "now, O LORD, thou art our father," what are we? "We are the clay. We are the clay. I had a lady that got upset at a preacher friend of mine because he had preached a message on God's sovereignty and when he finished she said, "Well, it sounds to me all you're doing is just making robots out of men," and the Lord gave some wisdom to this preacher to say to her, "No ma'am, being a robot would be too sophisticated." What the Scriptures call us is clay and dung. Now think about that. What is dung? What is clay? What could it be except for God in this super abounding grace make something of honor from it?

That's what we see here when we talk about the grace of God. "Thou art our father." I'll tell you what, this is a precious truth, notwithstanding our sin that God has purposed the way of redemption that he might save wretched sinners such as we are and give us his Spirit that we might call him, not just Father but Abba, Father, daddy. That's a term of endearment. What a blessed privilege. This isn't looking upon God simply as our Creator. He is. Or sustainer. He is. There are many people that that's all they know of God. They'll even acknowledge it, "Well, he's the Creator and thank God he sustains us." But to be able to call him Father, "But now, O LORD, thou art our father." There is none that can call Jesus Lord except it be by the Spirit. There is none that can truly address God as their Father except for those whom the Son has reconciled. You see, by the Son, have this relationship with God as the Father. That's a special relationship and that is according to God's sovereign grace and purpose. This super abounding grace, dear friends, is a sovereign grace.

It says, "we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand." Now, that's true physically. Every person born in this world is the work of God's hand as far as being a creature, but when we talk about spiritually, being a child of God, any that are his must acknowledge that it is entirely the work of his hand, much as a potter takes a lump of clay and out of that one lump is pleased to make one vessel unto honor and perhaps the other unto dishonor.

Look over in Romans 9, again, in this, Brother Isaiah and Brother Paul agree and I'm not surprised because the same Spirit of God was given to the one as to the other. But look here in Romans 9, we read beginning with verse 6, let's begin there, "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have

I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Now, let me just pause there a second and ask you: what does it take for God to harden a sinner? Well, what does it take for the soil to be hardened? Just withhold water. Withhold that which would make it something else other than it is. Whenever that clay hardens, it's just showing what nature it is. In and of itself, it's nothing but dirt and that's why we read on here, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Here it is, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" One vessel to sit on a king's table as an ornament of his power and authority and the other to be used as a chamberpot somewhere where the common man goes and sits on it and relieves himself. That's what it's talking about here. What makes the difference? What is the determining of this super abounding grace? Well, it says, "Hath not the potter power over the clay?"

Verse 22, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." I hope you don't have a problem with that because that's just the way it is but I'll tell you this in light of my own sin and recognizing, acknowledging that had God been pleased to make me otherwise than what he did, he would be just and right in doing so.

Yet here in Isaiah 64, you see, some people look at this message of the truth of God's sovereign grace and his super abounding grace toward sinners to whom he will show it, they see that as a reason to raise their fist against him, but that just shows, again, their nature. It just shows their worthiness of his condemnation should he leave them in that estate. But any of the Lord's, when they contemplate it, you can see in verse 8, it's a reason to draw unto him. "Lord, if you've been pleased to save some, why not me? If you've been pleased to, in spite of my iniquities, cause me to be your own, you being the potter and I the clay and me being the work of your hand by your grace and mercy, then I give you all the glory. You see, that's the super abounding sovereign grace of God to show mercy to whom he will and to harden whom he will.

A third point back here in Isaiah 64 that I would have you consider is the nature of this grace. We've seen how it's described, it's needed, and it's God's to give as he will, but let's dig a little deeper here just for a minute or two and look at what is the nature of this super abounding grace. You can see plea here in verse 9 as, "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD," and there is a reminder that he has a right to be angry. He has a right to consume

us in his wrath but the plea here when we plead for God's mercy and grace, mercy is God withholding from us what we deserve, grace is him giving us what we don't deserve. But in either case, the plea is, "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD. Do not count me among the number of those that your pleased to leave to themselves and cast into hell."

"Neither remember iniquity for ever." Where do you suppose one in the Old Testament was looking when they would have prayed, the Spirit given them this prayer, "Neither remember iniquity for ever"? Would they not have been looking forward to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ because until the cross, sin was only covered. That word "atonement" that we find in the Old Testament is a covering for sin but it had not yet been removed and so when the Lord would judge Israel, even as what Isaiah is describing here, they're being taken away into captivity and the city is being laid waste and as it describes there in verse 11, our beautiful house burnt up with fire, that temple was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar came down into the land and took them all away. All of these things taking place might have been pause for some to think, "Well, God has cast us all off forever," and yet those who were the Lord's would have been brought to cry out to him and say, "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever."

They would have been looking forward to that one place that God determined that sin should be put away but until Christ came and paid the debt, it was a very real condemnation; it was a very real curse because it had not yet been removed. I can imagine myself living in that day having to constantly have a lamb brought on a regular basis and visually seeing those lambs slain and blood shed and that being a reminder every day of my sin, that an innocent victim, an innocent animal would lay down its life in my place. But now imagine a period of time where God destroys even the place of sacrifices and scatters the priesthood to where one like Daniel living in his day no longer had sacrifices being offered. Wouldn't you begin to think in your mind, "Well, has God clean cast us off? Is this it? Is all that's left eternal condemnation? Will he be sore wroth forever?"

And that describes here the cry that is given, "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." Where does that cry come from? Well, it comes from the Spirit of God showing us our desperate need that if Christ has not paid our debt, then our sin remains and our desperate need to see that this super abounding grace of God is in the Lord Jesus Christ and that, then, is the nature of God's grace. God is in the business of showing grace to sinners. Christ said that he did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He passed by a whole generation of religious, self-righteous people and called out sinners; sat and ate with sinners.

What a blessed Redeemer he is and in that is God's super abounding grace. It's in this one who has come to pay the sin debt that God should remember iniquity no more. Here the question is asked in verse 9, "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever," to where we can say, according to the Scriptures, "Every one for whom Christ has paid that debt, there is therefore now no condemnation for those that are in

Christ Jesus." You talk about the nature of super abounding grace. That's what it took. It took Christ paying the debt in order that God might be just to justify his people.

Then we see the cry for this grace. I mentioned a little while ago but the cry. You say, "What is a cry of grace?" Well, in verse 10 through 12, it's seeing the need, "Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste." The bottom line of things: what is it that is vital? If God were to take everything away from us right now, imagine what you have, what would be most precious to you? I trust that if the Lord has so taught you of the grace of God, you would cry, "Lord, if you take everything, do not take your grace. Do not take from me your spirit of grace that is given in the Lord Jesus Christ." Everything else is replaceable. I hear people say that after a storm when everything has been destroyed, if they've got their family around them they say, "Well, the one thing you can't replace is life. All the rest of this we can replace." So there is kind of a rest and contentment in that and I understand that. I think if the Lord were to take everything but my family, I'd be thankful for my family, but then again, go a little deeper: what's more vital than even my family? That they be the Lord's, then nothing else matters.

As we look around even here as it's described, the cry is, "Our holy cities are waste. Zion is waste." I don't know about you but I look around more and more and just in my heart the burden I feel for what men are lost in religion and we can say the Gospel is not heard. There is a famine in the land with regard to the things of Christ. It's not a trivial matter and the people are caught up with it.

I just had one of my managers that cleaned out his house and he had a big pile of books and it's a big old box and he came and dropped it in my office and said, "Here, dig through this and see if there's anything you might find helpful." I've just been standing by the door, opening and looking at it. These are books he studied when he was in some school somewhere and I read it and it's nothing but man-exalting, self-motivation type stuff and I'm standing by our recycling bin just pitching, pitching, pitching away. And I could see where there were notes and underlines and they were written but right in the middle of this whole big box, I pull out an old book on the Gospel of John and I opened it up, the back had not even been cracked on it. This was one that had been sitting on his shelf and it was written by an old writer where every chapter begins with Christ. Do you think that was of interest to me? I started leafing through it. Let me go over and see what it says in John 10 where Christ said, "My sheep hear my voice and I lay down my life for my sheep." And this writer that I had never heard of before just clearly took the Scripture and set it forth, presenting the grace of God in Christ. I took that book and set it apart. Something of interest. That's kind of like finding some in the ruins of what men do and follow and I've been prayerful ever since about taking that book back to him and saying, "Here's one you want to read with your Bible open because of everything you gave me, this is the only thing I could find of any worth."

But you can understand right here the burden that is expressed here, "Thy holy cities are a wilderness. Zion is a wilderness." Where is there today where there's any that are

standing and faithfully declaring the Gospel of Christ? You've got to go a long way. A long way. "Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

Here, again, as the Lord has been impressing me, you see verse 12 asks the question, "Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD?" I believe that's a rhetorical question. When posed here, the answer is, "No, he will not refrain himself."

"Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" You know, no matter the affliction that we may feel at any given time and sometimes the Lord can lay a heavy hand upon us and feel as if he's just going to completely crush us away, but I know this: in his super abounding grace he won't and that any chastening he brings to us, if we're his, if Christ has paid the debt, I can tell you assuredly based upon this word that there is not an ounce of wrath in it for those for whom Christ has paid the debt. It might weigh heavily upon us. We might feel that his wrath is upon us, but if Christ bore that debt, there is no wrath in it and whom he loves he chastens and I think that many times when he takes away these things from us, it's for one reason, to cause us to cry unto him and remove from us any confidence in this flesh.

What super abounding grace in the end to be able to say that, "Thank you for that grace. I need it and I need it to be super abounding because I know my sin is great, but I'm thankful that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound in the Lord Jesus Christ. I trust that is your hope as well.