

01-12-1974

TEXT ISAIAH 64.1

Evening Lesson. Luke 4. vv.1-32.

Let us comprehend by grace, and I reiterate one point, the opening word of this illustrious prayer of the Church of old; the little word 'Oh'. It is an interjection that is a concentration of all the internal intercession of the Holy Spirit in the soul issuing forth to God in heaven, under a weight^{of} sorrows, sins, temptations and the whole path of tribulation in the journey to eternal bliss. So often, as we have seen in the chapter 8 to the Romans, "we know not what to pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." So understandably there are those of you who know what it is to utter before God, as I have done to day, a groan that the Lord Himself is able to interpret and mercifully respond to. This evening if the Lord will, we will proceed with the majestic symbolism of the Hebrew people before us in the Text, and I hope I shall not be guilty of overlapping or of repetition.

The overriding nature of the Text is surely this: under the weight of sin, guilt, fear, temptation, heavy trouble, a recognition as before God that all human power is impotent. So in the intensity of spiritual longing and holy desire and felt necessity is this wondrous appeal to God in the heavens, in His dwelling place, that He would rend the heavens and come down. It is obvious that all the living family of God born before the Advent and living in this period of history prayed the same. They were looking for redemption in Jerusalem, for the birth of the Saviour, the Messiah; all that had been prophesied by Spirit-anointed prophets of old. So we have the term, the rending of the heavens and His coming down.

I will begin on the point of what we said earlier, viz; when man fell completely into utter ruin, an abject state, and the earth and the race of mankind was plunged into misery. I remember the burdens borne by those who worshipped God in this Sanctuary since 1837. I remember the misery, the groans, the overwhelming sorrows of a number of the old saints, but the Lord appeared for them. There was one who came to the end of her singing days. It was noticeable that her mouth was closed. The reason for it was sorrow and trial that completely devastated her and those dear to her: she felt she could not sing again. I remember the wonderful experience of seeing her, and her testimony left an imprint on my spirit. One day I saw the dear old lady singing. The Lord had spoken to her about her silence in

the language of the Hymn;

"He justly claims a song from me;
His lovingkindness, O how free! (9)

From that day she sang again.

I will take up the point, as helped. When man fell and the world was ruined, it was as though the heavens were sealed. God's wrath, curse, vengeance seemed imminent, and those who had divine life in their souls said; "Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down!" The heavens were sealed. They felt, is there hope for us? where can we look? I will deliver to you the holy doctrine; the type of the high priest. Once a year in a cloud of incense, and not without blood, the high priest passed from the holy place into the holiest of all through the veil, and this was a type of the heavens being rent. When were they rent? When Christ was born; when the dear Son of God assumed a holy humanity into indissoluble union with His holy soul, and was born at Bethlehem, heralded by angels and His praise sung by multitudes of the heavenly host the heavens were rent. Day began to dawn and the shadows began to flee away. "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." So then the heavens were rent.

This leads our minds further. The heavens were rent especially when Christ said at the end of His vicarious sufferings, in all the holy triumph of His soul, "It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." How wonderful for the heavens to be rent! and "God and sinners reconciled!" Christ said; I am the way, the truth, and the life." The sins of His people were expiated, the curse removed, divine justice was propitiated, and poor sinners reconciled to God. There was an open way lined out with blood for the ransomed to pass over. This leads you to the glorious resurrection, when He rose on the third day triumphant. At His cross and in His resurrection, the Lord came down, and the mountains flowed down at His presence: mountains of sin, death, and hell. So He ascended on high and showed our feet the way. The heavens were rent. He is now seated on His Throne at the right hand of God, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us, and He says; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,

and I will give you rest." The heavens are rent. So as we had this afternoon He consecrated for us a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and the heavens were rent. There is a way of access, a way of approach. You may go to God: the heavens are rent. You may go to God the Father through the sacrificial merits, the precious blood, the intercession and mediation of the dear Saviour, once crucified, dead, and buried, now risen, ascended, and exalted. The heavens are rent. It is wonderful to prove it.

Let us translate to experience what we have said concerning the heavens being sealed. When a soul is quickened and brought under condemnation and conviction it is as though the heavens are sealed. There is thunder and lightning from mount Sinai, but the heavens are not rent until Christ is revealed. Immediately a dear bleeding Saviour is seen by faith, and the Lord gives a glimpse of Him exalted in heaven, the heavens are rent. You by the Covenant Grace of God know you have put in your hand an anchor. You take it, and with the divine efficacy, strength, and directive of faith, cast it within the veil; in Him: not in the earth; inside the veil. The heavens are rent for this soul. Now, communications from His fulness, all the blessings and promises of the New Covenant flow into your ransomed soul: there is union and communion: the heavens are rent. You have a blessed realisation of the Lord Himself going with you, drawing you to His dear feet, to His wounded side, His footstool, His Throne. The heavens are rent.

To take a further step: the heavens are known to be rent in an abundant manner and measure when the Lord visits you and grants forgiveness and deliverance. Why? It is then the Holy Spirit gives you heavenly transport, and you ^{are} taken in spirit to the heavens. I remember I felt I was nearly Home. How many times I have wished I had gone then, but it was not the will of God. Job felt the same, when he said he wished he had been cut off before the darkness. There was not a cloud in my sky; not a doubt in my spirit. I had full, rich assurance. The resplendent glory of our exalted Redeemer irradiated my ransomed soul and filled it. You are gone from this dark world. The heavens are rent. O! happy day! happy soul! The days of darkness are many; nevertheless, there is a blessed realisation between the eternal God and you through His dear Son that there is a rending of the heavens. The Lord gives audience to your prayers. They may be short: "Lord, help me. O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." He gives audience to you

Listen: you go off in secret. It will ^{be} dark to night when you go out, and you may be alone, and in the darkness try to look up. Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven. Try to pour out your soul to God: tell Him all your grief and pain on the ground of His love and mercy, poor, dejected, desolate heart. Presently you will come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you. Your sorrow will be turned into joy, and you will have a season of sweet access. The Lord says; "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears." Think of it! the dear Lord seeing your tears, and hearing your prayer! "behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city." Here are five blessings: the Lord hearing, seeing, adding, defending, delivering. You think of the concentration of blessings! You know He has heard your prayer; it has passed through, and it has come up before Him as a memorial. Get on your knees: tell Him you are at your wits' end. He is the Friend of the friendless and the faint: He is the great Physician, and He has said to you; "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Remind Him of His miracles; how He healed and cleansed the leper: how He allowed and delighted to grant virtue to flow from His body to the poor afflicted woman. Remind Him how He wept at the grave of Lazarus, and showed compassion to the mourning sisters. Remind Him how ^{He} responded to the petition of the centurion. "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Remind Him of this, and you will know; "Thus saith the Lord, I have heard thy prayer." It is impossible to express it adequately, but there are times in your soul when you are in agony, pain, trouble; yet there is such felt nearness to the Lord, as though He opens His loving arms and welcomes you to His breast, to breathe your sorrows into His ear. "I have heard thy prayer." The heavens are rent: there is access; there are communications; no barrier, no obstacle. The heavens are not shut to you. It is wonderful. In the journey of life from occasion to occasion you are tormented by Satan; he says God has forsaken you. He torments you that you will sink, be brought to confusion: you are tempted to resign all hope, and you cry to Him. You begin to feel the descent of the Holy Ghost; the immortal Dove descending on you. You feel peace, liberty, joy; your heart glows warm with ^{the} love of

Christ. You are happy: the Lord has returned; He has visited you, comforted you, helped you; there is a heavenly atmosphere in your spirit. Bondage has gone, fear is dissipated, the devil is silent and skulks off. He has rent the heavens. In your path and trials the Lord rends the heavens.

I want to dilate on this, if the Lord will help me. I will just go back to what I named in my petition to the Lord. It may be affliction fills your mind with terror, with gloomy apprehension, almost paralysing you with fear, in your person or the person of a dear one. You are in deep distress and the Lord rends the heavens. You make speed to go on your knees, to groan out your case before the Lord, and as you do a kind, merciful, loving Saviour speaks, and His speech is sweet. I referred to His speech. "Be not afraid: only believe." I so well remember how I was confirmed one evening by an amazing and comprehensive word concerning the temple and turning to Christ. "whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be: then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man," if they turn to Christ, - and I had the blessed issue in my soul; the Lord would rend the heavens. It was a word of comfort, hope, cheer, healing, and He fulfilled it; bless God.

So what you come into, my friends, you will prove in all your cries, groans, tears, beseeching the Lord, He will rend the heavens. He may do it in the ministry, conveying to your soul a word of divine power as it is delivered to you. He may rend the heavens from the Scriptures of divine truth. Amazing it is for His people, whatever they come in ^{to} He will teach their hearts to pray, but He rends the heavens. You see at first a little tiny crumb. I have several times referred to this, and I hope as I get older I shall not weary you. I so well remember leaving The Grove to preach in the Midlands, and I felt my heart ready to break with anxiety and trouble. I felt the Lord was near, and He directed me in a different direction to what I had known before. On the bus I kept pleading; Lord, I shall, God willing, visit three places and meet the godly deacons. Lord, teach them to minister to me. When there is the reception and conversation, put a word in the man, Lord, for me. In both the first two cases there was a little hope, but not the satisfaction I had pleaded for until I got to Westoning, and the dear old gentleman met me and we talked together. Presently he said, "You had better get to my son's to tea." I was disappointed. When I got out and held the door, he quoted a Scripture that went right to my heart. The

Lord rent the heavens. (He did not quote verbatim.) He said; "If the Lord had meant to destroy us, He would not have showed us all these things." It went right into my soul. When we got to Hope Chapel he announced Hymn 961.

"Be still, my heart! these anxious cares
To thee are burdens, thorns, and snares;
They cast dishonour on thy Lord,
And contradict His gracious word."

So the Lord rent the heavens. I came back filled with Resurrection power, hope, and the Lord's appearing. O the joy! What a journey outward bound! anxious, burdened, pressed, and coming back with the dear Lord's Resurrection power, joy and hope. So those who fear God will have groans, cries, tears. The Lord will rend the heavens: there is a tremendous change; the load is lifted from your mind, desolation and depression is dispelled. It is Resurrection power, His dear presence, His sweet love. The heavens are rent. That is the secret.

"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down." Why? Because for the Lord to visit you He must come down. It is His gracious, loving condescension to come down to where a poor sinner is. That is how we were when He came down as Surety in our wretched place. O the infinite stoop of His dear Son! "Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever." Is it not wonderful for Him to come down to you? to stoop so low? What does it mean? I will tell you: just this. Nothing can satisfy a gracious character only a personal visit of Christ to the soul. You want Him to come down into your heart. You can say; "Come into my heart, Lord Jesus! there's room in my heart for Thee." So you want Him to come to your heart.

I want to say to the friends, The Lord has visited me; He is with me now. "When I awake, I am still with thee." I am certain if I could speak with you personally, many would say; "I am not satisfied. I have a living hope. I have a few crumbs of divine mercy. 'I wait a visit, Lord, from Thee!'" He will visit you, and you will hardly know how to live in this world. The Lord will so bless your soul that your cup will run over. You want Him to come down into the garden of the Lord. So you say; "Awake, o north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."

You will know when He comes down. The Lord is in every room. You go to the Sanctuary, and you take Him in your heart. You have a song in the night, and you say; "It is well. He hath done all things well." You 'drop into His sea outright, and lose yourself in Jesus quite.'

"That the mountains might flow down at thy presence." Mountains stand for many things in the Bible. There are mountains of sin and guilt. When you come to His bleeding cross, and He leads you to Golgotha, it is there that the mountains of sin and guilt flow down at His presence. They stand also for formidable opposition, trial, impossibilities; a great solid mass of rock; menacing, dark, powerful, black, as if they would overthrow you and crush you.

Now one or two points from the narrative concerning Israel at the Red Sea, and the mountains flowed down at the Lord's presence,- the hosts of Egypt. The Lord rent the heavens and came down. "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you to day."- a mountain of hatred and malice, opposition and fierceness. They wished to destroy Israel. The mountain was soon levelled, and the Egyptians were at the bottom of the sea. The Israelites were on the other side, singing and rejoicing. I want to say to you, when I think of the Lord appearing in this way for His people I do not think of persons or individuals at the bottom of the sea, but of our formidable foes,- sin, death, and hell at the bottom of the sea.

Take another mountain of impossibility. You have got to your wits' end, and there is no way: you cannot see any way. You may consult the best brains in Britain: "Neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee." The Lord did the unexpected in a mysterious way to perform wonders. He made a passage through the mighty waters for the ransomed to pass over. My friend He will appear for you, and you'll not fail to sing His lasting praise on high. Amen.