

In chapter 61, we heard again of the Anointed Conqueror
who is given the Word and Spirit of God. (Cf Is 59)

“The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me because Yahweh has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor”

And in chapter 62, verses 7-8, the Messiah urged us to pray.

Having heard of the promise of the coming of the Anointed Conqueror,
the righteous remnant now lift up their prayers in response to God’s promise.

We are drawing to the end of Isaiah’s prophecy.

The message of salvation has been announced.

Now he gives the faithful a model for their prayers as they await the coming of that day.

And as such, it is useful for us.

Because while we live on the other side of the coming of the Christ,
we still anticipate his return and the final consummation of his kingdom.

1. Remember Your Story

We have here the voice of the prophet as the one interceding for the people.

As Isaiah is bringing his message to a close,
he now summarizes the whole story.

(Read v7)

*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.*

As with most biblical prayers, the prophet begins by “talking to God about God.”

This verse is sandwiched by two references to “hesed”

It is the first word of the sentence.

It is the last word of the sentence.

It is variously translated: lovingkindness, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness.

Here it refers to everything that God has done in his goodness and compassion.

Then starting with the Exodus,

he recounts the history of God’s dealings with his people.

He “became their Savior” when he rescued them from Egypt.

Verses 8-9 remembers the redemption from Egypt,

⁸ For he said, “Surely they are my people,
children who will not deal falsely.”

And he became their Savior.

⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted,^[c]
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.

Echoing the language of Dt 32, “carried them on eagles wings”
and brought them out of slavery and set them free.

But.

Ah yes, that most dreaded word in the Bible!

But.

In spite of all that God has done.

In spite of his great love—his covenant faithfulness—
the redemption that he has wrought by setting you free!

But... they rebelled. And grieved his Holy Spirit. (Verse 10)

And as God had promised,

their rebellion set in motion the Divine curse of the covenant. (Dt 26-27)

God himself fought against his people.

Isaiah uses five “waws” in verses 10-11

¹⁰ But they rebelled
and grieved his Holy Spirit;
therefore he turned to be their enemy,
and himself fought against them.

¹¹ Then he remembered the days of old,
of Moses and his people.^[d]

and they rebelled,
and they grieved
and he turned
and he fought
and he remembered.

In English we say

But they rebelled and grieved
So he turned and fought,
then he remembered.

The covenant curse is not the final word.

Because God had promised that there would be grace in the end (Dt 29-34).

As God remembered Israel when they were in bondage in Egypt,
so also God will remember Israel when they are in Exile,

READ v11-14

*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,*

¹² *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,*

¹³ *who led them through the depths?*

*Like a horse in the desert,
they did not stumble.*

¹⁴ *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.*

God is the one who brought Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea.

He gave them his Spirit—the glory-cloud that led them and dwelt in their midst.
Also note that God’s glorious arm went “at the right hand of Moses.”

Moses, the greatest prophet of Israel’s history is not called “God’s right hand.”
And yet Isaiah’s Servant is called “the arm of the LORD” (Is 53:1)

and of the Anointed One it is said: “then his own arm brought him salvation”
(59:16)—and “my own arm brought me salvation” (63:5)

It is plain that Isaiah sees the Anointed One as a divine figure unlike Moses.

Remember your history.

Remember what God has done in bringing you out of bondage to sin and death.

That is always the foundation for our prayers.

When you pray, remember your history.

2. Plead with God for Mercy (63:15-64:12)

There are seven stanzas in this prayer.

And they form a clear chiasm.

a) The LORD’s Compassion Restrained from His Holy and Beautiful House (15-16)

b) We Are Your Holy People—Though It Does Not Look Like It (17-19)

c) The Nations Would Tremble at Your Presence (64:1-3)

d) Will God Save Us? (4-5)

c’) But Instead, We Tremble, for You Have Hidden Your Face (6-7)

b’) Remember, God, that We Are Your People (8-9)

a’) Will You Restrain Yourself from Helping Your Holy and Beautiful House? (10-12)

The center of this chiasm is the terrible question,

“Shall we be saved?”
We have sinned against the living God.
Will he remember us for good?

a) The LORD’s Compassion Restrained from His Holy and Beautiful House (15-16)

¹⁵ *Look down from heaven and see,
from your holy and beautiful^[e] habitation.
Where are your zeal and your might?
The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion
are held back from me.*

¹⁶ *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.*

There are two holy and beautiful houses in this passage.
The first is in heaven, where God himself dwells.
The second is the temple, the earthly copy of the heavenly habitation.
Here we are dealing with the archetype—as the remnant plead with God for mercy.
Where are your zeal and might?
Where is the compassion with which you loved Abraham and Isaac?
Because we, the remnant, acknowledge you as our Father.
Though Abraham and Israel forget us,
you are our one and only Father and Redeemer.
We have no hope but in you!

I remember when I was 18,
standing on a hillside in Mexico.
I didn’t doubt that God existed.
I didn’t doubt that he was good.
I just was exhausted!
I was tired of trying to live the Christian life.
God seemed distant – and I was tired of it all.

So I told God that I was done with being a Christian.

Isaiah speaks of God’s people becoming like those who are not called by his name:

b) We Are Your Holy People—Though It Does Not Look Like It (17-19)

¹⁷ *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.*

¹⁸ *Your holy people held possession for a little while;^[1]
our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.*

¹⁹ *We have become like those over whom you have never ruled,
like those who are not called by your name.*

Why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart,
so that we fear you not?

This is a statement of remarkable honesty and frankness.

We know, O God, that you are the one who hardens the heart of the wicked.

We remember what happened to Pharaoh,
and we are wise enough to understand
that this is what you are doing to us.

Why?

Why are you hardening your servants—the tribes of your heritage?

We are supposed to be your people—your holy people.

And yet we are no different from the nations—
and now they have trampled down your sanctuary.

We have become like those over whom you have never ruled—
we are like the nations—those not called by your name.

Isaiah recognizes that God is sovereign,
and so lays the problem before God.

Why are you doing this, O God?

c) The Nations Would Tremble at Your Presence (64:1-3)

*64 Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence—*

² *[g] as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—*

*to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!*

³ *When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.*

Because what is more troubling is that if God rent the heavens
and came down, the earth would shake.

The nations would tremble at your presence.

Even the mountains would quake at your presence.

And yet, everything is still.

Will God ever do anything about this?

Of course – this *is* what God when he rent the heavens
and came in the person of his Son – to join himself to our humanity!
And so our prayers are even more bold!

Because this is what God *has done* in Jesus Christ!

But we still pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”

We still pray that God would do great and mighty deeds –
reveal your mighty deeds in our day!

d) Will God Save Us? (4-5)

⁴ *From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.*
⁵ *You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?*^[h]

And so we come to the heart of Isaiah’s prayer–
the prayer of the righteous remnant.

There is no God like you.

You meet him who joyfully works righteousness–
those who remember you in your ways.

But that’s not us.

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time,
and shall we be saved?

If you reward the righteous, then we’re in trouble.

Why is God angry?

Because he loves all that he has made!
And especially because he loves his people.

But sin and rebellion have poisoned humanity.

And so now God is angry.

He looks at the good and beautiful world that he made –
he looks at those that he made in his own image –
and he sees that things are not as they should be!
We are not as *we should be!*

If God was not angry about that – then he could not be said to love!

As long as there is sin and misery in the world,
God will be angry!

And as long as there is sin and misery in the world,
you should be angry too!

Our problem is that our anger gets misplaced – and misdirected!

c') But Instead, We Tremble, for You Have Hidden Your Face (6-7)

⁶ *We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

⁷ *There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in^[i] the hand of our iniquities.*

There is such irony here.

God's face would have brought the nations trembling before him,
but instead, "we" are shriveling up and wasting away.

We have all become like one who is unclean, (a leper)
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment
(menstrual rags—cf. Lev.)

We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
If we are honest, then we cannot claim that we are righteous before God.
Because there is no one who calls upon your name.
God has hidden himself from us, and therefore we tremble before him.

And this was the cry of the people of God for 500 years.
For 500 years, Israel remained unclean –
God's face hidden from them!

And often this is our prayer as well!

But neither they – nor we – can stop there!

b') Remember, God, that We Are Your People (8-9)

⁸ *But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.*
⁹ *Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all your people.*

BUT NOW!

V'atah!

Returning to the theme of God as Father,
The righteous remnant plead with God to remember us.

We are the clay and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.
Don't remember our sins—remember that you have made us to be yours.
Twice before Isaiah has utilized the image of the potter and the clay
(29:16, 45:9)
Again it plainly affirms God's sovereignty over his creatures.

But God's sovereignty is also our comfort!

As long as God remembers our sin – he will be angry with us!
So, please *look!*
Remember that we are all your people!
Remember your covenant – remember your promises!

a') Will You Restrain Yourself from Helping Your Holy and Beautiful House? (10-12)

The City of God has become a wasteland and a wilderness.
Zion—Jerusalem—is desolate.
Will God cast us off forever?
(Read 10-12)

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

¹¹ *Our holy and beautiful^[i] house,
where our fathers praised you,
has been burned by fire,
and all our pleasant places have become ruins.*

¹² *Will you restrain yourself at these things, O LORD?
Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?*

The temple is burned with fire—
the holy and beautiful house that mirrored God's heavenly dwelling.
Zion has become a wilderness.
We are returning to the *tohu vbohu*—the barren wasteland of chaos.
Will you keep silent, O God?
Will you not speak?!

We must anticipate chapter 65 a little.
Because God promises that he will speak.
He will arise and set his people free.

And that is what he has done in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Some of us have been reading Mark Talbot's little book,
"When the Stars Disappear."

Chapter 2 is titled, “Breathing Lessons: How to Survive Great Suffering.”
His central point is exactly the pattern of Isaiah 63-64.

“Sufferers...[can lose] perspective,
which can make it seem as if everything is closing in on us
so we can hardly breathe...
In particular, we can forget to breathe in
the words God has breathed out to tell us who he is
and why he won’t abandon us,
as well as to remind us more generally of what he has –
and hasn’t – promised.” (p42)

What has God promised?

When you pray, remember to “breathe in” –
remember who God is – pray back to him what he has said!
The Psalms are tremendously valuable as examples for prayer –
but also, as you read through the prophets,
make note of prayers that help you pray better.

But also “breathe out” –
pour out your heart to God!
Lament – complaint – protest –
all of these are appropriate to bring to God!
If you have soaked yourself in the scriptures –
if you have breathed in what God has said –
who he is and what he has promised –
then you will be able to breathe out faithful prayers
and God will hear you!

Plead with God for mercy that he might dwell in his holy and beautiful house.
Because this *is* what he has done in Jesus.
The holy and beautiful house – the temple that was burned by fire –
has been raised up in the resurrection of Jesus!

And we – as living stones – are being built into that holy and beautiful house.
If we suffer with him – that we might also be raised with him.
What God was doing with Israel – what God is doing with *you* –
is conforming us to the likeness of Christ.