

A Watchmen's Prayer

Isaiah 63-64

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On Jan. 2, during a Monday Night Football game, Buffalo Bills safety, Damar Hamlin, collapsed from a heart attack after he made a tackle. After a long period of waiting, players from both teams began to gather on the field to pray for Damar. The next day, live on ESPN, analyst Dan Orlovsky got tired of everyone saying we need to pray for Damar and, on a live broadcast, asked his co-hosts to bow in prayer. Immediately he began to pray for Damar.

As usual, in an event like this, everyone, even in the media, talks about praying. Yet, I've never seen anyone do it unscripted on live TV until I saw Dan Orlovsky pray on ESPN. I was shocked.

Question: What moves you to pray passionately? I don't mean praying as you go throughout the day but taking time to be still and get on your knees and pray or sit at a table and pray by yourself or with a loved one. Usually, it's when we have had a painful experience or intense suffering. When this happens, we begin to pray passionately.

Our suffering, trials, tribulation, or seeing someone suffer awakens us to prayer. It reminds us to pray. In Isaiah 63:1-6, Isaiah and the watchmen had a vision of the coming punishment of those who refused to trust the Messiah, and it moved them to intense, passionate prayer.

Last Sunday, we looked at Isaiah 62:6, where God appointed watchmen to pray. They were called to pray without ceasing. Listen to Isaiah 62:6:

*Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen on your walls;
they will never be silent, day or night.
There is no rest for you, who remind the Lord.*

In this text, we hear the Lord call His watchmen to pray continually. They were to persistently plead with the Lord to save sinners.

Now in Isaiah 63:1-6, we are also going to see Isaiah's vision of *The Day of Vengeance*. God's Servant talked about it in Isaiah 61:2. But here is the thing, when Isaiah and the watchmen see the vision of God's judgment at the end of time, it rocks their world. The vision of the coming horrendous suffering and judgment moves Isaiah, and the watchmen to passionately intercede for those who are in danger of missing salvation and being crushed because of their sin. The watchmen truly become a kingdom of priests who cry out to God, day and night, for the nations.

In these two chapters, we will see the vision the watchmen saw and then examine the watchmen's prayer.

I. The Shocking Vision of the Day of God's Vengeance (Isaiah 63:1-6)

Let me set up Isaiah 63:1-6 by looking at the end of Isaiah 62. In Isaiah 62, we soared into the Heavenly New Jerusalem. In it, we saw God's people eating and drinking and enjoying God's good gifts. They were finally home—safe and sound. They harvested amazing grapes and drank the new wine provided by the Lord. Their salvation had come. They were called *The Lord's Redeemed and Cared For, A City Not Deserted*, which implies that the Holy City was filled with all of God's people for all time.

Then from this amazing vision of heaven in Isaiah 62, we move into Isaiah 63:1-7 and see the vision of the *Day of God's Vengeance*. If you read Isaiah 63:1-6 this past week, you might be wondering what is going on in this

text. Remember, it is prophetic poetry, and in this poem, Yahweh is having a conversation with the Messiah He sent. Let me read it for us. The Lord is allowing us to eaves drop on their conversation.

*Who is this coming from Edom
in crimson-stained garments from Bozrah—
this one who is splendid in his apparel,
striding in his formidable might?
It is I, proclaiming vindication, powerful to save.
² Why are your clothes red,
and your garments like one who treads a winepress?
³ I trampled the winepress alone,
and no one from the nations was with me.
I trampled them in my anger
and ground them underfoot in my fury;
their blood spattered my garments,
and all my clothes were stained.
⁴ For I [the Messiah] planned the day of vengeance,
and the year of my redemption came.
⁵ I looked, but there was no one to help,
and I was amazed that no one assisted;
so my arm accomplished victory for me, and my
wrath assisted me. ⁶ I crushed nations in my anger;
I made them drunk with my wrath
and poured out their blood on the ground.*

In this passage, we hear God the Father and God the Son [the Lord Jesus Christ] having this conversation that will occur in the future. It is the judgment that is coming. You will notice that God the Father speaks as God and then God the Son, and as He dispenses judgment, He speaks with the authority of God.

These six verses are quite amazing. In this Old Testament text, we get a glimpse into the relationship between the Father and the Son. We are getting a peak into the relationship within the Trinity in the Old Testament.

However, these are hard verses to read. We tend to recoil from texts that depict God's wrath and vengeance. We recoil from this language because our grasp of God's holiness and justice is shallow. We lack the capacity of emotions to grasp absolute holiness. We struggle to understand that God's judgment is just because those who reject Him and live in rebellion toward Him get what they earned. So, in Isaiah 63:1-6, God settles all accounts with those who oppose Him.¹

We must remember that God has a passionate and aggressive concern for justice. In the end, when He judges sinners, He will act in a way that is consistent with His character. God does not bring His final judgment, and He is ashamed to do it. No, He brings judgment in His glory. God will be exalted when He brings His final judgment.

So, look back at v. 1. In v. 1, Isaiah sees the Conqueror coming from *Edom* with garments stained red from *Bozrah*. These locations are significant. *Edom* was an enemy of Israel and *Bozrah* was its capital. In Hebrew, *Edom* means red, and *Bozrah* means "gatherer of grapes."

Edom and *Bozrah* are symbolic. They represent all of God's foes who have been in rebellion against Him since the beginning of time.

¹ Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 509.

This text looks forward to when Jesus comes as God's Conqueror. He will come at the end of time and usher in the *Day of Vengeance*. He will stride in with His might and power, and He will vindicate God and His people. His clothes will be stained blood red from treading the winepress of God. Revelation 19:11-16 gives us the final vision of that *Day*:

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. ¹³ He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. ¹⁵ A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. ¹⁶ And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Friends, Jesus is the Conquering King who treads the winepress of the wrath of God alone. He will not need anyone's help, for no one is worthy to help. The victory is all His! He will fully and finally crush the enemies of God under His feet.

However, before this day comes, there will be many *dress rehearsals of the Day of Vengeance*. There will be days of pain and suffering that will hopefully awaken people to turn to Jesus in faith and repentance.

The plea for anyone who has yet to trust Christ is to recognize they are an enemy of God. While there is still time, we plead with them to trust in the One who was crushed in their place on the cross.

Bottom line: On the cross, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, was crushed under the wrath of God in the place of sinners. All who come to Him by confessing their sin and placing their faith in Him as their substitute will be forgiven of their sin. Their sin is credited to Jesus, and He becomes their substitute. His death becomes their death. The wrath they earned becomes His wrath. Their punishment is placed on Him. He was crushed for them so that, in the end, they would not be crushed for their sin. Finally, and here is the most amazing news, Jesus did not stay dead. After He was crushed under the wrath of God for their sin, He was buried, and then three days later, He rose from the dead, defeating death and Hell.

Think about it this way. God's offer of salvation is this: *Trust the One who was crushed for you or be crushed in the end.*

If you have never trusted Jesus, let today be the *Day of the Lord's Favor* for you: Admit you are a sinner, believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior by confessing your faith in Him, and you will be saved.

II. The Passionate Prayer of the Watchmen (Isaiah 63:7-64:12)

So, as we move on from the vision of the *Day of God's Vengeance*, what we find in Isaiah 63:7-64:12 is how Isaiah and the watchmen responded to the vision. The vision was so stunning that they fell to their knees in worship of God and began to do what Isaiah 62:6 called them to do—passionately and continually cry out to the Lord on behalf of those who were in danger of judgment.

If you remember, I said last Sunday that we are the watchmen. This is our calling. The vision of the *Day of God's Vengeance* is for us to see what's coming so that we will be transformed into a Kingdom of Priests who cry out for the salvation of the nations.

This vision is meant to shock us and burden us. This is why for the next chapter and a half, we hear the watchmen's praise of God and then lament for the people. Let's walk through the watchmen's prayer and let it strengthen how we intercede for others.

1. The Watchmen's Praise (Isaiah 63:7-14)

First, Isaiah and the watchmen meditate on God and praise Him for His faithfulness.

*⁷ I will make known the Lord's, faithful love
and the Lord's praiseworthy acts,
because of all the Lord has done for us—
even the many good things
he has done for the house of Israel,
which he did for them based on his compassion
and the abundance of his faithful love.*

Isaiah teaches us that when we pray, it is good to begin with the Lord's faithfulness. He remembers the many good things God had done for him and his people. He remembers the steadfast love of the Lord.

On this side of the cross, we remember God's faithfulness in the person and work of Jesus. We remember how He died in our place and for our sin. In this act, we praise God for His indescribable love. Listen to vv. 8-9:

*⁸ He [God] said, "They are indeed my people,
children who will not be disloyal,"
and he became their Savior.
⁹ In all their suffering, he suffered,
and the angel of his presence saved them.
He redeemed them because of his love and compassion;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of the past.*

Verses 8-9 are amazing verses. They are a shadow of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We see how God became man, and our Savior stepped out of Heaven, then He suffered in our place by living the life we should have lived and dying in our place and for our sin.

Next, in v. 10, we see the compassionate forbearance of our God and Savior.

*¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit.
So he became their enemy and fought against them.
¹¹ Then he remembered the days of the past,
the days of Moses and his people.*

Verse 10 says that in our rebellion, God may have fought against us, but then v. 11 reminds us that God did not abandon us. His Holy Spirit was grieved, so in His compassionate forbearance, He disciplined us so that we would return to Him.

Finally, in this last meditation on who God is, Isaiah shows us the importance of remembering the mighty acts of God. Look in vv. 11-12:

*¹¹ Then he remembered the days of the past,
the days of Moses and his people.
Where is he who brought them out of the sea
with the shepherds of his flock?
Where is he who put his Holy Spirit among the flock?
¹² He made his glorious strength
available at the right hand of Moses,
divided the water before them
to make an eternal name for himself.*

It is good to remember the mighty acts of God in prayer. As we do, His Holy Spirit strengthens our faith. The memory of God's powerful acts deepens our trust and strengthens our confidence in our Savior.

It is good to rehearse the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in our prayers. When we remember that on resurrection morning, God shook the earth and Jesus walked out of the grave alive, we can have hope that we have not been left alone.

Meditating on God's mighty acts in prayer helps us see through our suffering to the Savior who loves us and gave His life for us as an offering for our sin. Old Testament scholar Barry Webb says:

True prayer, however, must rise above [our troubling] thoughts [to God's faithfulness]. It is not enough to look back or look within. The intercessor must look up, for all true intercession is founded on the conviction that, however we feel, God is sovereign, and deliverance can be found in him alone.²

2. The Watchmen's Lament (Isaiah 63:15-64:12)

Isaiah 63:15-64:12 is a classic prayer of lament. This lament contains grief, a petition, a confession of sin, and a confession of faith in God. Let's work through this lament and let it help us see how to come before God in prayer when we are tired, broken, and needy. I want you to consider adding lament to your prayer life. Here are the four parts of a biblical prayer of lament.

First: *Turn to God*: In v. 15a, we see that Isaiah turns to God in his prayer of lament:

*Look down from heaven and see
from your lofty home—holy and beautiful.*

When we lament, the person we turn to is the only One who can help us, and that is God. We come to Him and ask Him to hear our prayers. We ask Him *to look down from Heaven* upon our situation.

Second: *Complaint*: In the complaint portion of a lament, we should be brutally honest about the pain we feel or the injustice we have experienced. Words like "why" or "how long" are often used in this portion of a lament. Listen to vv. 15b-19:

*Where is your zeal and your might?
Your yearning and your compassion
are withheld from me.¹⁶ Yet you are our Father,
even though Abraham does not know us
and Israel doesn't recognize us. You, Lord, are our Father;
your name is Our Redeemer from Ancient Times.
¹⁷ Why, Lord, do you make us stray from your ways?
You harden our hearts so we do not fear you.
Return, because of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.
¹⁸ Your holy people had a possession for a little while,
but our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary.
¹⁹ We have become like those you never ruled,
like those who did not bear your name.*

A prayer of lament makes the complaint known to God. However, it is not all complaint. It also has a confession of faith sewn into the fabric of the language. Did you catch what Isaiah said in v. 16a? Isaiah says, "Yet you are our Father." Isaiah may have complained, but he knew God was his loving, caring, sovereign Father.

² Barry Webb, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Isaiah*, 242.

Brothers and sisters, we may experience some very painful circumstances in our lives. The fact is, as Christians, we are not immune to pain and suffering. Here is what we need to know: We are so secure in Christ that we can come before Him and make our complaints known to Him.

Friends, God's shoulders are broad, and they have carried our sins to the cross so they can carry our complaints and burdens. Learning to lament means we can make our complaints to the One whom we trust. He is able to carry our burdens and our complaints.

Third: *Make our bold requests to God*. I can think of no bolder request than we find in Isaiah 64:1-7. Isaiah does not hold anything back. He makes his request, and he also confesses his sin to the Lord. He knows he is made of dust. Let's listen to his bold request:

*If only you would tear the heavens open and come down,
so that mountains would quake at your presence—
²just as fire kindles brushwood, and fire boils water—
to make your name known to your enemies,
so that nations would tremble at your presence!
³When you did awesome works that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains quaked at your presence.
⁴From ancient times no one has heard, no one has listened to,
no eye has seen any God except you
who acts on behalf of the one who waits for him.
⁵You welcome the one who joyfully does what is right;
they remember you in your ways.
But we have sinned, and you were angry.
How can we be saved if we remain in our sins?
⁶All of us have become like something unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment;
all of us wither like a leaf,
and our iniquities carry us away like the wind.
⁷No one calls on your name, striving to take hold of you.
For you have hidden your face from us
and made us melt because of our iniquity.*

Isaiah called upon God to act, and not a small act but to act mightily. He is asking God to save His people. He has seen the *Day of Vengeance*, and he knows it is a terrible day. He wants God's people to be saved and for God to save those who are lost. Isaiah is the watchman standing in the gap.

At the heart of this text is a bold petition. It is a beautiful verse that reminds us that we cannot save ourselves. It's a prayer of complete reliance on the grace of God to save us. Listen to v. 4 again:

*⁴From ancient times no one has heard, no one has listened to,
no eye has seen any God except you
who acts on behalf of the one who waits for him.*

This verse is a wonderful reminder that no matter what we are going through, God acts on behalf of the helpless. We should confess our helplessness like Isaiah and throw ourselves on the great mercy of our God. He will act for us.

The fourth and final part of the lament is: *Trust*. The bold request flows into a confession of our trust in God. We must choose to trust in God when we are in pain, suffering, and trials.

Trusting God in our suffering is not our natural disposition. It requires the work of the Holy Spirit. Look in vv. 8-12:

*⁸ Yet Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we all are the work of your hands.*

*⁹ Lord, do not be terribly angry
or remember our iniquity forever.*

Please look—all of us are your people!

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

*¹¹ Our holy and beautiful temple,
where our ancestors praised you, has been burned down,
and all that was dear to us lies in ruins.*

*¹² Lord, after all this, will you restrain yourself?
Will you keep silent and afflict us severely?*

Conclusion: Brothers and sisters, we are the watchmen who pray without ceasing. Sometimes we are lamenting for our own pain, and sometimes we are grieved because of the pain of others. May we be faithful to intercede for our church and those who need Jesus.