

March 1, 2020 AM
Pastor Ken Hepner

“The Passionate Longing in the Heart of God for Us”
Isaiah 40:3 – 5 and 28 – 31

Introduction:

This morning as we turn our attention to the Word of God, we looking at an area of the lives of Christians, which the Lord has really been laying on my heart for about fifteen years. This morning we will look at some clear pictures of the times when the Lord God Almighty moved powerfully on the earth in the midst of His people, responding in power and love to His sons and daughters who pour out our hearts to Him in earnest prayer!

One of the crucial elements to understanding this concept of God’s desire to interact with His people is the Biblical progressive revelation of the Immanuel Principle. Simply put, **Immanuel** means, “God **With** us, God **Revealed In** us.” It is a picture of the desire of God to dwell in the midst of His people, to walk among and minister to us.

- 1.) In Genesis 2 and 3 God gives us a beautiful picture of how He walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, as the three of them had prayer conversations together.
- 2.) He was the fire in the bush that did not burn up when He called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt.
- 3.) He was the fire in the wilderness as He walked them through the Exodus from Egypt and the 40 years in the wilderness wandering.
- 4.) He was the fire of God falling on their sacrifices Elijah on Mt Carmel, and Solomon at the dedication of the temple as the Shekinah glory fell among them.
- 5.) He was Son of God, Jesus Christ walking in the midst of His people, revealing the nature of the Father to us telling us how much the Father God longs to know us.

The Old Testament Scriptures like Ezekiel 36 pointed to the fact of **an Outpouring of His Spirit in His people**, a day when He would actually dwell in each of us. That began on Pentecost Day nearly 2000 years ago as the fire of God came to live in hearts. Today you and I live in the fullest revelation of the Immanuel Principle to date: He is the Holy Spirit dwelling in our individual hearts and lives today!

It is crucial that we remember the central issue to the heart of God the Father. He passionately longs to dwell in the midst of His people, because He wants so much to demonstrate His mercy and goodness to those who do not yet know Him. God’s deep longing to live in the midst of us and to know us is always about His heart to bring others into His family! **Renewal** of His people, is always about preparing us to be His **Vehicle** of **Revival** in the land.

Renewal of our hearts, spiritual passions after God is a work of His Spirit **In** His people, a work of **Restoring** and **Refreshing** our spiritual passions to know Him more intimately and honor Him more fully. The tendency of too many people in the church is to settle down and get

comfortable with what we have experienced and to forget the fact that the reason He works in us to cleanse, to purify, and to empower us, is to prepare us for use.

Revival in land is the work of the Spirit of God **Through** His renewed people, resulting in the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, clearly seen by all kinds of people and the fruit of which is **Community Transformation!** As thousands of people in a given geographic region come to know the Lord Jesus Christ in personal salvation experience, the blessing and power of God touches and changes the natural surroundings.

As one reads through both the Scriptures and church history stretching over nearly two thousand years, there are clear and observable stages of God's Sovereign pouring out of His Holy Spirit on the earth, which He deeply longs to do when His conditions are met by His people:

Stage 1 could be referred to as the **Touches** of the Holy Spirit. This is the stage of His drawing work, conviction of sin, seeing our need of brokenness and repentance. It is His awakening work in His people to see the true state of our hearts as a collective people. Touches of His Spirit are typically preparatory work of gathering a group of people who will give themselves to prayer until something happens! ***Moves of God on the earth require a vehicle God can use! Very often the Church of God needs the new moving of the Spirit of God to come into realignment with His purposes!***

Stage 2 of His Spirit's outpouring on the earth take us, His people the Church, into a deeper awareness of the reality of His presence among us. These can be referred to as the times of **Visitation**. As God visits His people there are numerous things that happen. Often, there is a very real sense of the heaviness of His presence dwelling in the atmosphere, and things in us that are displeasing to the Lord, which could hide before, are brought into the light. There are manifestations of His Spirit, the overwhelming of our humanity, weeping, and deep remorse for the sins we have committed or the good things we have left undone!

Stage 3 is what we long for, and what so few people on the earth have experienced, the rarest of all the outpourings of His Spirit on the earth, the days of **Habitation**. In these times it is clear to everyone – to saint and to sinner alike – the glory of the presence of the Lord is on the earth. In days of habitation, God is dwelling in the midst of a broken and surrendered people. Worship is passionate, and prayer is powerfully effective in every way. There are miracles, signs, and wonders wrought through the people of God, by the power of His Spirit. And all kinds and types of people are swept into the kingdom, experiencing true salvation by faith, in waves and waves of God's mercy and grace, which sweep the land.

It is vitally important that we keep in view the fact that God is powerfully at work, here and now in Central Pennsylvania, in His people of all types and shapes and sizes. He is doing a work of awakening, drawing us to **Unity** of the Holy Spirit in the midst of our **Diversity** of our life in Him. Here in Juniata County the Lord Jesus is drawing different pastors to pray together!

There are all kinds of churches, denominations, worship styles, with a variety of different pastors, who are being drawn together for the purpose of prayer and desire to see God come to our region and lead us to be a place of His habitation on the earth.

The thing that touches my heart about this move of His Spirit is that I believe He is up to something with us. He is **Preparing** us and **Repairing** us so that He might use us as His vehicle, for the lost and unchurched people of our region! The truth is if people are going to be able to see and understand the wonderful love, grace, mercy, and transforming power of God, they will see those things first through God's children who are being transformed by the Spirit.

I. The Vehicle Must Be Prepared:

Our Scripture text is taken from Isaiah 40, a passage of Scripture written to God's people who were walking in dark days of defeat, discouragement, and despair. Numerous tribes had been overrun and occupied by a ruthless foreign power, the best of the land stripped and carried off to Babylon, and spiritual evil was prevalent in their land. Into such a situation God began to draw His people to Himself, to see their deep need of Him as their source of hope, strength, encouragement, and consolation.

If this passage teaches us anything, it teaches us that God's people are not hopeless, defeated, or useless until and unless God says so. He stepped into their terrible circumstances and changed them as He walked with them bringing life-change to them as they walked through their negative circumstances.

He is the Lord and He will prepare His people for sacred use one way or the other. If we will not voluntarily choose to be His vehicle for the fulfillment of His plans to save the world through Christ Jesus, **He will get through to us another way. Generally, it is through the vehicle of refinement Through Suffering.**

You say now just a minute Pastor, what about the truth that God wants all of His children to be happy and blessed? That furnace of suffering stuff is pretty radical don't you think? Yes, radical, but also Biblical! In Scripture what does it mean when we are called to be happy and blessed? To live happy and blessed in the Lord is to know His holy provisions for our lives, to **Walk** in the **Spirit** in the confines of His will for our lives – in holy self-emptying, other oriented love, and **not in the human or fleshly desires of our own self-interest, what our fleshly nature thinks it needs to be happy!**

Isaiah 48:10, 11 "I have refined you but not in the way silver is refined. Rather I have in the furnace of suffering. I will rescue you for my sake – yes for my own sake! That way the pagans will not be able to claim their gods have conquered me. I will not let them have my glory!"

He put His One and Only Son through the furnace of suffering, Hebrews 2:10 *"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."*

Hebrews 5: 7 – 9 *"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."*

It is, in seasons, His calling to us His adopted sons and daughters, as well, I Peter 4:19 *“So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”*

It is vital that we remember the truth that God Initiates the renewal and refreshment of His people with His Drawing Love, by His Holy Spirit. God is passionate about His sons and daughters, a truth that is difficult to escape when we see that He has chosen to reveal Himself to us as a loving father. He moves to draw us and woo us to Himself, away from the stuff of this world, our focus on pursuits, material things, prestige, or career. He draws us to see there is more to life than the stuff of this world, and to hunger and thirst for spiritual satisfaction.

We Respond to His drawing and wooing works of His Spirit **in faith with Desire to know Him more Intimately.** We express this in prayer, passionately longing to experience more of His presence in our hearts and lives, to go deeper, and in the process, we become a part of the preparation the way of the Lord.

As we respond with longing to know Him, invariably He takes those He loves into the **Desert Places, the spiritually dry and arid places of the heart.** While we are there, in the hard places He permits, we are drawn to learn to trust Him only and to experience Him more deeply. Check it out in Scripture and you will find this pattern over and over in the chosen vehicles of the Lord. Moses, Joshua, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostle Paul all have the wilderness experience as their training ground in common.

Have you felt like you have been in the desert places, feeling like the Lord doesn’t see your heartache, places where it is hard to believe and to keep pressing in to what you believe He wants to do? Have you been praying and praying and things don’t seem to get better, or maybe even worse? Have you felt a need to go deeper after God? **Welcome to the School of God!**

II. The Ways of God in the Desert:

Isaiah 40:3 – 5 *“A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind together will see it.’ For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

Notice with me, what God told Isaiah to write. *“A voice of one calling: **‘In the desert, prepare the way for the Lord;** make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”* The Lord deeply desires to come and walk among His people, but there are impediments to His dwelling in the midst of us in His power. **The Spiritual Preparation** is a cooperative venture we do with the Lord God as we respond to Him when He gives leadership to our lives, by His Spirit. In the desert experiences of life, you and I make way for the Lord to dwell in us on earth!

Isaiah wrote about three categories of inner issues, which can be in the Lord’s people, and which must be addressed if He is to dwell in our midst in power, mercy and grace. Isaiah wrote about valleys being raised up, places of deep shadows, at which the enemy attacks, filled in with

healing mercy, by His Spirit. He wrote about the moving of inner **Mountains and the smoothing of Rough and Rugged places.**

The enemy specializes in creating real or imaginary mountains, obstacles that stand in the way of a deepening intimacy with God. These must be attacked and defeated by faith with the Lord in prayer, and as more and more of us do so together we increase the faith level and the concomitant response of God on the earth. Your faith response in your life, joined with my faith response in my life, and our believing God for the completion of His promised blessings for His Church, raises the level of faith for our church body.

There are implications here for each of us as individuals. **We are each responsible before God to be the “Spiritual Gatekeeper” for what we permit to live in our hearts and what we do not permit to live in us!** As we cooperate with the Holy Spirit of God who lives in us, we raise up the inner valleys, where the enemy has attacked us and we cut the inner mountains down to size. His Spirit makes the rough places of the heart smooth, as God heals each of us.

There are implications for us as a collective church family and the body of Christ in this region. As more and more of us become victorious over the inner issues of our hearts, the collective faith level of our church grows, and our gatherings become increasingly a place in which God moves in power.

Notice with me a third thing in that small paragraph of Scripture. **The Revelation of His Glory here and now on the earth is for Everyone!** As He reveals Himself in glory and power in His people all kinds of people will come into contact with Him, experience Him and be drawn to want to know Him. This is His plan from ages past, to create jealousy to know the Lord through the reality of His blessing in the lives of His people. *“And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind will see it together.”*

Everyone is to be impacted by the Holy Spirit’s revelation of the glory of the Lord on the earth.

- 1.) God’s people are overwhelmed with their need of His provisions, longing to be made holy in heart and life, as He is holy.
- 2.) Those who do not yet know Him are overwhelmed with the need to experience Him in salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

Notice a fourth thing with me here in this passage. The prophet Isaiah was moved by God to record for us that **the Proclamation is done through us by Faith**, regardless of evidence for or to the contrary of His working on the earth. Isaiah writes 40:8b – 10 *“... the Word of the Lord stands forever. Messenger of good news, shout to Zion from the mountaintops! Shout louder to Jerusalem – do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah, ‘Your God is coming!’ Yes the Sovereign Lord is coming in all his glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.”* New Living Translation

Our job as His messengers is to proclaim, in prayer by faith, what He wants to do, and it is His job to actually do what He has said He wants very much to do.

III. The Work of God's Spirit as We Surrender:

Isaiah 40:11 *"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."*

We need to see the truth that as we walk with God through the harsh and arid desert places of life, **He is there to Walking them With Us.** As a matter of fact, He has ordained them, so that in the difficult place we would draw near to Him and permit Him to have His way with us. This is the message we each responsible to receive from Him; the truth that we need the Lord to be able to live a life that is pleasing to Him and satisfying to us.

The truth is that we need Him to be at work in our life, transforming us, and empowering us to live above sin and sin's power to rule us. He tends to all of us, His flock, leading us to His provisions of living water and pastures of fresh Truth.

He is the Good Shepherd who knows us each by name and calls us to Himself, leading us out of sin and sin's confines and into His will and ways. He gathers the lambs, those who see themselves as small, childlike faith and trust, in His arms and carries them close to His heart.

Isaiah 40:27 – 31 *"Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?' Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint."*

The Lord moved Isaiah to prophesy about the renewal of His Spirit in the lives of His children who walk with Him, follow Him, and surrender to His will and purposes for our lives:

- 1.) **Hearts**, that is in our desires, passions, what we really want to do. We will center our lives in hope that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord, that the situation will be used of God to change me, and that He will work in me what is for my best and fullest maturation!
- 2.) **Strength**, for us is renewed when we know ourselves to be weak, and cry out to Him by faith, asking Him to strengthen us. He gives us that which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. All of our human strength, ingenuity, striving, and working will accomplish merely human results. But as we learn to walk in the strength of the Spirit, being strengthened with His power in our inner person, the results are in keeping with His power and anointing on our efforts.
- 3.) **Passion**, firmly fixed on true and genuine worship of the majesty and the magnitude of God. Passion that is a choice to do that which God has put in our hearts, nothing more and nothing less. Passion that is born within us by His Spirit, moving us to know and walk with God in His plans of global evangelization!

Conclusion:

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“The Passionate Longing in the Heart of God for Us”

Isaiah 40:3 – 5 and 28 – 31

Introduction:

This morning we will look at pictures in the Scriptures when God moved powerfully on the earth in the midst of His people.

The concept of God’s desire to live with His people, is revealed in the Biblical principle: The **I** _____ **R** _____. This word means God with us or God **R** _____ **I** us!

The Scriptures like Ezekiel 36 point to a day when the His Spirit would dwell in individual believers. That experience began on Pentecost Day!

God’s desire to dwell in the midst of His people, the **R** _____ of our hearts, desires, spiritual passion is always about us being a **V** _____ in whom He dwells revealing Himself to others through us!

Renewal is His holy working in us. **R** _____ is His holy work through us bringing others to Him. The result is **C** _____ **T** _____.

In Scripture and throughout Church history there are clearly observable stages of God moving on the earth in and through His people:

Stage 1 can be referred to as **T** _____

Stage 2 can be referred to as **V** _____

Stage 3 can be referred to as **H** _____

Right now, God is doing a work of awakening us to see our need here in Central PA. He is drawing us to **U** _____ in the midst of our **D** _____.

He is repairing and preparing His people to receive and help the lost and non-Christians to come to know Him!

I. The Vehicle Must Be Prepared:

Our Scripture text is from a passage written by Isaiah, chapter 40, in the context of God’s people walking in days defeat and discouragement!

The Lord God must have a people who are prepared to love others who are not “like us” for Him. He would prefer us to **C** _____ to be soft, pliable in His hands, as His vehicle of love and grace for others. If we are not soft and useable, He will get our attention in other ways. One of His Biblical ways is refinement **T** _____ **S** _____.

We often hear teachers misrepresent the words “happy” and “blessed.” In Scripture the blessed life is the life that W_____ in humble surrender to the Spirit, not the life that gets God to fulfill its selfish wants!

Isaiah 48:10, 11; Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 5:7 – 9; I Peter 4:19

It is vital that we know the truth, days of refreshment and renewing our hearts, are about God’s D_____ L_____ by His Spirit.

We respond with D_____ to know Him more I_____ to be shaped by His holy love. Those the Lord loves invariably He takes into D_____ P_____!

II. The Ways of God in the Desert Experience: Isaiah 40:3 – 5

“In the desert prepare the way for the Lord.” When we walk with God in desert places it is always about our S_____ P_____.

Isaiah wrote about three categories of heart issues: V_____ being raised up, leveled out ... places of D_____ S_____ healed ... and M_____, rough and rugged places in us smoothed.

The enemy specializes in creating real or imaginary mountains in us, things that stand in the way of walking in deeper intimacy with God.

As individual Christians we are each responsible to be the S_____ G_____ of what we permit to live in our hearts!

Notice what Isaiah’s prophecy says about the manifest glory of the Lord on earth: It is F_____ E_____. Both we who are the people of God and those who do not yet know Him will see His glory!

Notice also we are responsible to be the vehicle of P_____ by F_____ what the Lord has done. Isaiah 40:8b – 10

III. The Work of God’s Spirit as We Surrender: Isaiah 40:11

The wonderful thing about walking in the desert places is Jesus is right there W_____ in them W_____ U_____. He is the Good Shepherd who knows each one of us by name.

Isaiah 40:27 – 31 is a very familiar prophecy that speaks to our deep surrender to His will as we walk in hard places in life:

1. H_____
2. S_____
3. P_____

Concluding Thoughts

Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups

1. Isaiah wrote a prophecy about God's people walking in days of suffering, hardships, desert places. What circumstances motivated his prophecy?
2. Why do you think Isaiah was so adamant about the desire of God to dwell in the midst of His people, to do His work in them dynamically changing them?
3. What Scriptural pictures come to your mind when you think about people God dearly loves walking in suffering and hardships? How about Christians you have known, read about who walked in awful experiences yet loved Jesus in them?
4. What comes to your mind when you think of the imagery of the Lord God loving His people deeply and yet taking them out into desert places?
5. What are ways you can think of that we can be responsive to the Holy Spirit's desire to transform us when we are walking in days of suffering or hardship?
6. When you hear the prophetic word Isaiah shared about valleys raised up, dark shadows removed, and mountains smoothed, what is Isaiah talking about?
7. Do you think most Christians really understand the truth the Spirit of God deeply desires for us to know His heart of love, His strength, and His desires?
8. Read together aloud Matthew 4:1 - 11 and discuss insights you have about what Jesus experienced in the wilderness with Satan tempting Him.
9. Read together aloud Galatians 1:11 – 24 and discuss insights you have from Paul's experience with the Lord Jesus Christ, the message of the Gospel he received directly from Jesus in the wilderness of Arabia for several years.
10. How are you personally being changed by the Spirit of God making the Word of God alive to your heart and mind? When you have walked in days of suffering or hardship how have those times changed you? How has He spoken to you when your heart was broken and you didn't know what to do?