

## Our God Saves: Live

His Mercy is More

Isaiah 63

Mark Vroegop

---

*Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth." 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. For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Savior. 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 (Isa. 63:1–9, ESV).*

I'd like for you to think with me about how you would answer to a simple question: "What do you want?"

Now, this question has several layers, doesn't it?

The other day I took Savannah and Sarah out for ice cream after dinner. One of the flavors of ice cream was "Exhausted Parent." From the emptiness of the carton, it looked popular. For some of you that's not just a flavor, that's your life right now. You desperately want some rest.

If you're a senior in high school, you might want to be done with school. If you're looking for a job or stuck in a dead-end career, you may just want meaningful work. If you're a counselor, you might want people to be reasonable and listen to each other. If you're struggling with on-going health issues, you may just want to feel healthy again. If you're dealing with an ongoing relationship conflict, you might just want peace. If you're struggling financially, you might want enough money to make it. If you feel unattractive, you may just want someone to notice you. If you feel lonely, you may just want someone to be your friend.

Another way to ask the question would be for you to consider what you used to want. Sometimes we want things that aren't good things, or we want things in a way that is out of balance. In fact, if you think about it, there's always a "want" underneath our temptations and sinful choices.

Last question. What's something you wish you wanted? Maybe healthy eating, exercising, saving money, prayer, sharing your faith, generosity, or contentment.

To "want" is to be human. You cannot turn your "want" off. You are only able to direct your "want" – sometimes toward what is bad, sometimes toward what is good. Humans are "want-ers."

"To be human is to be for something, directed by something, oriented toward something. To be human is to be on the move, pursuing something, after something. We are like existential sharks: we have to move to live. We are not just static containers for ideas; we are dynamic creatures directed toward some end."<sup>1</sup>

The miracle of conversion is that God draws us to himself and empowers us to see God's glory as the most attractive and appealing reality in the universe. Augustine (354 – 430 A.D) said it this way: "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." Putting your faith in Jesus means that you come to see that God's grace is the thing that fills the deep "want" in your life. When you become a Christian, God supernaturally changes what you want.

What do you want? Throughout the Bible, this question is front and center.

Part of the reason that it's all over the Scriptures is because even after we come to Christ, there's a "want" battle. For instance, in Colossians 3 Paul argues that we should seek the things that are above (3:1) and set our minds on those things (3:2), so that we can put sinful actions/wants to death (3:5).

What we think about, what we set our minds upon, and what we worship directly affects our "wants." Another way of saying this is: "You become what you behold."

That's one of the reasons that the book of Isaiah is so helpful. Over and over the prophet is giving us a big view of God. And in this third section (chapters 56-66), Isaiah is particularly focused on living in light of this vision of God.

Isaiah 63 is yet another description of what God is like for the purpose of creating a desire for more of God. This text invites us to marvel at God's justice and mercy so that you long for more of him. Or to make it very simple: marvel for more.

That's even our goal in gathering on the Lord's Day for worship. We sing together, pray together, study the Bible together, and meet with the hopes that it creates a longing for more of God and his grace in our lives.

---

<sup>1</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 8.

So, let's look at two key questions in this text: (1) Who is God? and (2) What do we want? Let's look at these two questions to learn how they are connected.

### **1) Who is God? (vv. 1-14)**

Chapter 63 begins with a question. It's asked as if there is a watchman who sees someone coming. It's a vision of an approaching conqueror. The watchman watches for threats, and what he sees is alarming. The opening verses (vv. 1-6) are marked with tones of judgment.

The figure is the same person that we've seen before – the anointed one. Remember in chapter 61:2 we read: "...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God." The words judgment or vengeance might strike you a bit over-the-top, but it's important to recognize that the Bible isn't talking about the kind of vengeance or judgment that we normally have in mind. We usually associate those words with something evil or wrong.

Perhaps it would be helpful to think of these words more along the lines of justice. Biblical justice is what fits with the goodness and righteousness of God. And it's important to remember that the plan of God in salvation is to save sinners from the just judgment of God. In our appropriate celebration of God's mercy and grace, we need to remember that we're saved from something.

We are saved from God's judgment of evil.

That's why the words "Edom" and "Bozrah" must be understood. Bozrah was the capital city of Edom, and the nation was a perpetual adversary of Israel (see Amos 1:11). These locations were representative of constant attack. We have cities or locations that are representative, don't we? If I use an example like Las Vegas or Washington D.C., there's potentially a bigger meaning. The city and nation are metaphors for something more.

We get a clearer picture with the description of his appearance in verse 1. He is "...splendid in his apparel and marches in the greatness of his strength." What is this? He is described in majestic and powerful terminology. The watchman sees this person as a victor and as a conqueror.

And then he speaks, answering the question in verse one: "Who is this?" His response captures the theme of the book of Isaiah: "It is I, speaking in righteousness and mighty to save." Here is the anointed one's statement that he leads by speaking the truth and he comes to rescue his people. That's why our theme for this series since June of last year has been "Our God Saves."

But notice the second question: "Why is your apparel red and your garments like those who tread in the winepress?" (v. 2) The victor's clothing is not ceremonial – clean and pressed. He's come from battle, and it appears to have blood stains on it. Verse 3 confirms this. His garments reveal his activity of judgment.

Verses 4-6 give us more detail. This is the moment of divine judgment that's connected to redemption. The text makes it clear that no one was able to accomplish this activity on earth, so God accomplished it by his own power and his own might.

Salvation is a bloody event. It's important to get this image right. This rescue operation is not like trying to find someone lost in the woods or searching for a ship that's blown off course. In that case, the main obstacle is not knowing where the person is. You spend energy searching for them. God's rescue through salvation is different.

To be saved means to be rescued from captivity and from powerful forces that are not inclined to let us go. In this respect, God's deliverance is more like a special ops team attempting to rescue people from forces that opposed God's rule and oppress his people. That's why the Exodus is so important in biblical history. God not only delivered his people, but he did it through powerful judgment. And in the New Testament we see that Jesus inaugurates deliverance from the clutches of the devil by sacrificing himself through a bloody cross. It's why Paul describes the Christian life as needing spiritual armor and as a battle with spiritual forces (Eph. 6:10-19). And it's why Revelation describes the return of Jesus as one whose robe is dipped in blood, and who is called the Word of God (Rev. 19:13).

I realize that this imagery is a bit graphic, but I do think it's important to realize the danger of being on the wrong side of God's holiness. Sometimes we can become so accustomed to the presence of sin and the reality of death that we forget (or don't feel) how outrageous it is. We can become so inoculated to human rebellion that we lose our outrage. Worse, we can lose an appropriate fear of God. Sin can become so normal, injustice so common, or atrocities so frequent that we lose our sense of shock. This text is a helpful reminder of the cosmic battle that wages right now for the hearts of people. God will win. But it's a fight.

Thankfully, that's not all that we see in this text. God is not only full of justice, but he's also full of mercy. Seeing this picture causes Isaiah to reflect on the mercy and grace of God. God is full of mercy and he's full of justice. He's both.

In verses 7-14, Isaiah exults in the mercy of God. You see, this is the right response to considering the judgment of God. It should lead you to marvel at God's mercy. Notice the statements of praise in verse seven:

- "I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord"
- "according to all that the Lord has granted us"
- "the great goodness to the house of Israel...according to his compassion"
- "according to the abundance of his steadfast love"

In verse eight we see God believing the best about his people, yet willing to be their deliverer. In verse nine, we hear of God's empathy: "...in their affliction he was afflicted." God does not remain distant from his people's suffering. He's present. He's compassionate. He's loving. And he acts to provide deliverance.

Again, do you see how this connects to the ministry of Jesus? The son of God enters our world. He becomes one of us. He experiences the limitations and temptations of our broken world. He is full of mercy and pity. He's full of grace. That's what he's like.

But this beautiful summary of grace serves to remind Isaiah about the waywardness of God's people. Verse 10 highlights human rebellion and divine discipline. We see that there are times when God disciplines his people. Their/our rebellion requires divine action.

However, God's discipline is always rooted in his relationship with his people. That's why verses 11-14 rehearse God's remembrance of his love and his history of deliverance. Isaiah reminds Israel about the historic faithfulness of God, using the deliverance from Egypt as a prime example. These verses are designed to anchor the mercy of God in real events in the past that serve as encouragement.

Who is God? He's a God of justice. He's a God of mercy and grace. He's a God of vengeance. He's a God of compassion. He's a God that disciplines. He's a God that keeps his promises. And it's vital to the soul of God's people that they fully understand and meditate on what God is like.

How often did you think about what God is like this week? Do you know that our gathering together on Sunday morning is designed to help you remember who God is? Do you have a big view of God? Do you have a balanced view of him that considers both his mercy and his judgment? Do you think about his kindness and his justice? Do you love him and respect him?

What you've done with Jesus has sweeping implications for how you see God. Take our theme from Easter, for instance. "Jesus is alive" is a rallying cry of hope for those who put their trust in him as Lord and Savior. But if you were part of the crowd that falsely accused him, affirmed his crucifixion, and didn't believe in him, the resurrection is terrifying. In that case, Jesus is alive is deeply threatening.

Every person must decide which side he or she is on. So, this is not an academic decision. There are eternal issues at stake here. What do you think God is like? And now for the second question.

## **2) What Do We Want? (vv. 15-19)**

The study of God is not the same as every other subject. Understanding what he is like should create priority and passion for God. Learning more about God is designed to lead to more worship, more intimacy, and longing for more of him.

Deep friendships are like this. They are rare, but these are the kinds of relationships that more time creates a desire for even more time. You are not looking at your watch or developing an exit strategy before you go. The same could be said of a good marriage. The longer you're married the more your lives are intertwined and the more you value it. Those are comparisons, but they don't sufficiently capture the point here. Because we're talking about God.

C.S. Lewis, in the book *The Last Battle*, uses the phrase "further up, further in" to describe the way that heaven will be an eternal exploration of more of God. We'll learn about him forever, never tire of him because every day will be better than the day before. Can you imagine?

You might if you get a taste of deep spiritual transformation now. Once you've seen the miracle of God's work in your life, you'll want more of it. Or you might want it for others as well. That's why many of our biblical counselors are people who found freedom and want to help others.

So, the question is: what do we want? And in the final verses of this chapter, we see that Isaiah imagines the people of God crying out to him for more of him. They want more of God. Their marvel led to wanting more.

In verse 15 Isaiah identifies that the people of God are discontented – in a good way. It feels to them as if God is distant. As a result, this is a prayer of lament, an appeal for God to be true to his character and visit his people again. In verse 16, the historic faithfulness of God is celebrated. It's as though he's saying, "This is who you are." And yet the people want God to be closer and nearer.

They are mourning that God isn't closer to them, and they mourn over their wayward, hardened hearts. I don't think verse 17 is blaming God. Rather, I think it's a desperate acknowledgement that unless God intervenes, they are in big trouble. Their hearts are prone to wander. They know that they need more of God's help, and they are overwhelmed that more of God is needed. That's why the word "return" is used here. They want God back.

What's more, as they look at their society and culture, they see the need for God's help. They are in a bad place. They see their adversaries as trampling the people of God (v. 18), and it feels as if they are losing (v. 19)!

The text ends with a statement of holy discontentment: "We've become like people who are not called by your name." The effect of their collective sinfulness is that they are on the wrong side of God's character. They presently know more about God's discipline than they know about his mercy. They long – even beg – for divine intervention.

Do you feel any holy discontentment in your life right now? Do you feel any sense of where you need more of God in your life? When you look at the brokenness of the world, the hostility of the culture toward Christianity, or maybe the shallowness of evangelicalism, what do you think or say? Do you say, "Those people are messed up!" or "The place is falling apart"? Or do you say, "Oh, Lord, we need you!"

Because, underneath those statements is the question about what you really want. Do you want more of God because of God? Or do you just want your comfortable, suburban, Judeo-Christian affirming life back where people treated you with respect and acceptance.

What you think about God and what you want are always in play!

### **Applications:**

I started this sermon with a question: What do you want? Can I ask you a few more?

#### **1) How does your view of God and what you want inform your life right now?**

If you're not a Christian, this is a crucial and urgent question for you to consider. Maybe today God is moving upon your heart to turn from your sins and trust in Christ. If you are a Christian, how does what you believe really affect your life. How does it really work?

## **2) Does the brokenness in the world and in you draw you to ask for more of God?**

Is it possible that God is using pain in your life to get your attention? Some Christians don't consider if they are under divine discipline. Why not ask for more of God? Others of us need to consider our posture with "the world." Does bad news or upsetting news break your heart or just tick you off? When you are offended or treated unfairly, are you tempted to take your vengeance or do you look to God for his justice?

## **3) What might you do to increase your marvelling of God?**

Do you need to make church attendance a higher priority? Do you need to linger a little longer over the Word this week? Do you need to slow down in your prayer time? Is there something that you might want to give up because it's consuming too much time and deflating your soul? Do you need to find some theologically oriented books to give you a bigger view of God?

I began this sermon with a question and with a caution. The question was "what do you want?" The caution is that we become what we behold. What we gaze upon facilitates the desires of our hearts.

Outside our sanctuary today we are hosting an all-church celebration. Our aim is to find creative ways to connect with one another and enjoy the fellowship that makes church uniquely special. But we also want to remind you that one day a celebration like this will never end.

There's coming a day when the festival never ends, a day when will behold the glory of God. Until then, we're invited to marvel at what we see now so that we'll long for more.

Marvel at God so that you want more of him.

© College Park Church

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. [www.yourchurch.com](http://www.yourchurch.com)