

Prayer for God's Intervention to Save His People

Let us turn to Isaiah 64 as we continue to consider these last few chapters of this prophecy penned by Isaiah, the eighth century BC prophet to Judah and Israel. When we considered Isaiah 63 last Lord's Day, we commented that it, the chapter before us, and the last two chapters that follow, these four¹, all look toward the consummation of history from Isaiah's perspective. This is why some have described them as containing the theme, "Eschatological Overtones." In other words, in these last three chapters of Isaiah God has set before us the end of history, the final judgment, and the eternal state of both God's people and God's enemies.

Isaiah 64 is a prayer, an appeal of the prophet, which may be understood as on behalf of all the people of God, for God to come and manifest His saving power once again, that He would do so as He had manifested Himself savingly to His people in the past. Let us read the chapter before us. Here is Isaiah 64:

Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at Your presence—
²as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make Your name known to Your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at Your presence!
³When You did awesome things that we did not look for,
You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.
⁴From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides You,
who acts for those who wait for Him.
⁵You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember You in Your ways.
Behold, You were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
⁶We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
⁷There is no one who calls upon Your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of You;
for You have hidden Your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

⁸But now, O LORD, You are our Father;
we are the clay, and You are our Potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all Your people.
¹⁰Your holy cities have become a wilderness;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
¹¹Our holy and beautiful house,

¹ For some reason last week I had spoke mistakenly of the last "three" chapters rather than the last "four" chapters of Isaiah.

where our fathers praised You,
has been burned by fire,
and all our pleasant places have become ruins.
¹²Will You restrain Yourself at these things, O LORD?
Will You keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

The setting of these few chapters fit well with the historical situation in which the prophet was directing his words to his people. The readers to which he directed his prophecy would not live for two centuries after him. They would have returned to the land from their Babylonian captivity. But even after they had returned, their cities and their beloved temple had remained in ruins. They were defeated and despondent. The prophet lamented the condition of his people, even as he identified himself with them. God had forsaken them, or so they thought. They felt estranged from their fathers who had experienced God's blessing. They saw themselves as having been under His severe and unrelenting judgment. Nevertheless they had prayed to Him to have mercy on them and restore them. They appealed to His purposes and designs for them that had not been realized. Here in chapter 64 they express their longing to God that He would manifest Himself in coming forth from heaven to deliver them from their wretched condition.

We may consider the 12 verses of this chapter by the following simple outline:

1. Prayer to God that He would work on behalf of His people as He had done in the past (64:1-5)
2. Prayer for God's mercy toward them due to their sinfulness (64:6-12)

As we may see from this simple outline, the subject of prayer unto God is the major theme. Actually theme of prayer began in the last chapter. We read the following in **Isaiah 63:15-19**:

¹⁵Look down from heaven and see,
from Your holy and beautiful habitation.
Where are Your zeal and Your might?
The stirring of Your inner parts and Your compassion
are held back from me.
¹⁶For You are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us,
and Israel does not acknowledge us;
You, O LORD, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is Your name.
¹⁷O LORD, why do You make us wander from Your ways
and harden our heart, so that we fear You not?
Return for the sake of Your servants,
the tribes of Your heritage.
¹⁸Your holy people held possession for a little while;
our adversaries have trampled down Your sanctuary.
¹⁹We have become like those over whom You have never ruled,
like those who are not called by Your name.

But the prayer begun in Isaiah 63 continues with Isaiah 64:1ff. In the first 5 verses of this chapter we have

1. Prayer to God that He would work on behalf of His people as He had done in the past (64:1-5)

We read in **verse 1**:

***¹Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at Your presence—***

Actually, this is a prayer for a *theophany*, that is, *an appearance of God*. The language is designed to call the reader's attention to a prior great manifestation of God to His people--when God "came down" to meet with His people, Israel, at Mount Sinai.

The heavens are depicted as having a great curtain, or veil, that separates the people of earth from seeing the visible glory of their God. The prayer is asking God to tear open this curtain behind which He manifests His glory, and show forth Himself to his people once again. If this were to occur, then all would see Him as He acted to bring deliverance to His people and to destroy all those who had afflicted and tormented His people.

When God "came down" from heaven to Mount Sinai, the whole earth quaked reflecting the nature of His holy transcendence and power.

¹⁸Now Mount Sinai *was* completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. ¹⁹And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. ²⁰Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. (Exo. 19:18-20)

The whole scene was one of the revelation of the magnificent, awesome, splendor and majesty of God. He came to them to establish His covenant with them, to become their God and them His people. Here in Isaiah 63:1 the prophet cries out for an event in the life of His nation when this would be repeated.

His request continues in **verse 2** in which the manifest presence of God is described as "fire" that would consume their enemies.

*²as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make Your name known to Your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at Your presence!*

The specific desire was for God to manifest Himself in judgment so as to secure their deliverance, to bring salvation to His people by defeating their enemies and obtaining their release. As fire burns wood and boils water--emblems of God's scrutinizing and destroying power--the prophet asks God to show forth Himself to "His" adversaries--so that they "quake" at His presence. Originally at Sinai, the Israelites quaked with fear when the mountain quaked with God's presence. Here the prophet asks that God's enemies would quake, or experience the fear and terror of God as they were being overthrown.

In **verse 3** the prophet refers directly to Sinai:

*³When You did awesome things that we did not look for,
You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.*

This speaks about the work of God for His people that they could not have anticipated. When the Israelites were brought out of Egypt they could not have known what God had in store for them. That God came and delivered them was itself an amazing thing that they all desired but that really no one really expected would occur. And then they could not have anticipated the great history that they had experienced as a nation after God had established His covenant with Israel at Sinai. This event was a unique manifestation of God to His people. We read of this in **Exodus 34:10**:

And He said: "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you." (Exo. 34:10)

After God had manifested His glorious presence in a remarkable manner at Sinai, He continued to manifest His presence and power to His people as He led them in a miraculous way through the wilderness, and then into the promised land. Their inability to anticipate the measure of these things is expressed in the following verse:

***⁴From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides You,
who acts for those who wait for Him.***

No one could have anticipated what God had done among His people, who are here characterized as one “who wait for Him.” This last phrase is a description of prayer. The ones who call out to Him and do so continually and expectantly, even though they desire great things from Him, cannot possibly anticipate what it will be like when God does manifest Himself, for God does so in such a grand and wondrous manner. He does for His people above all that they can ask or even think.

This verse is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:9:

“But as it is written, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.’”

Notice several points about the use of this verse. Although most evangelicals quote this verse with the interpretation that it speaks to the unimaginable blessings of the eternal state--heaven and our place in it--Paul uses the verse to speak of the salvation we *have presently* in Christ. In Isaiah 64 the prophet longed for a new experience of salvation in that his people would be delivered from their oppressors. He desired a deliverance and life thereafter that would be on such a grand scale as the Exodus and the events thereafter, events of such magnitude and blessing which no one could have anticipated. Paul said we who are Christians have realized this in our salvation. The prophet got what he prayed for: the Lord had delivered His people from Babylon and they returned to the land, but more than even the prophet had anticipated, the Lord sent His Son and through Him brought a revelation of Himself and a salvation in Him with its accompanied blessings which He could not have envisioned.

Notice also where Isaiah speaks of the one who “waits” on Him, Paul has the expression worded a little differently, “for them that *love* Him.”

In **verse 5** the prophet speaks of God condescending to people who live in righteousness, who are godly in their character and holy in their living. But the prophet acknowledges that His people had not been characterized in this way.

***⁵You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember You in Your ways.
Behold, You were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?***

The prophet described the one with whom the Lord delights in meeting. (1) God delights in those who “rejoice in doing righteousness.” He does not want us to grudgingly submit to His laws and ways, but He desires and delights in our delighting to do righteousness. (2) He “meets” or manifests Himself in power with them who reflect on God and the “ways” in which He has shown Himself graciously and faithfully in the past (and the “ways” in which He manifests Himself in the world).

But when the people of God reflect on God’s past manifestations of mercy and faithfulness, they cannot help but recall their own past failings. So the prophet does so here. He laments on behalf of himself and his people their past sins. God had judged them severely and God had been right in doing so. He had been marvellously patient. But their wickedness persisted. They had continued in their sins a long time.

When one reflects on God’s past mercies and one’s own persistent resistance to Him in spite of His kindnesses, and then he reflects upon the reality that God had judged him severely for what seems to be a

prolonged time, the question might be asked, “can I hope for mercy now?” “And shall I be saved?” This brings us to the second section of this chapter in which we read of...

2. Prayer for God’s mercy toward them due to their sinfulness (64:6-12)

*⁶We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

The prophet uses four similes² to depict the sinfulness of his people. Sinners are as **unclean**, as lepers are unclean, even their best “works” are as a **polluted garment** -- an unclean cloth, they are as a **leaf**, which is dry, frail, and withered, and they are as the **wind**, whose sin is very powerful upon and within them.

(1) **“We have all become like one who is unclean.”** Lepers were to announce before others with a loud voice, “Unclean! Unclean!” We read in Leviticus 13:45 and 46,

⁴⁵“Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ ⁴⁶He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

Uncleanness was a ceremonial category in which things and persons were deemed unfit to be used in the temple in the service of God. Unclean people could not enter the formal worship of God unless and until they were cleansed. God was holy and only holy things--things which were dedicated to Him--could be used. Only “clean” things could become regarded as holy things. Here the prophet laments the fact that the whole of the people were unclean, not fit to be in God’s presence or used by Him. Their sins had rendered them so.

(2) **“And all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”** Their righteous deeds were also unclean. Often in Holy Scripture one’s good deeds or one’s righteous acts are likened to clothing. We read in the Revelation of the clothing of the “bride” of Christ, a metaphor for those redeemed by Christ:

⁷Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. ⁸And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, **for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.** (Rev. 19:7f).

These righteous acts or deeds of these saints are those produced by the grace of God in the people of God by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. But until a sinner is converted to Jesus Christ, made a new creation in Jesus Christ, until one’s works are generated by Christ, and even then purified by Christ, what people think are “righteous deeds” are in actuality soiled, smelly, tattered things, that do not cover the shame of their nakedness, but rather their clothing, what they assume to be “righteous deeds”, render them that much more contemptible by and before a holy God. Rather than their good deeds in some way rendering their uncleanness as less defiling, they only aggravate their condition. Their best deeds were unclean, as though they were wearing a garment that had been defiled. That kind of garment needed to be discarded. So the people deserved to be cast away because even their best deeds rendered them as deserving God’s rejection of them.

(3) **“We all fade like a leaf.”** As leaves are decayed, brittle, and lifeless, so are all who are sinners apart from the life-giving power of God that comes to them in salvation. They are in need of God to come to them and give them life. This is similar to what we read in **Psalm 90:3-6.**

You turn man to destruction,

² A simile is a special form of metaphor in which the words “like” or “as” are used to show the comparison of to things.

And say, "Return, O children of men."

⁴For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night.

⁵You carry them away like a flood;
They are like a sleep.

In the morning they are like grass which grows up:

⁶In the morning it flourishes and grows up;
In the evening it is cut down and withers. (Psa. 90:3-6)

Here sinners are likened to dry **grass**, but the metaphor that sinners are as a **leaf** is of the same nature. Similarly we read in **Psalm 103:16**:

As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
And its place remembers it no more.

(4) "***And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*** We read elsewhere in the Scriptures that our sins are like **chaff** that the wind of God's judgment blows away. But here our sins themselves are the **wind** that blows us away.

We then read of the universal sinfulness of man shown in his unwillingness to seek God.

⁷***There is no one who calls upon Your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of You;
for You have hidden Your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.***

The number of people who were concerned about seeking God were few. So few were praying that the prophet could say "***there is no one*** who calls on Your name." They would not arise out of their beds to pray in any serious manner--here expressed by the words "to take hold of You." This may be the idea of one who comes falling down at the feet of a magistrate or judge pleading for mercy, or perhaps it is an allusion to an occurrence of some Old Testament characters to come into the temple and cling to the horns of the brazen altar where the sacrifices were made, and there plead for God's mercy.

The prophet had said of God, "***for You have hidden Your face from us.***" This speaks about God's presence being denied to the people. God would not look upon them with favour. He would not even allow them to come before Him to plead their cause. Rather than hearing their prayer, His judgment had turned them over to their sin; He turned them over to their "iniquities."

It is a horrible thing when God turns over an individual or a society to the power of sin. For sin is a consequence of sin. And sinning is itself a judgment of God, not only what results from sin. Sin may seem to be pleasurable for the moment, but it can never bring true or lasting satisfaction; that is why it is repeated. The Israelites were turned over to the power of their sins and the result was their destruction by the Babylonians. In these days God turns peoples over to their sins and they encounter the ramifications of their sins in fear, torment, and death.

We then read **verse 8**:

⁸***But now, O LORD, You are our Father;
we are the clay, and You are our Potter;
we are all the work of Your hand.***

The prophet acknowledges that God is their Father, who had begotten them. He acknowledged that God had the right and ability as their Creator to use them for His purposes. They were powerless. They were wholly dependent on God to be favourable toward them. It would be a matter wholly due to God's purpose to deal with them according to His grace.

And so, the prophet pleads for his people by appealing to God as the One Who had fathered them. "O Lord, in spite of the fact that we have sinned, and that we are unclean, and that we have been severely judged, nevertheless, we appeal to You that we belong to You. You created us. You fashioned us. We were as clay and the fact that we exist and whatever good had ever been seen in us was a result of Your work in us and upon us."

In the light of this the prophet pleads for mercy in **verse 9**:

***⁹Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all Your people.***

He asks for mercy, that God would turn from His wrath that was upon them. He prayed that God would forgive their sin. He pleaded with God that they, Israel, belonged to Him, but as the next verse points out, "How could they be His people? Just look at their present condition!"

***¹⁰Your holy cities have become a wilderness;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.***

They are God's people, but they are destroyed. Is this the destiny of the people He has made for Himself? The cities are barren, and Zion as well. It appears to be a dead scene in which no life exists. **Verse 11** records,

***¹¹Our holy and beautiful house,
where our fathers praised You,
has been burned by fire,
and all our pleasant places have become ruins.***

"The temple, Lord, look at it!" The place where formerly their own fathers had worshipped is now in ruins having been destroyed and burned.

This description would seem to indicate that the setting was designed to speak to people either in Babylon looking for return, or, they had returned, nevertheless, everything was in ruin and the prophet expresses the desire for God to favor them in bringing restoration.

***¹²Will You restrain yourself at these things, O LORD?
Will You keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?***

The appeal is made: "Will You allow Your people to remain in this condition? Will You continue to afflict us so as to destroy us utterly?"

And so this chapter closes upon this note of desire on the part of His people. They see their spiritual poverty before the Lord. They are mourning over their sins. They are broken and humble before the Lord. They are longing for His favor, they thirst for His grace to be poured upon them and in them, but they are fearfully mindful that they have no claims upon Him. Everything about them warranted God's displeasure, His rejection of them, His wrath poured out upon them. But they desire His forgiveness of their sins. They long for the life that only He can impart to them.

This place and this condition of this people is itself a result of the working of God's mercy and grace. They were now in realization of their desperate and despicable condition, which is the prerequisite for the blessing of God to be graciously bestowed upon them. For it is to this kind of people, to whom the Lord Jesus said one day:

³Blessed are the poor in spirit,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.

Now let us consider several abiding truths that we have rehearsed before us in this passage.

1. All mankind desire God to manifest Himself to them in a significant, awe-inspiring manner.

The prophet exclaimed in **verse 1**: *“Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence.”* This is a universal desire, for this is how God made us. God made every human being to be His image, and as a result each of us have this aspect of our human nature in which we desire to know and see God at work in our lives. It was the 17th century French mathematician and philosopher and physicist, **Blaise Pascal**, who rightly said, “There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”

But when people desire to see or hear from God, the motivation is commonly that of the desire for Him to come down and deliver us from our troubles or to administer judgment, even vengeance upon our enemies, those who are opposed to us and who make our lives difficult. This is the nature of the prophet’s request in verses 1 and 2. Again, we read,

Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at Your presence—
²as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
*to make Your name known to Your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at Your presence!*

We assume that the God we are calling upon is our God, and that He will be favorable to us and will be against those who are against us. And so, yes, we desire to hear from God and desire to seem Him working on our behalf, but all people everywhere have that desire.

But two things are at work in all of our seeking and our praying. *First, because of our sin, although we desire to see “God” manifested to us, if and when the true God does reveal Himself, then we are afraid and we turn away, and even flee from His presence.* This was seen in our first parents in which we read in Genesis 3:8,

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

This reaction to flee from the presence of God was also manifest at Mount Sinai when God “came down” to meet with His people. We read in **Exodus 20:18 and 19**,

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

The *second* common reaction and response of sinners encountering the true and living God, is *they recast, reshape, and reinvent their conception of God so that He would seem to be favorable toward them and less than threatening to them.* This, too, was demonstrated at the foot of Sinai.

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

²And Aaron said to them, “Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” ³So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

Then they said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

⁵So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.” ⁶Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. (Exod. 32:1-6)

Fallen man reinvents God to make Him more manageable, less threatening, more amiable to them. He creates God in his own image. As God Himself declared in the psalm, “

¹⁶But to the wicked God says:

“What right have you to declare My statutes,

Or take My covenant in your mouth,

¹⁷Seeing you hate instruction

And cast My words behind you?

¹⁸When you saw a thief, you consented^[a] with him,

And have been a partaker with adulterers.

¹⁹You give your mouth to evil,

And your tongue frames deceit.

²⁰You sit and speak against your brother;

You slander your own mother’s son.

²¹These things you have done, and I kept silent;

You thought that I was altogether like you;

But I will rebuke you,

And set them in order before your eyes.

Now, not only does all mankind desire God to manifest Himself to them in a significant, awe-inspiring manner, but sin has twisted and perverted this desire, but

2. Fallen man will not and cannot recognize or readily acknowledge the true God when He does manifest Himself in His grace. God acts in a manner beyond our ability to comprehend. Again, the prophet called upon the event at Sinai to declare this truth:

³When You did awesome things that ***we did not look for***,
You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.

⁴***From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides You,***

who acts for those who wait for Him.

⁵You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,

As we said earlier, the apostle Paul used this verse to teach the Christians in the church at Corinth that all that they were as Christians and all that they had obtained through Jesus Christ was due to the grace of God bestowed upon them through the Holy Spirit who had revealed the true God unto them.

⁷But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

⁹But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

¹⁰But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²*Now we have received*, not the spirit of the world, *but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

3. When God does manifest His “glory” to His people, the truth of His nature and ways, they are struck down with the nature and gravity of their sin and their condemnation before the holy God that they now see and hear. We see this in our text. What was the response of the prophet, who asked God to come down and manifest His glory, to punish their enemies? He was strikingly made aware of his own sin and the sin of his people. Again, our text reads:

Behold, You were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
⁶We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
⁷There is no one who calls upon Your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of You;
for You have hidden Your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities. (Isa. 64:5-7)

When God begins to reveal Himself in truth, fallen man becomes a sinner in his own sight. He begins to see himself and all about him as undeserving of the least of God’s blessing. The one illuminated by the true glory of God, that is the truth of God for who He is, what He is like, and how He acts in His world, that one becomes aware of his fallen, bankrupt, unclean, lifeless, condition that warrants God’s everlasting wrath.

Here is a description by **J. C. Philpot** of the one to whom the glory of the true God has shone:

“God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts” (2 Cor. 4:6). But, together with this ray of supernatural light, and blended with it in mysterious union, supernatural life flows into the soul. “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth” (James 1:18). “You hath He quickened”—that is, made alive—“who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Every ray of natural light is not single, but sevenfold, as may be seen in the rainbow, where every distinct ray of the sun is broken into seven different colors. And thus the first ray of supernatural light which shines into the soul out of the Sun of righteousness is really not single, but manifold. Mingled with heavenly light, and inseparable from it, life, feeling and power, faith and prayer, godly fear and holy reverence, conviction of guilt and hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, flow into the heart. And it is this blended union of feelings which distinguishes the warm sunlight which melts the heart from the cold moonlight that enlightens the head. The latter begins and ends in hard, dry, barren knowledge, like the Aurora Borealis playing over the frozen snows of the north; whilst the former penetrates into and softens the secret depths of the soul, and carries with it a train of sensations altogether new, heavenly and divine.

Thus **feeling** is the first evidence of supernatural life—a feeling compounded of two distinct sensations, one referring to God, and the other referring to self. The same ray of light has manifested two opposite things, “for that which maketh manifest is light”; and the sinner sees at one and the same moment God and self, justice and guilt, power and helplessness, a holy law and a broken commandment, eternity and time, the purity of the Creator and the filthiness of the creature. And these things he sees, not merely as declared in the Bible, but as revealed in himself as personal realities, involving all his happiness or all his

misery in time and in eternity. Thus it is with him as though a new existence had been communicated, and as if for the first time he had found there was a God.

It is as though all his days he had been asleep, and were now awakened—asleep upon the top of a mast, with the raging waves beneath; as if all his past life were a dream, and the dream were now at an end. He has been hunting butterflies, blowing soap bubbles, angling for minnows, picking daisies, building card-houses, and idling life away like an idiot or a madman. He had been perhaps wrapped up in a profession, smuggled into a church, daubed over with untempered mortar, advanced even to the office of a deacon, or mounted in a pulpit. He had learned to talk about Christ, and election, and grace, and fill his mouth with the language of Zion. And what did he know of these things? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Ignorant of his own ignorance **of all kinds of ignorance the worst**, he thought himself rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing, and knew not he was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Rev. 3:17).

But one ray of supernatural light, penetrating through the veil spread over the heart, has revealed that terrible secret—a just God, who will by no means clear the guilty. This piercing ray has torn away the bed too short, and stripped off the covering too narrow. It has rent asunder “the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods and the veils, and it shall come to pass that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty” (Isa. 3:22-24).

A sudden, peculiar conviction has rushed into the soul. One absorbing feeling has seized fast hold of it, and well nigh banished every other. “There is a God, and I am a sinner before Him”, is written upon the heart by the same divine finger that traced those fatal letters on the palace wall of the king of Babylon, which made the joints of his loins to be loosed, and his knees to smite one against another (Dan. 5:5, 6). “What shall I do? Where shall I go? What will become of me? Mercy, O God! Mercy, mercy! I am lost, ruined, undone! Fool, madman, wretch, monster that I have been! I have ruined my soul. O my sins, my sins! O eternity, eternity!” Such and similar cries and groans, though differing in depth and intensity, go up out of the new-born soul well nigh day and night at the first discovery of God and of itself. These feelings have taken such complete possession of the heart that it can find no rest except in calling upon God. This is the first pushing of the young bud through the bark, the first formation of the green shoot, wrapped up as yet in its leaves, and not opened to view. These are the first pangs and throes of the new birth before the tidings are brought, “A man-child is born.” “What shall I do to be saved?” cried the jailer. “God be merciful to me a sinner!” exclaimed the publican. “Woe is me, for I am undone!” burst forth from the lips of Isaiah.³

4. When God manifests His “glory” to His people, with the realization of the guilt of their sin and inability to raise themselves, understanding they have no claim upon God to be favorable to them, **they look to God to deal with them according to His mercy and grace.** We read in our text of the prophet’s appeal to God that He would acknowledge them and be gracious to them.

⁸But now, O LORD, You are our Father;
we are the clay, and You are our Potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

⁹Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all Your people.

We, of course, see that God’s mercy and grace is mediated through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God has revealed to us His glory, even the glory of the only begotten Son of God, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). As we look to the Savior, we see the glory of God manifested. That glory shows us our sin, humbling us before Him, but it also shows us the glory of salvation

³ J. C. Philpot, “*Winter Afore the Harvest; Or, the Soul’s Growth in Grace.*”
<http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=category&cid=223&page=6>

freely bestowed upon us because we believe Him to be our Savior and Lord. He is to us the final and greatest Prophet, who instructs us in our ignorance. He is to us the great Priest, for which we were in need, because we needed forgiveness. He is to us our King, who delivers us from the power of sin that had formerly dominated us. And now as we live by faith in him even as we purpose to live for Him, we rejoice in Him singly and supremely. He is all in all. Praise God for His unspeakable gift in Jesus Christ.

5. If they would/could receive God's favor granted them through His mercy and grace, then *they would purpose to live truly before Him in righteousness*. They would be ones like David, who upon receiving the free and full forgiveness of his sin had once wrote:

¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

¹⁶For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

¹⁸Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24)