

Mercy Remembered (Isaiah 63:1–19)
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Introduction

1. In our last message, we examined Isaiah’s vision of the One coming from Edom.

The Lord announced the coming Savior and the importance of the watchmen to prepare the way for the people (62:10–12). The prophet looked with expectation at the Savior in His approach but was shocked at His appearance (63:1–3).

The obligation of His servants was to be watchmen on the walls to protect and guard the covenant bride over whom the Lord rejoices. They were to put Yahweh, their covenant Lord, in remembrance and “*take no rest and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth*” (62:6, 7).

What is it to put the Lord in remembrance? It is to know who Yahweh (the covenant Lord) is and what His covenant is about (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13). His people are to know Him, fear Him, and obey Him.

Isaiah sees this very One, this triumphant Warrior in blood-spattered royal attire, coming to him. Yet, Isaiah is shocked to see Him coming in anger because His people did not keep covenant—did not fear Him or obey Him. They “*grieved his Holy Spirit, therefore, he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them*” (v. 10).

2. The condition of Zion, the church today, is mirrored in the condition of Zion, the covenant people of Isaiah’s day.

Paul warned the believers in Rome: “*Note then the kindness and the severity of God*” (Romans 11:22; 2:6–8). The modern church, as a rule, does not know the Savior as a covenant Lord; therefore, the church, overall, being self-seeking, does not fear Him.

Because the church does not fear the Lord, she is *powerless*, claiming to represent Him with whom nothing is impossible. She is *poverty-stricken* while claiming Him who supplies every need according to His riches in glory. She *flounders aimlessly*, claiming Him who knows the end from the beginning and provides guidance through the Spirit and the Word. She is *fruitless* in the vineyard of Him who, as the True Vine, enables His disciples to bear fruit, much fruit, and more fruit for the glory of His name.

Isaiah reveals both the cause and the cure for our present plight.

I. Covenant Faithfulness Recalled

1. The Lord’s dealings with us are based on His own covenant faithfulness.
 - a. He is revealed as a God of tremendous compassion and faithful covenant love for His people.
 - b. In verse 7, the prophet speaks of—
 - 1) The covenant love of the Lord as the motivation for all He does
 - 2) All these glorious deeds were to generate praise due His name.
 - 3) Everything that the Lord has granted His covenant people came through His grace and covenant faithfulness. He will always keep His covenant mercies even to His own hurt.
2. In return, the Lord has covenant expectations of His people: “*‘Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely.’ And he became their Savior.*”

- a. Yet, the great hope of the gospel is that His people will in the end finally live up to His covenant expectation of them.
- b. The means God uses to bring His people to covenant rest are the afflictions they suffer.
Paul encouraged new disciples *“to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations [afflictions] we must enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22).

II. Zion’s Faulty Memory

- 1. In verse 11, it is the people who now remember the days of old.
The better translation of verse 11 is, *“Then the people remembered the days of old, the days of Moses.”*
 - a. Israel had a great tendency to forget the Lord and their promised determination to keep the covenant.
 - b. In remembering the Exodus history, the flesh provoked them to complain, “Where is the Lord now in our present affliction?” (Nehemiah 9:9, 10).
 - c. God’s covenant children were still creatures of self and prone to complain of the Lord’s absence in their new “Babylonian bondage.”
- 2. Memory is very unreliable for sinful people.
 - a. It is true that the Lord did great things in Egypt and the wilderness, but people have a way of ignoring their own sinful propensities. In verse 14, The people remembered, but wrongly, that *“The Spirit of the Lord gave them rest.”* Did He? (Hebrews 3:9–11, citing Psalm 95).
 - b. This is the message of Isaiah 63. So, why is the Savior coming with anger? Verse 10 lays down the facts: *“But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore, he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.”*

III. Zion’s Repentance Required

- 1. The people rebelled and grieved the Holy Spirit (v. 10).
 - a. His covenant people’s response to the Lord’s covenant love ought to be humble fidelity.
Verse 10 ties back to verses 7 and 8 where the prophet recounts the *hesed* (covenant love) of the Lord. “Surely, they are my people, children who will not deal falsely.”
 - b. However, Israel dealt falsely by unfaithfulness to her covenant obligations (Psalm 89:33, 34).
The Lord’s steadfastness to His covenant love should motivate His people to search their own hearts. Such searching will expose their awful natural tendencies to deal falsely with their covenant Lord.
- 2. The Lord allowed this covenant failure to direct focus to His greater purpose—to bring the Savior to redeem and sanctify a new generation of people who would not fail Him.
These new-covenant saints will also experience afflictions, but through the Word and the Spirit they will eventually experience true covenant faithfulness, as promised in the text.
 - a. Afflictions are designed to provoke repentance over abiding sin and dependence on the Spirit for victory over sinful self.
 - b. The prophet confessed, *“We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name”* (63:19). *“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down”* (64:1) in grace and revival to enable your people to overcome their sinful covenant failure.