

Isaiah 63:17; 64:1-9(ESV) 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. ¹Oh 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.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

It has been said that the church is always one generation from extinction. **Matthew 16:18(ESV)** ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **Luke 18:8b(ESV)** Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The promise of Jesus brings great comfort regarding the church. Jesus will not allow the church to be overcome by the gates of hell. God will always have his remnant people, the true church, on this earth, until the trumpet call of God is heard world-wide, and the commanding shout of the angel is heard worldwide. Until the 2nd coming of Jesus, the enemy, Satan will not prevail against the church but of course the enemy will give it his best shot.

There is such a thing as generational sin. One definition of generational sin are those rebellious actions, traits, and attitudes against God that we pass down to our children and grandchildren. I was introduced to the concept of generational sin and/or dysfunctions in college. I took time to study my relatives and could see two major generational sins were

abusive tempers and bitterness. The Good News is there is power from the Gospel of Jesus Christ to stop generational sins and unhealthy traits and addictions. "Father, at the foot of the cross may all of my generational sins and unhealthy traits and addictions be stopped with me. "May I not pass these onto my children or grandchildren." I know of a father who when it came to being a father completely failed the course; the abuse was horrible. Yet, the son became one of the best fathers I have ever met. God has the power to stop generational sinful practices, traits, and unhealthy addictions for God's grace is more powerful than our sin.

Here is my point. Jesus says, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" I interpret the verse this way. When Jesus comes again, the earth will be full of faithless people, where an entire generation(s) has or have deliberately walked away from God and from the church. *"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."* Is there such a thing or are there such things as a generation or generations turning deliberately away from God and have no fear of God at all? YES!

At the time of Noah there was only one faithful family to God. Jesus says when he comes again it will be as in the days of Noah. There will be found little faith when Jesus comes again. At the second coming of Jesus, He will stop the people of the world from destroying themselves completely. Before everyone is wiped out by war, the battle of Armageddon, Jesus returns and puts an end to all wars. **Isaiah 2:4(NLT)** *"⁴The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore."* Until that day, Jesus promises the church will remain although it may be few in number.

I was raised in the least churched county in the entire United States. I know what it is like to be completely in the minority when it comes to being Christian. Isaiah writes, ¹⁷*"O 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."

Isaiah is viewing an entire generation who has forsaken God, fallen away from God, and do not even give God a thought. Friends, it is so easy for anyone to fall into unbelief or backslide spiritually. Church attendance is at an all-time low nationwide. We can argue who's to blame but the fact is there is no longer a fear of God in our land just as in the days of Noah and Isaiah. Isaiah wonders out loud why God is allowing this to happen. Isaiah is not blaming God for the generational fall away from God. Isaiah is pleading with God to step in and stop this downhill spiral.

"Dear God it looks like to so many of an entire generation or generations of younger people no longer want God in their lives." "Lord their hearts are hardened toward you and they seek you not." "Instead of looking to you O Lord they are looking to the government to take more and more control of our land." "They are relying more on government than God and their politics have become their religion." "Dear God please step in and stop this sick way of thinking." "Please soften the hearts of our entire nation toward Jesus and put an end to our national and generational sins." "In the name of Jesus. Amen."

Friends, God forces no one to sin. Each person is responsible for one's own sin. One form of God's judgment goes like this. "And God gave them over to their sin." God has restraining power to keep us from sin, yes. But there comes a time when people's attitudes and hearts are so hardened against God that God lets them sin in any way they want, withdrawing God's restraining power from sin. Sin spreads like wildfire across dry grass. God is never responsible for sin. We are responsible for our own sin. This is what happens when we refuse to repent as our hearts are hardened for God and our desire for God has vanished. The only answer is for God to return to us.

Raymond C Ortlund Jr. writes, "We tell ourselves we can fool around with some daring sin and then, when we feel like it, just drop it and come back to God, no big deal. Where did we learn to think that way? Does the Bible tell us to trivialize God? Sin is a power beyond our control (John 8:34). When we find our hearts hardened with lethargy, self-pity and even blaming God himself, so that we don't even want to return to him, what then? We pray that God will return to us. Isaiah prays, Return for the sake of your servants. We are utterly dependent on God. When we have wandered from his ways and no longer fear him, our hope is not in

ourselves at all. Our hope is that in his mercy God will return to us" (Raymond C Ortlund Jr, Isaiah, God Saves Sinners, pg. 432).

Friends, Advent is a time to pray for God to return to you. Advent is a time to pray for God to show you where you have fallen away, strayed away from God. When God's Holy Presence comes near to you, God exposes your sin. God does this out of perfect love. It is God's will for you to draw near to God as God draws near to you. God has his ways of stopping us in our tracks, exposing our sins, disciplining us out of love, purging us of our sinful ways, pruning our lives so we readily repent and bear more fruit for God. The Bible says, "Endure hardship as suffering" (Hebrews 12:7) The Bible says, "Think about it: Just as a parent disciplines a child, the Lord your God disciplines you for your good" (Deut 5:5).

I truly believe this. If you are a child of God, God will only let you stray so far into sin and then God will step in and bring you back. The Bible says, "Your sin will find you out." "That which is done in the darkness will be brought out in the light." The process can be quite painful, but God does it out of love.

¹Oh 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!

In other words, "Lord we have fallen so far away from you that our only hope is for you to step in and stop us in our tracks." "Desperate times demand desperate measures." "Lord, please give to us a season of repentance." "Please no longer give us over to our sin." "We need more blessings than we have ever seen before." "God, please do an intervention of us."

Friends, God is more than capable at stopping you and stopping me from sin and may God do just that today. Please ask God to send his Presence your way and listen to God and hear exactly what God wishes for you to do.

There are places around the world where God is showing up as never before and Christianity is flourishing. It seems the better they do, the further we as a nation fall. I cannot explain that. Sometimes I think God has moved to better weather in the Southern hemisphere.

Yes, I am joking, but it is South of the equator where the church is growing by leaps and bounds. God, please do that here.

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.

In the Bible, God has amazing ways of getting the attention of his people. Parting the Red Sea, coming onto Mt. Sinai with the fullness of God's Presence in a glory cloud, raising Jesus from the dead, sending the Holy Spirit to birth the church at Pentecost. Please, everyone give to God your full attention. Be in his word every day. When living by faith in Jesus, God has so much more for you to know and experience as you wait on God, day by day.

^{5b}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.

The entire generation's hearts were hardened toward God. They needed deliverance from themselves. The generational sin hit an all time high. The only answer was for God to turn to them and bring them unto Himself for left to themselves they would be lost forever, never again turning to God.

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.

Friends, this way of praying brings glory to God (ibid pg. 435). It expresses a heart in desperate need for God. Yes, we are the clay. God is the potter. God has the right to put us in the kiln of great heat so a holy formation can be developed from the work of God's hands. We need God's touch to redesign us and reshape us to be more the way God wants us to be. Yes, God is able to touch us again. We need it again and again, the touch of God. The best place

for us to live and be is in the hands of God, repenting fully of our sins, receiving God's forgiving touch. Amen and Amen.

I encourage all of you to go on the church's website and read the text of this sermon for it is much better read than said.

I close by reading the Lyrics of the Christian Contemporary Song, He Touched Me by Bill Gaither, whose music I grew up on.

Shackled by a heavy burden, 'Neath a load of guilt and shame.

Then the hand of Jesus touched me, And now I am no longer the same.

He touched me, Oh He touched me, And oh the joy that floods my soul!

Something happened and now I know, He touched me and made me whole.

Since I met this blessed Savior, Since He cleansed and made me whole,

I will never cease to praise Him, I'll shout it while eternity rolls.

He touched me, Oh He touched me, And oh the joy that floods my soul!

Something happened and now I know He touched me and made me whole.

I encourage all of you to go on the church's website and read the text of this sermon for it is much better read than said.

Amen and Amen.