

Isaiah 63:7-64:2

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] No matter what religion, and no matter what philosophy, no matter what perspective, everyone! at some point in their life, whether they'll admit it or not, will pray. Whether it's the whether it's the soldier in the foxhole, whether it's the parent of a baby on life support, whether it's the anxious student before an exam, everyone at some point prays. All of us have this creaturely instinct to pray. And I think all of us struggle in knowing how to pray. It's not uncommon for people to ask me to help them in, how do I pray? Someone said to me recently, I want to pray but I just don't know what to do. And she's not alone. Even Jesus and his disciples came to him with that request. And early on in his ministry, remember what they said, Lord, teach us how to pray. And here in Isaiah 63 to 64, we actually have one of the great examples of prayer in the Bible. It's specifically a prayer of intercession. There are a number of great intercessory prayers where the person praying asks for things from God. There's Abraham's prayer for Sodom. In Genesis 18, Moses is praying for Israel after the event of the golden calf in Exodus 32. You've got the prayer of Daniel in chapter 9. You've got Jesus' high priestly prayer. It's probably one of the greatest prayers, isn't it? Ever prayed. But this prayer in Isaiah 63 to 64 is certainly less well known than those prayers. But I hope as we see it, we will see that it's got the stamp of greatness.

We're about to see it has, I think, the boldest of requests. So if you were here two weeks ago, remember that the chapter before, Isaiah speaks and sees himself as something, as a watchman. He's a praying watchman alongside other watchmen. And I try to impress upon you that that is a call that God has placed on all of our lives. We are asking people to be watchmen and watch women.

We are asking people who pray in ceaseless discipline, vocal, urgent, pressing, sustained manner to God. But Isaiah doesn't just leave it at that. He doesn't say, well, let's all be praying watchmen and women.

Let's just get on with it. He intends to give you more this morning. He intends to show you what it looks like. To what it actually means. And the English translations don't show this so well.

[2 : 45] But look at the two verses from the week before last. Let me render them a little bit literally. Look at chapter 62, verse 6. Sorry, chapter 62 and verse 6.

You put the Lord in remembrance and give him no rest. You who call the Lord to remember, give yourselves no rest, literally. And then look at the first verse of our passage today.

Chapter 63 and verse 7. I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord. The praises of the Lord according to all that the Lord has granted us.

I will cause the Lord to remember. I will recount what God has done. It's the same word that's used in 62.6 and 63.7.

And what Isaiah does is he uses that same word to describe what you, as a praying watchman or woman, have to do. He's about to show us our task in prayer.

[3 : 49] And so three things of prayers that God loves to answer. Number one, the context of the prayer. Number two, the content of the prayer. And number three, the answer to the prayer.

Number one, the context of the prayer that runs all the way from 7 to 14 in chapter 63.

Look at verse 7. 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 for the house of Israel.

For he has granted them according to his compassion. According to the abundance of his steadfast love. Now can you notice how Isaiah begins and ends the verse. He begins and he ends verse 7.

With God's steadfast love. He bookends it. Everything that God started to do. Is because of his steadfast love. And everything that God will end up doing.

Is because of his steadfast love. And everything in between. Is because of his steadfast love. All the deeds for which he is reaped. The good things which he has done. Are out of his steadfast love. [4 : 49] And right away Isaiah is laying a foundation for the prayer that will follow. He knows that the prayer that pleases God. Is a prayer that flows out of clear theological convictions.

About who God is. And about what God has done. And you see that with pretty much all the intercessory prayers in the Bible. Now the praying watchman begins here by talking to God about God.

By talking to God about God. He recounts what God has done in the past for his people. His deeds of mercy. His works of patience and redemption.

And so when we come to God in prayer. We shouldn't just launch right in. Into our requests. But we need to recount. Who God is and what he's done. To set the context for our prayer.

And Isaiah isn't really yet praying. He's at the moment laying the foundation for who God is. So let's think about it. So we praise him. Verse 7 for his steadfast love.

[5 : 53] His kindness from before and in the future. In the now. We praise him for what he's done. How he's met all our needs.

That we need to begin our prayers by reverencing him. Isaiah continues in verses 8 and 9. He highlights God's grace and goodness to his people.

In all their affliction. He was afflicted. He knew their distress. 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. But they rebelled. They grieved his Holy Spirit. Isaiah still hasn't gone anywhere close to bringing his requests.

He's still rehearsing to God. About God. All that God has done. And said. So again if we use this passage in our lives.

[6 : 53] We praise God don't we? Because he has called us as his children. His children. And Isaiah gets specific about what God has done for his people.

He says he's become their saviour. He's become their saviour. He's carried them all from the days of old. But they rebelled verse 10.

And grieved his Holy Spirit. Therefore he turned to be their enemy. And he himself fought against them. And then he remembered. The days of old of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them out of the sea.

With the shepherds mischief. And he said. I think you can go right the way through to verse 14. He's thinking about one particular event. He's speaking about the exodus. Thinking about how God saved them.

From Egypt. And he says. Your God is not a distant God. In their distress. God identified with them. In your affliction he was afflicted.

[7 : 51] It's a wonderful picture isn't it? Some of you will know. The famous poem. That is on countless Christian cards. Footprints. You know right? The person has a dream.

And they look over their life. And they see. In the sand. Two sets of footprints. Most of the time. Sometimes Lord. There's one set. And the person in the dream is bothered.

By. Why is there only one set of footprints. And so they ask the Lord. Where were you? Where were you Lord. When I need you most. And the Lord said. There's only one set of footprints there.

Because. Because that was when I was carrying you. Now. You might love that poem. You might think it's a little bit kitsch. Or quaint. But here is the deal. Alright. There's only ever one set of footprints.

There's only ever one set of footprints. Because Isaiah says. God carried them. Isn't it wonderful? God carried them all the days of old.

[8 : 54] All the time. And he's always carrying you. That's what he does for his people. He carries us. That's what he does. As you are sitting here this morning. He's carrying you.

Because he is the loving. Merciful. And kind. And compassionate God. The load bearing God. The carrying God. And then through verses 10 to 14. He puts flesh on this.

By recounting. Recounting how God saved his people. He speaks of God's unswerving commitment. To covenant. Steadfast love. In the person of the Holy Spirit.

To bring them to the land he promised. Giving them rest. But Isaiah doesn't sugar coat God here. This isn't. Oh isn't it all wonderful and great. He says.

No you need to know all of God's character. So look at verse 10. But they rebelled. And they grieved his Holy Spirit. Therefore he turned to be their enemy. And himself fought against them. [9:53] Let those words sink in for a moment. In his text. Like Isaiah. 63. Verse 10.

Blow out of the water. That little mantra. You know. God hates the sin. But loves the sinner. It doesn't quite do justice. What the Bible says. That in order to preserve his holiness. God turns to be the enemy. Of those who rebel against him. It's not a good place to be. God's enemy. The God who is omniscient. Who sees everything. The God who is omnipotent. Who is all powerful. The God who is sovereign over all. The God who knows your thinking. And he knows your actions. And he knows it all. It is not a good idea to be his enemy. And yet the Bible is very clear.

Isn't it. This morning. That if we will not submit our lives to him. If we will not trust in. The saviour that he has provided. In Jesus Christ. Christ. That is what we are.

[10:53] And Isaiah rehearses all of this before God. God is kind. Yes. But he is holy. God is merciful. Wonderfully. But he is righteous. God is loving.

But he is just. And he is not going to ask anything of God. Until he has filled himself up. With reverence. With these great theological truths about God. And for you and me. As praying. Watch women and watch men. We need to rehearse these great truths about God. Before we come to him with great petitions. Notice how he primes the pump. By talking about who God is.

But also by building a case for what he is going to ask for. In verse 11. Isaiah starts asking questions about God. Doesn't he? He says. Where is he who brought them.

Out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock. Where now is this God who acted. He acted in this way. On behalf of his people. Has his patience been exhausted.

[11:53] Has he withdrawn his protecting presence from them now. And it's not just for the sake of his people. That God has acted that way. Look at verse 14. Isaiah addresses God directly.

For the first time. And Isaiah says. You led your people out. To make for yourself a glorious name. He said. You did this all Lord. You guided your people in this way.

With all that power. And all that love. To reveal your glory. That's why you did it. To reveal your beauty to the world. To show how attractive your loving ways are.

Lord. Does that not matter to you anymore? And Isaiah is expressing concern. Not only with what troubled him. But with what troubles God. He brings God's concerns to the fore here.

Because he knows God cares more than anything else. About his own glory. And the beauty of his name. So Isaiah will intercede with God. On the basis of what is at stake here.

[12:55] And what is at stake. Is nothing less than God's glory. And his beauty. And his renown. All those things. God cares about most. And I think you and I. We need to hit the pause button there.

Because I'm pretty sure. When we think about this. It raises questions. Doesn't it? You hear people talk about God. And God does all these things. For his own glory. And frankly.

That strikes us. Doesn't it sometimes. As weird. And a bit troubling. Isn't it a bit egotypical? And self-centred.

And arrogant. To do whatever he pleases. For the glory of his name. Anytime. Anytime. You or I. Come across a person. Who is like that. Who they do everything.

For their own namesake. We look at people. That's like that. And we think. Don't we. How arrogant. How egotistical. How selfish. To do everything for yourself. And so.

[13:51] Why. Is God. Doing that. Any different at all. How can he not be referred to. In those ways. Couldn't God. Have designed reality.

Such that he could. Give glory elsewhere. And not to himself. Could he have not. Led the people. Of Israel. As Isaiah says here.

To make a glorious name. For Moses their leader. Couldn't he have done that. But God says. I will not give my glory. To another. The answer is. Of course. God could have. But if God.

Had given his glory. To another. God would have been. An idolater. God would have. Committed idolatry. Because God. Would be telling us. That there is something.

More important. In the universe. Than he is. And there isn't. And God would have. Been telling us. That there is something. More beautiful in the world. Than he is. But there isn't. And God would be

telling us. That there is something.

[14 : 45] More satisfying in the world. Than he is. But there isn't. And he would be suggesting. That there is some one. Or some thing. More splendid. And glorious. And perfect. And righteous. And just. Than he is.

But there isn't. He would be suggesting that there's someone more caring and saving than he is. But there isn't. He would be stating that there's a greater hero in the world than him. And there isn't. And that is why God is zealous to make for himself a name that is glorious. He does everything for his own glory because he is the ultimate hero. He is the one that you and I need. He is the one who deserves all praise. He is the one that you and I are called to trust in with everything we've got. Now everything we've looked at so far this morning is in the context of this prayer.

And it's not until chapter 63 and verse 15 that we move to the content of the prayer. Which goes all the way through to the end of 64. Isaiah has primed the pump in the way that he's described God.

[15 : 48] The way that he has articulated God's ultimate passion. And that is going to impact how he approaches God and how he talks to God. And the same is true for you and me. What we actually bring to God in our prayers.

What we actually say to God and how to say it. How impassioned we are when we say it all. Is going to flow out of what we realise is the truth about God.

And what we've rehearsed before God. So let me point to you three aspects of the content of the watchman's prayer. First of all there's an impassioned plea. Can you see verse 15?

Look down from heaven. And see. From your holy hill and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might. The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion. They are held back from me. Isaiah comes humbly and reverently. He seems to be drawing off that vision from Isaiah 6. He has a vision in the temple where he sees God high and lifted up.

[16 : 48] His train fills the temple. And glory fills the temple. And the cherubim cry back to one another. He is holy. He is holy. He is holy. And so he knows.

He comes to God with reverence because of that. But he's bold isn't he? He's talking to God and he says verse 15. He looks and sees. And he's still asking questions.

But now the questions he's asking are kind of full on person to person questions. Where are you God? In verse 17 he adds to the where question. The why question.

Why are things so different from what they used to be? Chapter 64 verse 5. And then he adds a how question. How can we be saved? 64 verse 12 he adds a yes or no question.

After everything that's happened God. Are you just going to hold back? And do nothing? Do you pray like that? If I do pray like that it's not very often.

[17 : 49] And I'm guessing we don't pray like that. Because we think that it's a little bit rude. Or insolent towards God to speak like this. But they're not hostile questions are they?

They're not arrogant questions. These questions are impassioned. Because Isaiah realises what is at stake. Maybe we don't pray like this because we don't realise what's at stake.

He's pleading with God to do something for the glory of his name. And God could not be more delighted when we ask. When we care.

For his glory. And Isaiah is pleading for the sake of God. But he's also pleading for the sake of his people in verse 17. And we should realise that those two pleas are related. Pleading for his glory. And pleading for his people. Which makes sense. Because the second aspect of the content of the prayer is a family connection. Isaiah brings that up.

[18 : 51] Explicitly three times doesn't he? Verse 16 of Isaiah 63. For you are our father. Chapter 64 verse 8. But now oh Lord you are our father.

You are our father. The boldness with which Isaiah comes before God. Is because he knows God as father. And that relationship for Isaiah means accessibility.

And intimacy. And immediacy. And so as we come to God. We pray. Our father who is in heaven. We don't come in a business relationship. There's a difference isn't there.

Between a business relationship. And a family relationship. In business. Your relationship to your boss. Is on the basis of your performance.

If you perform for me. I will perform for you. In a family relationship. The basis is commitment. And there's no better place. For you to work out. How is your relationship with God.

[19 : 53] What's it like. Whether it's a business basis. Or a family basis. Then looking at how you pray. You come with a sense of intimacy.

And an immediacy. Or are you a little bit standoffish. Not too sure. Not too sure. That you should approach him. There is a difference isn't there.

Between a business relationship. And a family relationship. He is our father. He is our father. He is a father who says to his people. I want you to come. I want you to come with your questions.

I want you to come with your doubts. I want you to come with your griefs. And your pleas. I want you to come with your struggles. And I want you to trust me.

And depend on me. Absolutely everything. And thirdly. The content of this prayer. Includes a penitent pose. A repentant pose. He says verse 7.

[20 : 55] Doesn't he. He addresses God. 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 the hand. Of our iniquities. Isaiah in these verses. Displays.

The devastating effects of sin. That sin. Imprisons. And sin. Depraves. And disintegrates.

People. And sin. Alienates people. And he points to how. Sin creates. Absolute havoc. The effect that sin has.

In your life. On your mind. And it gets to the point. Where he says. You know what happens. This might not seem the pinnacle. But to God it's a big deal. He says it's got to the point. Verse 7. Where no one will lift a finger.

[21 : 52] No one will even lift a finger. To try and take hold of God. But what is interesting. Is how Isaiah speaks about. Sin. Who is it.

That he says. Has committed this terrible sin. He says. We. We did. We did. That what it means.

To be a praying. Watchman or woman. In the terms of Isaiah 62. And 63. Is. That we admit. We are the problem. That we are always. Including ourselves.

That we don't hold. Sin at arm's length. Or we don't think. You know the problem around here. The problem around here. Is. Is that's them out there. The problem around here. Is you. No. We are part of the problem.

And you and I. Will never become passionate. Praying people. Until we see our needs. To identify. With the problem. Rather than see. Other people's faults. And we need to see.

[22 : 54] That we need rescue. And we need deliverance. And we need forgiveness. And mercy. If not more than those around us. And that's what Isaiah does here.

He takes up this pen and pose. Lastly. How does God answer this prayer? How does God answer. The watchman's prayer. We've actually looked at.

What is central. The central part of the prayer. Isaiah 63 verse 15. Isaiah asks God. To look down from heaven. Look and see Lord. But as we come.

To 64 verse 1. Do you notice. There's a little bit of a change. 63 verse 15. Look and see. 64 verse 1. Come down. Oh that you would rend the heavens. And come down. Forget about just looking now. I am asking Lord. That you would come down. Oh that you would rend the heavens.

[23 : 51] And come down. That the mountains might quake at your presence. As when fire kindles brushwood. And the fire causes water to boil. To make your name. Make your name known to your adversaries. And that the nations might tremble at your presence.

When you did awesome things. That we did not look for. You came down. The mountains quaked at your presence. From of old. Those 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.

Isaiah's still got Exodus in his mind. Doesn't he? And he says. Lord you've done it before. Would you do it again? You came down in the first Exodus. Upon Mount Sinai.

With thunder and lightning. As you brought the Lord. We didn't expect you to do it. But you did it.

And the mountains trembled when you did it. And Isaiah is saying. We need you to do it again Lord. Lord we need a new Exodus.

We need you to rip the heavens apart. And we long for you to show the world. Who you are. That since ancient times. No one's here. No eye has perceived.

[24 : 53] No eye has seen any. God except you. Who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. I don't know if you memorize. The Bible memorize scripture.

I don't do it. Anywhere near as much as I should. But this is a verse isn't it. That is well worth memorizing. Paul quotes it in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 9. And it's been called.

The gospel in the Old Testament. If you wanted a verse to encapsulate. The gospel. Isaiah 64 verse 9 does it for us. But here is the message. The God of the Bible.

Works on behalf. Of those who wait for him. He works for us around the clock. He's working for you right now. He's waking you up to listen to his word.

He's constantly working. He doesn't take days off. He doesn't call in sick. He doesn't sleep. In fact you want to know how eager God is to work for you. Listen to this verse from 2 Chronicles 16 verse 9.

[25 : 51] For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth. To give strong support. To give strong support to those whose heart is blameless towards him.

God in heaven looks around for more work to do. For those who trust him. He's not looking for people to work for him.

He has. He is looking for people who will let him work for them. Isn't that the gospel? That God works for you? The gospel is not about what you do for God.

It is about what God has done for you. Of course when you know that God is working for you. It changes your heart. So you end up in gratitude wanting to serve him.

But that is not the first thing is it? The first call of the gospel is to let God serve you. Isaiah's point here is that the gospel is not.

[26 : 52] God hanging up a help wanted sign. The gospel is not that God is kind of struggling with his job. When he needs you and me to come and try and help him. No. The gospel commands you and I to put up a sign saying I want it.

That is essentially the purpose of our praying, isn't it? What is prayer? Prayer is to admit our weaknesses. That's why prayer is so important for us as a church.

It tells us of our inability. And our absolute need for God to work on our behalf. And the great news is that when we hang up that sign saying help wanted.

That is met with God's promise saying I will indeed be your help. He will work for us if only we will ask. So here's the question.

Has God answered Isaiah's prayer? Or is it out there hanging? And the answer is he has answered Isaiah's prayer. If you went to Mark chapter 1 and verses 9 to 11.

[27 : 58] The time of Jesus' baptism. And it says in those days Jesus of Nazareth of Galilee was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came out of the water immediately he saw the heavens being torn open.

Rent. And the spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven saying you are your beloved son with whom I am well pleased. And Isaiah cries out doesn't he?

Oh that you would split the heavens and come down. And God did. And when he came down the first time in the Exodus he came with thunder and with lightning. But this time, the second time, the second Exodus.

The greater work of deliverance by which God will make his glorious name known to the nations.

The spirit comes down like a dove. And he anoints Jesus as the servant of the Lord.

That's the language that God uses at the baptism. The servant of the Lord who is all over Isaiah. Who will come to be the substitute for your sins and my sins.

[29 : 05] And Isaiah asks, Lord where are you? And God replies, here I am in the person of my son. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you.

Who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. And that work for which God splits the heavens and anoints his son culminates at the cross.

And Matthew tells us, doesn't it, wonderfully. That at the very moment that the Lord Jesus died on the cross. It's as if he pans the camera from the cross on Calvary to the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus cried out again with a loud voice. And yielded up his spirit. And behold the curtain of the temple was torn.

Into exactly the same word. From top to bottom and the earth shook and the rocks were split. And the gospel writers use the same word for the tearing of the temple curtain.

[30 : 05] And the tearing open of heaven at Jesus' baptism. Because you see the curtain. That is what surrounded the Holy of Holies. It was the place where God dwelt in the temple.

It was this huge barrier. It was a huge barrier between the Holy God and sinful men and women and boys and girls like you and I. It was like a massive, great, big, no entry sign.

And as Jesus breathes his last, God rips it from top to bottom. He doesn't just open it. If he opened it, it could be closed again.

But no, he rips it once for all to say nothing, nothing now can prevent my people from coming into my presence, from knowing me as my father. God answered Isaiah's prayer.

Because he is the God who does awesome things. He does awesome things that we don't even look for. He is the God who works for those who wait for him.

[31 : 13] Dick Lucas in a sermon on this passage said, A person who does not know God, could not, would not, does not pray like this.

Only God can lead you and me to make our prayers about him. That is the key. Who is your prayer?

What is your prayer mostly about? So Dick says, we come to Isaiah and we ask some questions.

We say, Watchman, what are you praying for?

I'm praying for the presence of God. And Watchman, what are you concerned or sad about? I'm sad because we've lost hold of God.

And Watchman, what hope do you have that your prayers will be answered? My only hope is the character of God. It seems as though the country is in chaos.

[32 : 20] In lots of ways, we lurch from kind of one crisis to another. And what is our hope? What is our only hope? Well, what do we pray for?

We pray for the presence of God. And what should grieve us most? What should grieve us most that as a church and as a country we've lost hold of God?

And what is our hope? Our only hope is in the character of God. And the Lord God is pleased by such praying.

By men and women. And boys and girls. Like you and me. And so let's pray.