



Sermon Transcript October 28, 2018

Hospitable God, Hospitable People Where Wrath and Mercy Meet Isaiah 63:1-6

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 28, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text

Isaiah 63:1-6

¹ 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.”

² Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?

³ “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. ⁴ For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. ⁵ 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. ⁶ I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”

Introduction

Our passage this morning forces us to consider some hard things about God. Red is the dominant color in this passage and it is because it is a bloody passage. In these brief verses we hear about God's anger, God's wrath and a coming "*day of vengeance*." These are not concepts about God that play very well in our progressive culture. Even in the church we find ourselves wanting to keep this truth about God somewhat quiet and so you don't hear a lot about the wrath of God from the pulpit these days.

Paul Tripp captures some of the angst we feel in the church when the Scriptures confront us with the truth of God's wrath and judgment. He says, "Sometimes we can treat God's anger like the embarrassing uncle in our extended family. It's as if we are working hard to keep this attribute of God away from public exposure. Are we secretly worried about causing undue embarrassment to the family of faith? We are tempted to act as if anger were the dark side of God's character."¹

That is the problem that comes with this truth about God's anger and God's wrath. The problem is not with the fact that God might be angry or that God might display his wrath. The problem is with our understanding of it. First of all, Tripp is quick to point out that "God doesn't have a dark side!"² If God is completely holy and perfect, then whatever anger God displays is a holy and perfect anger. We get that on a much smaller scale. When we see injustice it ought to cause us to feel righteous anger. Over the past year I have been involved in numerous conversations about matters of race and the injustices that mark our history as a country and still mark us today. Most recently, I attended our district conference last week where this was the topic of conversation. As a white person, each time I engage in this conversation I am grateful for it but I also find it incredibly painful. The last thing the speaker said to us was this. "When it comes to racial prejudice and injustice, I want you to know that God is angry about that." Then he looked at us, primarily white pastors, and he said this to us. "And you should be angry about this too."³ Why? Because anger is an appropriate response to injustice.

That is another thing we need to understand about God's anger and God's wrath. Tripp is quick to point out that, "God's anger is an anger of grace. It is not the violent anger of unbridled and unrighteous fury. God's anger always works to right what is wrong."⁴ You need to hear that again. "God's anger always works to right what is wrong." God's wrath poured out on Jesus on the cross was to make us right before God and to address the sin that lives inside of us. God's wrath that will be poured out at the end of time is to once and for all break the power of sin and evil and to restore this broken world. God's

vengeance and God's wrath does not stand alone. In verses 4 and 5 they are coupled with "*the year of redemption*" and the "*arm of salvation*." And so "*the day of vengeance*" and "*the year of redemption*" don't stand opposed to each other. Rather, they stand in union with each other. "God's anger always works to right what is wrong."

It is with this in mind, we come to our passage this morning. Our passage asks two questions. The first question is a "who?" question. "Who is this who comes?" The second question is a "why?" question. "Why are his garments stained red?" I would like us to consider Isaiah's response to these two questions as we contemplate the justice and the judgment of God. What does it look like when wrath and mercy meet?

Who is this who comes?

Our passage begins with a question. "*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?*" This passage is picking up from where we left off last week. In Isaiah 62 we were given the picture of a highway where every obstacle had been cleared and the way to God was now wide open for all peoples. We hear this wonderful announcement in verse 11, "*Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, your salvation comes.*" We saw in verse 6 how "watchmen" were placed on the walls of Jerusalem to give God no rest—to not cease from praying—until God's promised salvation comes in full. To put it as we already said, the watchmen are praying for that day when "God works to right all that is wrong." Or, as we have been taught to pray, "*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" We long for that day.

Isaiah 63 begins from the vantage point of the watchman who is looking out over the wall and onto this highway. And from a distance, he sees someone coming from the capital city of Edom, the city of Bozra. Let me give you a quick introduction to the people of Edom. The people of Edom were descendants of Esau the twin brother of Jacob. Jacob and Esau were sons of Isaac, the son of Abraham—the father of Israel. Jacob and Esau, these twin brothers, were at odds with each other and went their separate ways. The promise to Abraham came through Jacob and from him came the people of Israel. And so the people of Edom and the people of Israel were distant "cousins." But like the "Hatfields and the McCoys" this bad blood between these two groups lived on for generations. The people of Edom stood constantly opposed to the people of God. Oswalt says, "Edom was the perennial enemy of Judah, so much so that it came to represent all its enemies."⁵ And so Edom is representative of all who stand opposed to God and his people. Edom represents the people of this world described in

Psalm 2. “*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’*” And so this warrior is coming from the land of Zion’s enemy.

So this watchman sees this warrior who is dressed in “*splendid apparel*” walking with a bit of a swagger as he makes his way from the land of their enemy. He is marching “*in the greatness of his strength*.” And so the question asked is, “*Who is this who comes from Edom?*” - (from the land of those who oppose the living God?) This warrior responds by saying, “*It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.*” In his response, there are several clues that clearly indicate who it is that is seen approaching the city.

The phrase “*mighty to save*” has that divine quality we saw applied last week to the Anointed Servant who by “*his mighty arm*” is able to accomplish all the purposes of God. And when he answers, “*It is I . . .*” we remind ourselves that this is the fourth time since Isaiah 59 that the coming “Anointed Servant” is singled out with a singular pronoun of “I” or “me.” Perhaps the passage that stands out the most to us is the second time this “Anointed One” is identified. In Isaiah 61:1 it says, “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me . . .*” This is the passage Jesus quotes in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry in Luke 4. It is here where Jesus says to all who could hear him, “*Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*” Very quickly, we begin to identify this warrior as “the Divine Warrior” who conquers the enemy of God—sin and evil and death—because he is *mighty to save*.

It is interesting to me that Revelation 19 draws from the image of Isaiah 63:1-3 to describe the second coming of Christ when he comes back “to judge the living and the dead.” In Revelation 19 Jesus is depicted as a Divine Warrior on a white horse, his robe is dipped in blood and he is called “*The Word of God.*” A sword comes from his mouth, which indicates that he is able to accomplish God’s saving purpose through the power of his Word. (This is why we trust the preaching and the reading of God’s Word. It is the power of God through the work of the Spirit of God to save.) And so when this one who comes identifies himself as “*It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save*” we can’t help but conclude that it is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who comes to judge.

“*Who is this who comes?*” As watchmen on the walls, praying for God to accomplish all his good purposes for this broken world, we too pray—“*Come, Lord Jesus.*” My point is simple here. Jesus is coming back. As he ascended into heaven in Acts 1:8, the angels said to the disciples, “*he will come in the same way you saw him go.*” The second coming

of Christ is one of the major themes of the New Testament. “In the New Testament one verse in twenty-five deals with the Lord’s return. It is mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament. The return of Jesus Christ is mentioned in every one of the New Testament books except Galatians and the very short books of 2 and 3 John and Philemon.⁵ As watchmen standing on the walls, we must boldly proclaim to this world the message of the gospel: Christ had died! Christ has risen! Christ is coming back! “Who is this who comes? It is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Why are his garments stained red?

As this warrior first comes into view, these watchmen take notice that his garments are “*crimson*.” It says in verse one, “*Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments.*” But as this warrior draws closer to the city, it is pretty clear that his clothing is red because it is stained. And so they ask, “*Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?*” Coming from the land of the enemy of God and his people, this Divine Warrior responds by saying, “*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.*” The reason his garments are stained is because this Divine Warrior has executed the judgment of God.

I would like to make two observations about the judgment of God, the coming *day of vengeance*.

What is God’s wrath? Mark Dever defines it this way: it is “God’s very own personal opposition to what is wrong.”⁶ What is the wrong that incurs the wrath of God? The word used to describe the wrong of this world is the word “*sin*.” We are reminded in Romans 3:23 that “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*” Simply put, sin is the rejecting of God as the good ruler of our lives. It is rebelling against the one who gave us life. John Piper defines our sin this way. “Sin is not small, because it is not against a small Sovereign. The seriousness of an insult rises with the dignity of the one insulted. The Creator of the universe is infinitely worthy of our respect and admiration and loyalty. Therefore, failure to love him is not trivial—it is treason. It defames God and destroys human happiness.”⁷ The reason people have trouble with the concept of God’s judgment is because they fail to see the absolute glory of God and they have a low view of the offense of sin. But the Scriptures are very clear. In no uncertain terms we are told, “*the wages of sin is death.*” It is judgment.

You must understand this morning that God's wrath is personal. Oswalt says that God is not "a cool judge impartially handing down verdicts on persons in whom he has no personal interest." Rather, his own glory has been offended. Oswalt says, "God is a Father whose children have been abused and mutilated. He is a king whose subjects have revolted and tried to usurp the throne. He is the Creator whose creations have perverted themselves into the very opposite of the things for which they were created."⁸ Therefore, God's wrath is consistent with his opposition to all that is evil in this world.

The second observation I want to make about God's wrath is that it is horrible. By "horrible" I mean that it is fierce. I struggled reading verse 6. *"I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."* But this image is consistent with the rest of Scripture when it describes the coming wrath of God against sin. Paul writes of this coming day in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9, *"God's judgment is right . . . God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you . . . This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power."*

I think of the fear and the helplessness we often see portrayed when a flood, a hurricane, an earthquake or a tsunami completely levels a community in such short notice. That is but a taste of the horror of what it is like to come under the sweeping judgment of God. Walt Kaiser used to say when these natural disasters would take place, "God is calling . . . God is calling." Jesus said the same thing when asked to comment on the natural disasters of his day. In Luke 13:5 he said, *"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."* A theologian by the name of Dodd, once observed, "the god of the Apocalypse can hardly be recognized as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁹ To which Oswalt says, "The imagery is gruesome in its vividness; it says to us that we should do everything in our power to become part of his people and not be among his enemies."¹⁰

I think Mark Dever is right when he says that "perhaps the horrible judgment can only fully seem right to us in heaven." He adds, "Certainly none of us here and now know every real wrong done in every place at any time by every one who has ever lived. Nor do we have the moral character to know how wrong—wrong is. But the God of the Bible does. He stands as an eternal, ever-present, ever-truthful witness, and an ever-wise, ever-merciful, ever-just judge."¹¹ Why are his garments stained red? Because when Jesus comes back he is coming back to judge and to once and for all conquer sin and evil and to deliver his people.

Where Wrath and Mercy Meet

I am comforted with the thought that the story of the Bible does not end with *“it is appointed unto man once to die and then to face the judgment.”* Clearly from the context of this passage the blood that stains the uniform of this Divine Warrior is the blood that comes from those who oppose God and his people. But we know that this is not the first time his uniform was stained with blood. We must not forget that this is the same one who poured out his own blood for our sake. Isaiah 53:12 says, *“he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many.”*

On Sunday morning, September 15, 1963 a group of about 200 people were doing what we are doing right now. They gathered together as a church family to attend their weekly services at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. It happened to be the Sunday School hour. At precisely 10:22 a.m. a bomb was detonated on the church’s east side, spraying mortar and bricks from the front of the church and caving in its interior walls.

The vast majority of the people were able to escape without injury. But once the dust settled the bodies of four young girls were found beneath the rubble in a basement bathroom. The names of these girls were Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson (each were 14 years old) and 11 year old Denise McNair. Ten year old Sarah Collins was also with them in that bathroom. She lost her right eye in the blast, but she survived. The bomb had been planted in this predominantly black church by members of the Ku Klux Klan. There was a righteous anger that bubbled over as a result of this crime that catalyzed the Civil Rights movement.

A group of white girls from Wales, of all places, was moved by what they heard happened in Birmingham. They wanted to do something and so they started collecting money and a famous artist got wind of what they were trying to do and so he offered his services. As a result \$300,000 was collected and the artist was commissioned to make a stained glass window with the image of a black Jesus crucified on the cross. It was to symbolize that Jesus identified with those who were oppressed—something Isaiah makes very clear to us . . . Something Jesus makes very clear to us. The words at the bottom of the window reflect his words, “You Do it To Me!”

But I want you to notice the way the hands are positioned on this work of art. One hand is held out like a wall and it is holding back the judgment of God on those who deserve it. That is exactly what is happening on the cross. Jesus Christ absorbed the wrath of

God—the judgement we have been talking about—so that we don't have to come under God's judgment. Then notice the other hand. It is held open as a gesture to anyone who repents of their sin and turns in faith to Jesus. The offer is that God would freely forgive them of their sin and his wrath would be removed. Where does wrath and mercy meet? It meets at Jesus. It meets at the cross. It meets at his return. Jesus said it this way in John 3:36, "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God remains on him.*" Oswalt says, "Sin and evil will be converted or destroyed."¹² This judgment that is described in Isaiah will be your judgment if you do not avail yourself of his death.

Come and see, come and see
Come and see the King of love
See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer as he lifts the cruel cross
Lone and friendless now he climbs in agony

Come and weep, come and mourn
For your sin that pierced him here
So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail
All our pride, all our greed
All our fallenness and shame
And the Lord has laid the punishment on him

Man of heaven, born to earth
To restore us to your heaven
Here we bow in awe beneath your searching eyes
From our tears comes our joy
From your death our life shall spring
By your resurrection power we shall rise

We worship at your feet
Where wrath and mercy meet
And a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream
For us he was made sin
Oh, help me take it in
Deep wounds of love cry out "Father, forgive"
I worship, I worship the lamb that was slain¹³

Conclusion

Who is this who comes? It is Jesus Christ our Lord. He died! He has risen! He is coming again! Why are his garments stained red? The day of vengeance and the year of redemption has come. Do not delay. On the cross, Jesus has absorbed the wrath of God and he offers his hand of forgiveness to all who humble themselves and turn to Jesus in faith.

Repent of your sin.

Rely on what Jesus has done for you on the cross.

Submit to him as the Lord and Ruler of your life.

To reject this offer means that you remain in your sin and are condemned by God and you face death and judgment. But if you receive his gracious offer, the promise is that you are forgiven of your sins and you will have eternal life.

¹Paul Tripp “If God Weren’t Angry” www.thegospelcoalition.org November 20, 2011

²Ibid

³Ibid

⁴John Oswalt *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 596

⁵James Boice *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986) 705

⁶Mark Dever “The Wrath of Almighty God” Sermon preached at Ocean City Bible Conference, September 11, 2018

⁷John Piper *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006) 20

⁸Oswalt, 597

⁹C. H. Dodd *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1936) 86

¹⁰Oswalt, 598

¹¹Dever

¹²Oswalt 596

¹³Graeme Kendrick *Come and See* <https://www.invubu.com/music/show/song/Graham-Kendrick/Come-And-See.html>

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What is your favorite kind of candy? Why?
2. Which of these emotions best describe what you are feeling: sad, angry, scared, happy, excited, tender? Why are you feeling this way?
3. What did you take from the sermon on Sunday?

Diving Into The Word

4. Read Isaiah 63:1 and 2 Peter 3:1-13. How should we live in light of the promised return of Jesus? What do you think it looks like “to keep watch” for his return?
5. Read Isaiah 63:2-6 and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9. What do you make of the wrath of God? Why do you think God is angry? Why do you think many people are offended at the idea that God might be angry over their sin?
6. Read Matthew 26:39 and 42. What was “the cup” Jesus was referring to? (See Revelation 14:10). How does this impact the way you look at the cross. Read the poem at the end of the sermon and reflect on what it tells you about Jesus and the cross.
7. Read Luke 13:1-5. How does the coming wrath help us understand current events? How is it fuel for evangelism?

Taking It Home

8. What is one thing you are taking with you from your discussion?
9. Share the name of someone in your life who is yet to come to faith in Christ. Form a list as a group and commit to pray for these people and for opportunity to show and share the love of Jesus with them.