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Sermon Notes

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God's Passionate Response to Sin Draws Forth Intercession (Part I)

Isaiah 63-64

I. An Urgent Call for Intercessors

A. God Calls on Us to Call on Him

1. The marvelous gift of intercessory prayer
2. A vast privilege bought for us by the blood of Jesus Christ
3. It is also a responsibility that we have for the church and for the human race
4. The call was made plainly

Isaiah 62:6-7 I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, ⁷ and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

5. Watchmen are those who deprive themselves of sleep so they can stand on the city walls, looking out into the darkness all night to see if any encroaching danger is coming and to warn the people
6. God has summoned his elect to a life of prayer, a life of being watchmen on the walls... until God has established the NEW JERUSALEM... the church of Jesus Christ, elect from every nation, called out of a life of sin to a life of repentance and faith and service to God
7. In Isaiah 63-64, we have a valuable pattern on HOW to do this intercession... for two weeks we are going to God's school of fervent intercession...
8. How do I know that that's what's going on here?

Isaiah 64:1 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

Isaiah 64:7 No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.

SO... Isaiah is talking to us about CALLING ON GOD to descend in power... but our tendency is NOT to call on his name, NOT to strive to lay hold of him

We begin by understanding the terrifying danger of the WRATH OF GOD...

B. The Encroaching Danger Could Not Be More Extreme...

Isaiah 63:1-4 Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." ² Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? ³ "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. ⁴ For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come.

1. God is pictured as striding off the battlefield with his garments spattered in blood
2. This is the vengeance of the Lord, the Day of God's wrath, approaching inevitably
3. The danger here is INFINITE and therefore terrifying

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

4. The people of God are called to a life of fervent intercession for the good of all people... that they would be delivered from the wrath to come
 - a. Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah most persistently, begging that God would not sweep away the righteous with the wicked
 - b. Moses passionately interceded for Israel at Mount Sinai at the time of the golden calf; God threatened to destroy Israel and turn Moses into a great nation

Exodus 32:12 Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

- c. David interceded for Jerusalem when God sent the angel of the Lord to slaughter the Jews in a plague

- d. Ezekiel interceded when God gave him a vision of angels that were commanded to go through the city of Jerusalem and slaughter everyone there who was not mourning for the wickedness of the city

Ezekiel 9:8 While they were killing and I was left alone, I fell facedown, crying out, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?"

- e. When the godly see the wrath of God about to fall, they fall to their knees and plead with God to turn from his wrath and deliver the people
5. More than that, we are to warn the slumbering people to AWAKEN and see their danger, as John the Baptist did most passionately

Matthew 3:7-10 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ... ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

- 6. A life of fervent intercession in light of the COMING WRATH OF GOD leads inevitably to a life of fervent evangelism... proclaiming in Jesus' name the atonement he alone worked to rescue us from the coming wrath
- C. These Two Chapters are a Wake-Up Call first to the Church... then through the Church to the world
- 1. Judgment Day is coming... this chapter gives us a clear picture of it, as we'll see in a moment
 - 2. It begins FIRST with us, as we search our hearts and our lives to repent and prepare through Christ
 - 3. Then through us we are called to PRAY FOR and then WARN the world

1 Peter 4:17-18 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

- D. These Two Chapters Teach us HOW to Pray in Light of God's Coming Wrath
- 1. He will teach us ELEMENTS of intercessory prayer as WATCHMEN on the WALLS

We begin by walking carefully through the terrifying image of the wrath of God in verses 1-6

II. The Lord's Terrifying Day of Vengeance on His Enemies (63:1-6)

A. The Doctrine of the Wrath of God is Hard for Sinners to Accept

1. The tame picture of God as universally loving, universally accepting, patient and tolerant of all sin, ready to love and welcome us at any time... it is a partial truth masquerading as the whole truth...

J.I. Packer in *Knowing God* said "a half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth"

2. Two seemingly diametrically opposed images of God... somehow we must bring them together in our hearts as one
 - a. First: OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

Hebrews 12:29 our "God is a consuming fire."

- b. Second: OUR GOD IS THE LOVING FATHER OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:20 while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

3. The image of God as a consuming fire shows him as infinitely powerful, a God who "dwells in unapproachable light", a God who will by no means clear the guilty, whose commitment to righteousness is like the immeasurable heat of the raging sun... he will do whatever is needed to purify this universe of all evil; all things in the universe belong to him because he made them, and he will not overlook wickedness or sin
4. The image of God as the father of the prodigal son shows his grace, mercy, love, tender kindness, incredible patience, generosity... the sweetness of his embrace of a son still stinking from pig filth is one of the most amazing and incomprehensible in the Bible
5. We MUST keep both of these images together in our minds
6. For us as Christians, our acceptance of God's WRATH... his infinitely passionate reaction to evil, his commitment to kill it and rid the universe of it, is essential to us rightly esteeming what Jesus did for us at the cross... when he drank to the bottom the cup of God's wrath... our acceptance of this doctrine is ESSENTIAL to our passionate urgency in praying for a lost world and reaching out to our dying neighbors

B. This Passage (vss. 1-6) Pictures God as a Mighty Warrior Striding Victoriously from a Bloody Battlefield

1. Terrifying

These verses are simply terrifying. They should cause all faith-filled readers to tremble at his Word, for when the great day of God's wrath comes, who is able to stand?

2. The passage begins calling out asking WHO??? Who is this?? Who is coming from the battlefield of Edom and Bozrah
 - a. Edom = the descendants of Esau, the ultimate picture of the reprobate in the Bible
 - b. Bozrah = the capitol city of Edom...
 - c. The Edomites: the enemies of the people of God... a literal nation in Isaiah's day
 - d. But ESAU is also a prophetic metaphor for the lost, the pagan people of the world, the reprobates who live for their stomachs

Philippians 3:18-19 Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

C. The "Year of the Lord's Favor" Comes to an End... and the "Day of Vengeance" Comes at Last

1. Remember that Jesus stopped reading Isaiah 61

Isaiah 61:1-2 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God

2. Now is the "year of the Lord's favor"... a time of GRACE
3. But there will come a day of vengeance when he will unleash his righteous wrath on his godless enemies
4. That day is pictured as a day of bloody battle with Almighty God
 - a. The call comes "WHO IS THIS coming from Edom with his garments spattered in blood??"
 - b. He is robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength

- i) After a vicious hand to hand battle in those days, it was common for the warriors to be absolutely EXHAUSTED
- ii) Samson thought he would die from thirst after the battle in which he killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey
- iii) BUT this warrior is striding forth in undiminished strength... his battlefield exertions have not depleted him at all
- iv) So **WHO IS THIS** striding from such a bloody slaughter??

c. The answer is BOLD and STRONG!

Isaiah 63:1 "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save."

- i) At this point it is best to try to identify the one speaking... JESUS CHRIST, the Lord, the Second Person of the Trinity
- ii) Jesus is the one who was speaking in Isaiah 61

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

- iii) And I believe he was the one speaking also in Isaiah 62

Isaiah 62:1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.

- iv) Here the one striding forth mightily from the battle field is Jesus Christ again
- v) There is strong confirmation of this in the similar vision of Christ's Second Coming

Revelation 19:11-16 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Note plainly two things about Jesus Christ in Revelation 19: 1) he wore a robe stained in blood which came from trampling the winepress of the fierce anger of God Almighty; 2) he destroys his enemies without mercy by a sword that comes from his mouth (that is, his word)

- vi) SO in Isaiah 63 the focus is on Christ's SPEAKING... his word is mighty and unstoppable
- vii) Notice also that he speaks IN RIGHTEOUSNESS... this is essential to embracing the doctrine of God's wrath... it is his RIGHTEOUS wrath, perfect in JUSTICE
- viii) Christ is not in any way ashamed of the slaughter he has just worked
- ix) Also note that this BLOODY CONQUEST is a form of salvation... he is "mighty to save" by spilling the blood of the wicked, saving HIS PEOPLE from their wickedness
- x) Jesus is rescuing his BRIDE from mortal danger

5. Next question:

Isaiah 63:2 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?

- a. He answers boldly and clearly

Isaiah 63:3-4 "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood splattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. ⁴ For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come.

- b. Christ is splattered with the blood of his enemies because the time has come to exact justice
- c. He does this to work the vengeance of God
- d. He does this also to work redemption for his people

D. Christ is Unashamed of His Actions

1. Notice very clearly there is no squeamishness at all about this... no embarrassment, no sense of shame
2. This is the just action of God on sinners whose time has run out
3. So also for eternity, God will be in no way ashamed of the fact that a vast multitude of people he created are suffering in hell

E. Christ ALONE Can Work Salvation... AND Vengeance

Isaiah 63:3-6 "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. ⁴ For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. ⁵ I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. ⁶ I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground."

1. He treads the winepress ALONE... no one from the nations could join him in this action
2. He looked for anyone righteous enough to join him, and no one could
3. He was "amazed" or "appalled" or filled with wonder at the fact that there was no one who could join him... this is a clear statement of the universality of sin
4. Ultimately it shows that JESUS ALONE could address the wrath of God... He ALONE could drink the cup of God's wrath at the cross, and HE ALONE could pour out the cup of God's wrath on the earth at the end of the world

F. Jonathan Edwards's Overwhelmed Statement About the Wrath of God

[W]e read [in Revelation 19] of "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." The words are exceeding terrible. If it had only been said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is "the fierceness and wrath of God." The fury of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! Oh, how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them! But it is also "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." As though there would be a very great manifestation of his almighty power in what the fierceness of his wrath should inflict, as though omnipotence should be as it were enraged, and exerted, as men are wont to exert their strength in the fierceness of their wrath. Oh! then, what will be the consequence! What will become of the poor worms that shall suffer it! Whose hands can be strong? And whose heart can endure? To what a dreadful, inexpressible, inconceivable depth of misery must the poor creature be sunk who shall be the subject of this!

G. Why this Wrath??

Vs. 4 "*the day of vengeance was in my heart.*"

God had stored up his wrath against them, not forgetting any of their wicked acts, especially those done to harm his chosen people. RECORD KEEPING!!

Romans 2:5-6 because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

H. Immediate Application

1. To the non-Christian: FLEE THE WRATH TO COME!!!

- a. This passage is a clear warning to all who are living like Esau... living for their stomachs, living for sex and food and pleasure and money and earthly things, with no consideration for the judgment day that is coming upon us all
- b. COME TO CHRIST!! He alone can avert his own just wrath for your sins

2. To the Christian

- a. Understand the wrath you DESERVED to experience... you should be humbled by this
- b. Grow in your estimation of the incredible GRACE of God and the LOVE of God to you... how God has forgiven you so richly!!!
- c. Meditate on the truth of what is coming... embrace the fact that God will have his day of vengeance
- d. Don't minimize this, but feel the weight of it
- e. Then PRAY as a watchman on the walls... and WARN your lost friends about this

III. Persistent Intercession and Lamentation by God's Watchman (63:7-64:12)

A. The Intercessor Recounts the Lord's History of Love (63:7-9)

Isaiah 63:7-9 I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. ⁸ He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Savior. ⁹ In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

- 1. Seems a strange switch from verse 6 to verse 7

Isaiah 63:6-7 I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground." ⁷ I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised

2. However, it is not so surprising when you consider two things
 - a. First, we deserved to be trampled as much as the wicked did
 - b. Second, their destruction was done to BENEFIT us... that our suffering should end, that we should no longer be attacked, persecuted, insulted, and killed
3. The Intercessor begins the prayer then with a telling of the KINDNESSES (plural) of the Lord... the many acts of kindness he has showed
 - a. As we begin in prayer, let us begin with overwhelming THANKFULNESS to God in Christ!!

Isaiah begins by going over the history of the Lord's mighty acts of salvation for Israel in the past. This history is vital to the Intercessor's confidence that God loves his people and will not cast them off because of their sins. So Isaiah begins by speaking of the Lord's faithful love (Heb. *hesed*, "covenant love") and his "praiseworthy acts" on behalf of Israel. These flowed from God's compassions and the "abundance of his faithful love." (vs. 7)

Think of the mighty deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt, when God destroyed Egypt and her gods, and destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea

4. The basis of these praiseworthy acts of deliverance and kindness is his ELECTION of Israel as his chosen nation, his adopted children

Isaiah 63:8 He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Savior.

- a. The concept is one of MUTUAL COMMITMENT
- b. They would be his people, and God alone would be their God
- c. This adoptive love is the key to the relationship

Exodus 4:22-23 Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, ²³ and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me."

- d. So also for us in Christ

Ephesians 1:4-6 In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace

5. Because of election and God's love for his people, he SUFFERS when they suffer

Isaiah 63:9 In all their distress he too was distressed

Amazing! Because God is perfectly happy, infinitely HIGH above the misery of the earth, nothing can faze him!!

Psalm 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

BUT he willingly chooses to unite his heart with our situation and feels great compassion for the suffering of his people on earth:

Exodus 2:24-25 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

6. We should see the outpouring of wrath on the enemies of God's people as a form of loving protection he does on their behalf
7. The "Angel of his presence" is JESUS!!

Isaiah 63:9 In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

What a beautiful picture... the LIFTING UP and CARRYING of the people of God by the angel of God's presence

This is none other than the "Angel of the Lord" that led Israel out of Egypt and fought for them against their enemies:

Exodus 23:20-22 "Behold, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. ²¹ Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him.

This is how Isaiah begins his intercession by recounting God's covenant love and mighty acts of compassion for Israel in the past.

At the time of the Exodus, God said this:

Exodus 23:22 I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.

So both in the Exodus, when God destroyed Israel's enemies, and in Isaiah 63 when Jesus finishes the job, the motive is the same: PROTECTION for his adopted people

B. The Intercessor Confesses Sin (63:10)

BUT tragically, Israel's history was one of consistent rebellion against the grace of God.

Isaiah 63:10 Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.

Israel's rebellion against God, from the desert after the Red Sea crossing, through the history under Joshua, the Judges, and the Kings, was deeply grievous to God. The Lord mourns over the sins of his people, just as he suffered because of their afflictions in Egypt. Because of Israel's rebellion, God became their enemy and fought them. All of the punishments the Lord has ever meted out in Israel's history was because of the truths recounted in verse 10.

1. When the people of God rebel, they GRIEVE the Holy Spirit
2. This chapter has two of the THREE references to the "Holy Spirit" in the Old Testament, though the Spirit of God is mentioned many more times than that
 - a. God's HOLINESS is emphasized here, his hatred of sin
 - b. God's Spirit delights in the PURITY of his people... and when they rebel and follow wicked ways, they become just like the nations around them
3. This shows the powerful and perfect emotional life of the Spirit of God... the Spirit is an EMOTIONAL being, and he is GRIEVED at the sin of his people
 - a. When I think of GRIEF, I think of funerals and deep sorrow... not a light thing
 - b. Our sin is a tremendous grief to God
 - c. So as we intercede for people, we must be ever mindful of our own sinfulness, the many times we ourselves have grieved God
 - d. Also as we confess sin, we must be grieved ourselves as well:

James 4:9-10 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

4. As we read about the awesome and terrifying wrath of God in this chapter, we must be very humble and meek and confess that we ourselves have sinned and are no better than they are
5. God TURNS and punishes his people when they sin like the nations... all his disciplines... all the times he brought drought, famine, plagues, and especially the invasions of Gentile armies were examples of God turning and fighting against his people
6. So also Christians, when we sin, God may turn and discipline us most severely to teach us to hate sin as he does

Hebrews 12:5-7 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

So... in this chapter, we have seen the powerful striding of the Lord in wrath after slaughtering his enemies, represented by Edom... we have seen how this wrath is RIGHTEOUS and HOLY, and that it is terrifying slaughter. We have also seen how no one but Christ could address God's wrath at the cross, and no one but Christ will have the right to pour out God's final wrath at his Second Coming... he TROD THE WINEPRESS ALONE.

We have also acted out for us the attitudes and words of a WATCHMAN on the walls of Jerusalem, interceding for the people and for the nations in light of this coming wrath. We have begun to see how to GIVE OURSELVES NO REST AND GIVE GOD NO REST in prayer... next week, we'll finish the lessons of these two chapters...

III. Applications

A. Stand in Awe and Terror at the Coming Wrath of Almighty God!!

The first application of these chapters is to stand in awe and trembling at the wrath of God against his enemies. The image of a blood-soaked warrior striding in great power after the slaughter of Edom is terrifying when we realize that we all deserve to be included in the slaughter.

Furthermore, we must embrace that this is very much the purpose of the Second Coming of Christ, for he will come to "trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty." (Revelation 19:15) Scripture is not ashamed to declare this openly about God and about his Christ, and when he executes this slaughter, it will be done with perfect righteousness. So neither should we Christians now be ashamed of the wrath of God or the future trampling of the godless. Rather, we should be like the angel who

was pouring out wrath on planet earth and celebrating the righteousness of God in such a judgment (Revelation 16:5). And we should plead with sinners to repent while there's time, to flee the wrath to come.

B. Plead with Sinners to Repent While There's Still Time!

Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

C. Begin Interceding for God's Work on Earth

The rest of the two chapters dealt with here form the basis of a pattern of intercession for God to perfect Zion in holiness. I have cast these two chapters in the light of the Watchmen on the Walls of Zion, who are charged to remind God and **to give ourselves no rest or him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem as the praise of all the earth.**

A Christian may well take up this challenge (although it is so overwhelming, given our weakness and desire for rest!), but may say, "Lord, I don't know what to pray for." Isaiah 63:7-64:12 gives a wonderful answer to that question. Pray like this! But pray from a New Covenant perspective, based on the finished work of Christ. Pray based on God's history of love toward his church, especially now in light of Christ's saving acts toward the church (63:7-9); pray with genuine and humble confession of sin, that our sins have grieved the Holy Spirit (63:10)

We'll learn more next week how to pray!!