

Where Are Your Zeal and Your Might?

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Date: 11 December 2022

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Hello. I'm Scott Fisher.

I'm also known as Fish. I'm part of one of the Oakland community groups. And today our reading is from Isaiah 61.4, 62, 6 and 7, 63, 7 through 19.

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated. They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem.

They will never be silent day or night. You who called on the Lord, give yourselves no rest. And give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

[1 : 1 1] 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 Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.

He said, surely they are my people, children who will be true to me. And so he became their savior. 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. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy.

And he himself fought against them. Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them through the sea with the shepherd of his flock?

Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown?

[2 : 1 0] Who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble. Like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name.

Look down from heaven and see, from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us.

But you are our Father. Though Abraham does not know us, or Israel acknowledge us, you, Lord, are our Father. Our Redeemer from old is your name. Why, Lord, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you?

Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance. For a little while your people possessed your holy place, but now our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary. We are yours from of old, but you have not ruled over them.

They have not been called by your name. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of your God stands forever. In one of our favorite and most well-known Christmas carols, we sing these words.

[3 : 21] We sing, let every heart prepare him room. Let every heart prepare him room. What does that mean? To prepare for the coming of the Messiah. To pray for the coming of the Messiah.

Yesterday, I was reading the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke, and I came across these two lesser-known characters, Simeon and Anna.

Simeon and Anna were very old. They were near death. They had been praying for 80 years, 90 years, maybe even longer than that. They had been praying for the Messiah to come.

And we're told in Luke's Gospel that Simeon is a man who's righteous and devout, and that he was, quote-unquote, waiting for the consolation of Israel. Waiting for Israel to be comforted.

We're told that Anna worshipped the Lord day and night with fasting and praying, and that she was, quote-unquote, looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

[4 : 22] And, of course, this day came when Joseph and Mary, they brought their baby, Jesus, to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, to dedicate him to the Lord.

And when both Simeon and Anna saw Jesus, both this man of God and this woman of God saw Jesus, they began to praise God and to thank God. Because in Jesus, they saw what they had been waiting for their whole lives, what they had been longing for their whole lives.

In Jesus, they saw what they had been preparing for and praying for. They saw in Jesus the consolation of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem.

Now, why were Simeon and Anna waiting and longing for this consolation and this redemption? Why were they preparing and praying for this?

Because they read their Bibles. Because they read especially the prophet Isaiah, who teaches us to long and to wait for these things. So, that's where we've been preaching the past few weeks.

[5 : 27] That's where we're going to be today. And just for some context, Isaiah the prophet had this ministry that spanned the reigns of four or five kings in Judah from the years 750 to 700 B.C.

And he wrote down these visions, these visions of events that would happen in his lifetime and things that would happen after his lifetime. He wrote about things that were coming 150, 200 years later.

The Babylonian exile, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. He wrote about the return of these exiles from Babylon in 538 B.C. And he wrote all about these glorious visions of how God was going to come and rebuild his temple.

And restore the city of God and renew the people of God. And we really can't understand this text without that background. If you look at verse 18, it says, For a little while your people possessed your holy place.

That is, before the exile, we had our own temple, our own city of God here. But now our enemies, the Babylonians, have trampled down your sanctuary. Or if we look at chapter 61, verse 4.

[6 : 43] It says, They will rebuild the ancient ruins. The things that have been ruined by the Babylonians will be rebuilt. And they'll restore the places that were long devastated by the Babylonians.

They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. So Isaiah is exhorting his future readers to trust that the Lord is going to bring a faithful remnant of his people back to full blessings after the exile.

He's going to bring consolation to Israel. He's going to bring redemption to Jerusalem. And how is the Lord going to do this? How is he going to accomplish this work?

How is he going to rebuild and restore and renew? Well, the prophet tells us in chapter 62, verse 6. He says, I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem.

They will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

[7 : 48] In other words, the Lord is going to rebuild his people. He's going to rebuild Zion, the kingdom of God. He's going to rebuild it through prayer. He's going to rebuild it through the prayers of his people.

And this prophet is calling upon all the citizens of Zion to become intercessors. He's calling upon people like Simeon and like Anna who will wait upon the Lord day and night, who will hope upon the Lord all their lives until he comes to accomplish this.

People who will plead with God that his church will be what it's meant to be. Watchmen. And watch women who stand on the ruined walls of the city of God.

Keepers of Zion, guardians of Zion who stand there and they call upon the Lord. They give the Lord no rest day or night.

They just wear him out. They refuse to stop assaulting God. And saying to God, we have this one burden.

[8 : 55] This one passion. This one all-consuming concern and idea. That one day, one day, the presence and the power of God is going to come and dwell among his people again.

He's going to come and dwell in such a way among the city of God and the people of God that it will finally be established in security and stability.

We're praying that one day God is going to come with his presence and his power that he's going to make his people the praise of all the earth. Like Jacob, who wrestled with God and struggled with God and said, I'm not going to let you go until you bless me.

The prophet Isaiah is calling on people who will be intercessors for Zion and who will pray like Simeon. Lord, we're not going to let you go until you console Israel.

Like Anna, we're not going to let you go until you redeem Jerusalem. The prophet here is teaching us that we should pray like this and how we should pray like this.

[10 : 04] And that's what Isaiah 63 to 64 is. It's one of the longest and most beautiful, eloquent intercessory prayers in the whole Bible. And so we're going to do part one right now and part two next Sunday.

And the question is, are we ready to learn how to pray like the prophet Isaiah? Are we ready to learn to pray like Simeon and Anna were praying who were waiting for the Messiah?

Learning to pray for this Messiah to come into our lives, come into our city, come into our world. Well, prayer for the coming Messiah says four things.

Prayer for the coming Messiah says, wow, sorry, thanks, and help. If we want to learn how to pray like Isaiah, pray like Simeon and Anna, prayer for the coming Messiah says, wow, sorry, thanks, and help.

So prayer for the coming Messiah says, wow. I want us to pay attention to the leading principles of the prophet's prayer, the scheme and system and sequence of his praying and the arrangement and order of this prayer so that we can be instructed on how we too can pray for Zion that needs rebuilding and how we can pray for the temple of God that needs restoring and for the people of God that need renewing, all of which the Messiah must ultimately come and do.

[11 : 27] If you're familiar at all with the Psalms, the prayer book of the Bible, which is the prayer book of Jesus and the apostles and the church the past 2,000 years, there are four types of prayer in the Psalms that we find in this prayer of the prophet Isaiah.

And some of you have learned these four prayers through the acronym ACTS, A-C-T-S, which stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

I kind of like my version, wow, sorry, thanks, and help. But any way you do it, I want to invite you to do it as we close out these last days of 2022.

And the prophet tells us to start our praying with the word, wow. Wow, Lord. Verse 7, The prophet starts with the character of God, which is the secret of all true prayer.

The first thing we've got to realize is who is the one we're addressing? To whom are we speaking? And the prophet reminds himself of the character of the living God.

[12 : 50] And he basically says to us, no matter how you want to explain the ruins of the people of God and the rubble of the city of God, it's not because of something wrong in God himself.

No, we know that God is kind. We know that he's praiseworthy. We know that he's good. We know that God is full of compassion and love and mercy. And so the first thing you, the people of God, need to do is to get rid of all your doubts about God.

To get rid of all the lies that you have in your mind about God. To get rid of all the uncertainties you have about the being and the character of God. And just come and worship him for who he is.

And that's the question for us, Christ Church. Do we start our prayers adoring God? Do we start our prayers praising him and ascribing to him all the excellencies of his holy nature that he's been pleased to reveal to us?

Parents, are we teaching our kids to say, wow, Lord, you are so good in and of yourself. And wow, Lord, you have been so good to me.

[13 : 58] Notice the prophet begins to review the history of the relationship between God and his people. He says in verse 8, the Lord said, surely they are my people, children who will be true to me.

Right? That's something we do in prayer is we say, we're your chosen people. We're your special people. You're like a father to us and we're your children. And we call to mind all the promises that God has made to us through Abraham and Moses and David where he says over and over, I will be your God and you will be my people.

And then look what he says in verse 8. He says, and so he became their savior. 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. He's calling to mind their bondage in Egypt and calling to mind those days when God liberated them from their chains and from their slavery.

And he says, you God, you did not choose to stay distant from us. No, you chose to come and actually share our distress with us to save us. You and your love and in your mercy, you came down from a very high place and you came down into our misery.

[15 : 21] You descended among us sufferers and sinners that we are. And why did you do that? You did it that you might redeem us. You did it that you might come lift us up out of that muck and that mire.

And that like a mother who tenderly carries her young, that you might carry us out of Egypt. Carry us through the wilderness.

Carry us all the way to our true home in the promised land. You see, the reason we need to learn biblical history and learn church history isn't so that we can just know more stuff about God in our minds, but so that we can say from our hearts, wow, Lord, wow.

And that's what I want to invite us to this Advent and this Christmas is to pray a daily wow. In our Christmas carols, we say, joy to the earth, the Savior reigns.

Wow, Lord. In Jesus, your compassion and your many kindnesses took on flesh. He emptied himself to come and share with us.

[16 : 27] He didn't have to, but he came and shouldered for us the distress and the misery that we bear. Wow, Lord. In your love and your mercy, in Jesus, you made your love and your mercy visible to us.

Wow, Lord. He left the glories of heaven to come down. Even though he didn't have to, he wanted to come and save us and redeem us and lift us up and carry us home.

One of my favorite wow, Lords, for Christmas time comes from a great pastor in North Africa. His name was Augustine, and this is what he says. He says, Man's maker was made man, that he, ruler of the stars, might nurse at his mother's breast, that the bread might hunger, the fountain thirst, the light sleep, the way become tired on its journey, the truth might be accused of false witness, that the teacher might be beaten with whips, and the foundation be suspended on wood, that strength might grow weak, and that the healer might be wounded, and that life itself might die.

That's St. Augustine saying, Wow, Lord. Wow. In Jesus, our Savior, you've done many, many good things for the house of Israel.

And I want to invite us every day this week to just start with these verses, verses 7, 8, and 9, praying through these glorious attributes of the Lord, praying through the praiseworthy deeds that he's revealed in his Messiah who came down at Christmas.

[18 : 10] And as we pray, wow, let's pray that all the people of the city would come and share our wow, that everything that has breath would praise the Lord, because that's why we have breath in our lungs.

It's to say, wow, Lord. Prayer for the coming Messiah says, wow, but it also says, sorry and thanks. It also says, sorry and thanks.

When the prophet sees the goodness and the glory of God, he says, wow. But then he begins to look at himself and to examine the condition of his own heart and the heart of his people, the people of God.

And he begins to say, sorry. And that's what verse 10 is about. It says, yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. And so he turned and became their enemy, and he himself fought against them.

Though the people of God had experienced the abundant blessings of God, they turned their backs on God. Over and over, this is the story of the Bible, that we began to envy the nations and the gods of the nations.

[19 : 13] And we began to say to ourselves, you know, the religion of the God of Israel is just too narrow. And these Ten Commandments are a total bummer. I mean, we can't remake God into our own image.

And we can't worship God in our own way. And we can't interpret the Bible however we want. And we can't live seven days a week as we like. And we're not allowed to hate our enemies.

That's so awful. We're not allowed to marry or have sex with whoever we want. We're not given free reign in our desires for more stuff and more money and things that don't belong to us.

We're not allowed to sit loose to the truth. Man, this is crimping our style. This is so intolerable. This yoke of God, this law of God is a burden to us.

And the people of God over and over have turned against the Spirit of God who gave us the Word of God. And that's why the prophet is saying, sorry.

[20 : 15] Sorry, Lord. And this Advent and this Christmas, I want to invite us to pray a daily sorry. Just to say, honestly, Lord, I'm failing to love you with all my heart and my soul and my mind.

Honestly, Lord, I'm not obeying your commandments fully as I ought. Lord, I'm loving other things more than I love you.

You know, when the people of God are living among the ruins and living among the rubble and when we're down and we're defeated, it's not because God's not being God. It's because we're not being the people of God.

And this is calling upon us. Like the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13. He says, examine yourselves. Examine yourselves to see whether or not you're still in the faith.

To see whether or not test yourselves. To see whether or not you're being faithful. Psalm 139 says, Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

[21 : 19] And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. And maybe that's your prayer this week. Because, Lord, is there any way I've been grieving the Spirit of God?

Any way I'm resisting you? Any way I'm ignoring you? Any way I'm not praying to you as I ought? Any way I'm not giving Christ and the purposes of Christ the number one priority in my life?

And if that's the case, Lord, I'm sorry for fighting against you and being your enemy. See, the prophet doesn't stop at sorry. He moves on to thanks.

And he sees the goodness and the glory of God. He says, wow. He sees the rebelliousness and the grievousness of sin. And he says, sorry. And then he begins to ask this question.

He says, where is God? Where is God among us? Where is this God that we've been ignoring and neglecting? Where is this God that we've been pushing away and resisting?

[22 : 22] Where is this God that we've been doubting and deconstructing? And how do we get the presence and the power of God back among us again? And so he says in verse 11, Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people.

Where is he who brought them through the sea? You see, he's going back in a time to when God clearly revealed himself. He says, where is he who brought them through the sea?

Where is he who brought them with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them? Where is he who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand?

Where is he who divided the waters before them to gain for himself everlasting renown? Where is he who led them through the depths like a horse in open country that did not stumble?

Like cattle that go down to the plain that were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord. See, he goes back to this time at the Red Sea that the people of God could never forget.

[23 : 24] And he says, when we were there with our back up against the Red Sea, and when we were there with nowhere else to go, and we were hopeless and we were helpless, and we were there, remember we had a mountain on one side, and we had a mountain on the other side, and we had Pharaoh and the whole army of Egypt behind us, and we had an impossible and uncrossable body of water before us.

Remember when we were totally defenseless and doomed, when we were desperate and despairing, and we were shut in, and we were shut down, and we were on our knees crying out to God, and what did God do?

He came down with his Holy Spirit. He came down with his mighty arm. This is the prophet saying, thank you, God. Thank you, God, for the way that you come to save us when we could not save ourselves.

And this Advent, this Christmas, I want to invite you to pray a daily wow and a daily sorry, but I also want you to pray a daily thank you, God. To call to mind how God has clearly come down to us in the past, and to say thank you, God, for making possible what we thought was impossible.

Thank you, Lord, that a long time ago, in days of old, in those days of Joseph and Mary, you sent your Holy Spirit down among them. Thank you that you overshadowed her womb in such a way that she conceived the God-man, that one mediator between the Creator and his creatures.

[25 : 09] Thank you, God, that she gave birth to this sinless Son of God. And we thank you, God, that you sent your glorious arm of power among us in the form of those fragile arms of the infant Christ, those arms that would grow big and strong and be stretched out on the hardwood of the cross for our sins.

We thank you, God, that you gained for yourself everlasting renown, not by splitting apart the Red Sea. That was easy. What you did in Christ when you sent him among us, you split apart sin and death itself.

Thank you, God, that you made a way for us in this world where there was no way, that you made a way for righteousness in this world. You made a way for life in this world.

You made a way in the Christ you sent among us so that we could stumble and run free. So that we, like this, I love this beautiful image of the prophet Isaiah.

He says, we were like horses that were set free to gallop, sure-footed in the open country. That's what you did for us. That's the freedom that you brought for us in your Messiah.

[26 : 18] Thank you, God. Thank you, God. Prayer for the coming Messiah says, wow. And prayer for the coming Messiah says, sorry.

And prayer for the coming Messiah says, thanks. And prayer for the coming Messiah finally says, help. Help. Help. Really, this whole prayer is one giant plea for help.

Wow. You were so good to save us in Egypt, but won't you come and help us with that same goodness now? Sorry, Lord.

We rebelled against you in the past, and won't you come and show us your mercy to us now in the present? Thank you, God, for parting the Red Sea, and won't you come and show us that same power now?

The whole prayer is a plea for God's help. Won't you come and do all this again for us who are living among the ruin and the rubble and the devastation of Zion?

[27 : 25] Won't you come, God, and rebuild your temple and restore these walls and renew these people? Won't you come and establish us and make us the praise of all the earth?

Won't you send your Messiah to come do this for us? You see, the prophet is turning to God with his urgent desperation for help. Verse 15, Look down from heaven and see.

From your lofty throne, holy and glorious, where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us. Right? The people of God are defeated.

They've been carried off as slaves to Babylon. The temple of God and the city of God is a heap of rubble, which I think is a perfect picture of the church in the Western world, right?

The church in the secular age, the church in post-pandemic North America is a heap of rubble and ruins. And the prophet says, Look at us, God.

[28 : 27] Don't have your back turned toward us. Turn your face toward us, but we're longing to see your smile. We're longing for you to turn upon us and give us your smile.

Let's pray. Lord, help. Help this person who needs your smile even now.

Look down, Lord. Look down upon all of us because there's something in all of our hearts that's screaming out. Lord, look down upon this tortured world that's longing to see the face of Christ.

Lord, that's longing for the grace and the peace that Christ came to give us. Look down, oh Lord, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. You see, the prophet is praying.

He's praying, Lord, bring the authority of your throne. Bring the power of your holiness and your glory to bear upon us. Where is your zeal and your might, Lord?

[29 : 42] And won't you be zealous for us? Won't you be zealous for our cause today? Won't you show us the zeal that you've shown to your people over and over again when they were in slavery in Egypt, when they had their backs against the wall of the Red Sea, when they came in against mighty enemies in the promised land, when they were taken away to Babylon, when they were brought back to the ruins?

Won't you be zealous for us? Lord, where is your might? Where is your tenderness? Where is your compassion for your people? In verse 16, he says, but you are our father.

Though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us, you, Lord, are our father. Our redeemer from of old is your name. He's saying things have become so bad among us that if Abraham and Jacob were to come back and to see us, they would probably not even recognize us.

They would not acknowledge that we are the covenant people of God. They would say, these people can't belong to us because we're a people of holiness. We're a people of faith. And they would come and they would renounce us and they would disinherit us, but you, oh God, you can never disown us because you're our father and you're our redeemer and you are holy and you are glorious.

You are zealous and you are mighty. You are tender and you are compassionate. And we belong to you and Father, won't you come and help us?

[31 : 16] This Advent and Christmas, I want to invite you to pray a daily help us, God. A daily wow, a daily sorry, a daily thank you, but also a daily help.

Will you pray for the Lord's help like the prophet Isaiah? Isaiah, will you pray for the consolation of Israel like Simeon was praying? Will you pray for the redemption of Jerusalem like Anna was praying?

To simply pray, our father, our redeemer in heaven, you sent down from your throne this newborn king. From your high and heavenly and holy throne, you sent your eternal son of God to come and embody for us the zeal and the might of the Lord, to put flesh on your tenderness and your compassion, to come and open our eyes to the face of God and the smile of God.

And won't you come and do that for us? Won't you show us your face? Won't you show us your smile? And friends, our Messiah, our Messiah who's come and who's coming again, his basic invitation to us today is to say, won't each of you become an intercessor for my people?

Won't you become a watcher on the walls? Won't you become one of these keepers and guardians of Zion? Won't you call to me day and night? Won't you give me no rest with your wow and your sorry and your thanks and your help until I come and do what I want to do, which is to establish you and to make you the praise of all the earth, to bring about the consolation of Israel, to bring about the redemption of Jerusalem, my people.

[33 : 09] This is what it means, I think, for every heart to prepare in room to prayerfully pray that our hearts might be prepared and make room for our coming Messiah.

in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Thank you.