

## PRAYER: Pleading with God — Part One

Isaiah 63:7–14

In your righteous imagination, think through a scenario with me. Let's imagine we live in a culture where the things of God are held in contempt, the government passes wicked laws, tax dollars from your pocket are used to fund evil philosophies, and you are about to have to launch your children into this world where they will be hated and possibly killed for embracing the things of God. Now in that imaginary land, what if God said, I will intervene and clean up all the things you hate; I'll give you a strong economy, hold your enemies at bay, and allow your children and grandchildren to live in peace and safety. I will do all of this, but because you resist me and run your life to be convenient for you, I will never draw near this land again. Do you want to live in that land?

Or think about this: What if God said to some small church, I will give you successful popular programs with gifted people to run them and plenty of money to fund them, large student ministries with families who have similar values and political views, a celebrity pastor who has great insight into how to achieve a successful American life with a balanced happy family— but since you won't humble yourself and pray, you won't orient the whole of your life to seek first the kingdom of God, I will not draw near in resurrection power to deliver you or your children from grip of safe, cultural Christianity. You'll not have to worry about your children going into gross immorality or wickedness. I will preserve them from that and make them likeable and polite. But you'll never know power of the resurrection in your midst that makes dead men live, and you'll never see what I can do when I draw near. You'll be comfortable and content, but you won't be conformed to Christ nor consumed by love for him. Would you like to be in a church like that?

I'm not suggesting that either of those scenarios mark us this morning. But there is a pattern throughout redemptive history of God's people walking away from God, choosing self-made religion and personal autonomy and loving the world — rather than choosing the greatest, which is dying to self and experiencing the life of Christ on mission for his Kingdom. There is a pattern of God's people loving his blessings, but despising his ways. What do you do if you find yourself living in a time of such spiritual decline? Is there a political solution to the absence of God? Is there a legislative remedy when divine judgment is being meted out? Is there a military answer if God is the enemy? Isaiah found himself in such a time. What did he do? He prayed. And he prayed a massive prayer. Let's examine his agonizing plea for God to return and deliver his people from their sinful rebellion.

## 2

Let's pray we will be gripped and transformed by his prayer to such a degree that it shapes our hearts and our understanding of prayer. **PRAY** with me before we read.

**Isaiah 63:7-14** — <sup>7</sup>I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

<sup>8</sup>For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Savior. <sup>9</sup>In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

<sup>10</sup>But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. <sup>11</sup>Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, <sup>12</sup>who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, <sup>13</sup>who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. <sup>14</sup>Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

<sup>15</sup>Look 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. <sup>16</sup>For 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. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>Your holy people held possession for a little while; our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. <sup>19</sup>We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name.

### **Recount, Remember — vv 7-9**

When we pray, the first thing we need to do is remind ourselves of the one to whom we are praying. He is the exalted one, holy, eternal, our God, and our Father. As we recount who he is and what he has done, it is *not only* that he is then glorified as he deserves, but we are reminded of who our God is, and what he is capable of. So Isaiah begins laying the foundation on which he will plead with God to return and put his glory on display. These attributes of God form the basis — the argument, even — of how he will make his case for God to return and restore his people.

### 3

Three times he recounts God's love; he remembers God's great goodness and his compassion for his people— compassion that caused him to feel affliction as they were afflicted. Out of his love and pity he *redeems* them. Perhaps the description of God our Father in Psalm 103 is coming to mind with a similar recounting of God's fatherly kindness, compassion, tender mercies, and watch care over his children, not treating them as their sins deserve, but forgiving and restoring.

Isaiah says out of God's steadfast love and mercy he becomes their Savior — and he does it on his own, without either their help or their merit. Salvation is of the Lord. They were helpless and enslaved; they were without hope and in bondage. But God saw, he felt pity, he had mercy, he came down, he carried, he saved, he redeemed. This harkens back to their slavery in Egypt which is the most striking foreshadowing of salvation that we have been given in Christ. As God saw and saved hopeless and helpless Israel when enslaved to wicked Egypt, he sees and saves his people out of the imprisoning chains of sin in the domain of darkness. As God brought Israel into the promised land to faithfully worship and serve him, so Jesus brings us into his kingdom to worship and serve under his preeminent and compassionate rule and reign. Beloved, if the Old Testament saints had reason to recount God's love, and his deliverance from earthly enemies, do we not have infinitely greater reason to recount God's love that delivered us from spiritual death and eternal slavery. Take time in your praying to give God glory as he deserves, and to remind yourself of the one to whom you were praying. He has come to seek and save the lost in order to make us worshipers, a kingdom and priest to serve him. Let this shape your praying. Pray in such a way that moves your heart and shapes your life — that orients you daily to worship and serve this God who saves you.

#### **Where? The Glory of God Removed — 63:10–14**

But now there is a radical change. God, who became their Savior and expected faithfulness from them, is no longer acting in a peaceful way toward them. He has become their enemy. He is now fighting against his people. This might be a shocking revelation to those who have only studied one attribute of God: love. When we say "God is love" we have said all we can about love. But we have not said all we can about God. He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. This is the way he reveals himself. He makes no bones about it.

What is the reason for this whiplash change from Compassionate Father to hostile enemy?

**v 10** — They rebelled. In light of all that he has done in saving them to make them a people for his own possession, they have raised their fist and rebelled against him. This is a pattern for God's

## 4

people that is as shameful and sad as it is consistent and recurring. Isaiah 65 describes what their rebellion looks like, and it looks a lot like 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christianity in the West.

- They do not walk in God's highway of holiness as he called them to do, but follow their own ideas, walking in their own godless way. As a reminder of both God's consistent message and our own consistent rebellion, recall what Jesus requires in **Mark 8:34** — "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."
- They create and serve their own idols, rather than the living God.
- They live as though God's law does not apply to them.
- They fashion a religion on their design, and justify themselves according to their own standard.
- "Yes!" to salvation; "No!" to serving God. "Yes!" to forgiveness of sins; "No!" to turning from sin.
- They love that he became their Savior, they loathe that he demands to be Lord.

Their rebellion is in spite of the fact that God had acted zealously in delivering and defending his people. In light of this, their rebellion is even more wicked – and deadly foolish! God is their life! When they turn from him, they are turning from life to death. There is no hope apart from him. So God sends them the severest of discipline: the removal of his presence, so giving them over to their sinful independent passions. It is a terrifying judgment.

God causes those who rebel and reject him to stray from all moral good. We see this in Romans 1— although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, Then three times in vv 24, 26, and 28 — God gave them up. And in 2 Thessalonians 2:10–12, those who refuse to love God and his truth are given over to wicked deception.

Israel rebelled, and God became their enemy.

In our praying, we dare not ignore or treat as a light thing any rebellion against him. What a dangerous thing to do, to harbor rebellion knowing that we are setting ourselves up to be opposed by God himself. If God is for us, who can be against us? But if God is against us, what difference does it make who is for us? If God judges our rebellion by withdrawing his presence and blessing, what difference does it make if the world likes us? If we are fiercely orthodox and proud of our theology, but quarrelsome and resistant to the Spirit's humbling work to produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in our character and speech, God resists us.

## 5

He knows our hearts and sees our rebellion with blazing holy eyes. Here are we

- If we are mapping our own way and finding bypaths to God's way, we must confess this in prayer and turn from it in practice.
- We must not allow any aspect of our lives, our relationships, our resources, or our devotion, to take priority over, serving and loving our God, and advancing his kingdom first.
- If there is anywhere that we are disregarding the laws of God, presuming that grace will cover our sinful disobedience, we must acknowledge this wicked presumption that we are somehow above God's holy law. Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!<sup>1</sup>

We cannot create a 21<sup>st</sup> century deconstructed Christianity that may appeal to the spirit of the age and expressive self, but is a stench in the nostrils of holy God. Our praying must include confessing these sins, and our living must be marked by turning from these sins back to the God who calls us for his own purposes and glory.

Several more things are going on in this confession in vv 10 to 14.

- First, he is still recounting God's goodness in the past. Where is he who **brought them up out of the sea**? Where is he who **put his Holy Spirit in their midst**? Where is he who **displayed his glorious arm, his mighty work of salvation, even dividing the waters before them**? Where is he who **carried them and saved them** *for their good* — but ***not just for their good, but for his glory***.
- Second, he puts God's glory on display both to orient God's people to God's mighty work, ***and to lay a foundation on which he will appeal to God***.

Look at the end of v 12 — He did these things to make for himself an everlasting name.

At the end of v 14 — He led his people to make for himself a glorious name.

He is laying a foundation on which he will plead with God to put his glory on display again.

Perhaps you recall Moses' prayer in Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9 when God said that he is simply going to wipe out the children of Israel, because they are idolatrous rebels. God tells Moses, I will just start over with you, but I've had it with them. In a similar way to Isaiah, Moses appeals to God's glory, and his honoring of his name among the pagan nations. He says, God, if you destroy these people, you will give the Egyptians opportunity to blaspheme and lie about you, saying your had evil intent. Do not destroy them lest the land from which you brought us say, "Because the Lord was not able to

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:1-2

## 6

bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.” For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.<sup>2</sup> Moses appeals to God’s goodness and glory. Isaiah is laying a foundation to appeal to God’s glory.

Be bold in your praying. Lay a foundation of God’s glory, and the renown of his name among the nations when you pray. If your immediate response to that is that “I really don’t know how God’s glory is put on display,” then let this spur you to study the works of God in scripture and learn them. Get a notebook or journal and begin making a note every time you read that God does something. Consider especially the work of salvation in Christ. He saw his people, he came down, he delivered them from the domain of darkness. He made them a kingdom and priests to serve him. How have you seen that working itself out in your life? Is it working itself out? If not, confess and turn from rebellion. How is this working itself out in the life of RGC? Or all Gospel-believing churches in our city?

Let look at one example. There are hundreds throughout the scripture, but this will get you started. **Colossians 1:18–20** — <sup>18</sup> And [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

If you were in a church that had a division over who was going to be in charge, this faction or that, or was making a choice about whether they would follow the New Testament teaching in a particular area — if that church was in danger of collapse because of this fight over direction, how would you lay a foundation to for God to come take control over that group of battling church members?

PRAY

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 9:28–29