

CHAPTER 63

In this chapter we have,

I. God coming towards his people in ways of mercy and deliverance, and this is to be joined to the close of the foregoing chapter, where it was said to Zion, “Behold, thy salvation comes;” for here it is shown how it comes (v. 1-6).

II. God's people meeting him with their devotions, and addressing themselves to him with suitable affections; and this part of the chapter is carried on to the close of the next. In this we have,

- 1.** A thankful acknowledgment of the great favours God had bestowed upon them (v. 7).
- 2.** The magnifying of these favours, from the consideration of God's relation to them (v. 8), his compassionate concern for them (v. 9), their unworthiness (v. 10), and the occasion which it gave both him and them to call to mind former mercies (v. 11-14).
- 3.** A very humble and earnest prayer to God to appear for them in their present distress, pleading God's mercy (v. 15), their relation to him (v. 16), their desire towards him (v. 17), and the insolence of their enemies (v. 18, 19). So that, upon the whole, we learn to embrace God's promises with an active faith, and then to improve them, and make use of them, both in prayers and praises.

ISAIAH 63:1-6

THE TRIUMPHS OF THE MESSIAH

It is a glorious victory that is here enquired into first and then accounted for.

1. It is a victory obtained by the providence of God over the enemies of Israel; over the Babylonians (say some), whom Cyrus conquered and God by him, and they will have the prophet to make the first discovery of him in his triumphant return when he is in the country of Edom: but this can by

no means be admitted, because the country of Babylon is always spoken of as the land of the north, whereas Edom lay south from Jerusalem, so that the conqueror would not return through that country; the victory therefore is obtained over the Edomites themselves, who had triumphed in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (^{<310>}Psalm 137:7) and cut off those who, making their way as far as they could from the enemy, escaped to the Edomites (^{<311>}Obadiah 1:12, 13), and were therefore reckoned with when Babylon was; for no doubt that prophecy was accomplished, though we do not meet in history with the accomplishment of it (^{<240>}Jeremiah 49:13), *Bozrah shall become a desolation*. Yet this victory over Edom is put as an instance or specimen of the like victories obtained over other nations that had been enemies to Israel. This over the Edomites is named for the sake of the old enmity of Esau against Jacob (^{<1274>}Genesis 27:41) and perhaps with an allusion to David's glorious triumphs over the Edomites, by which it should seem, more than by any other of his victories, he *got himself a name*, Psalm 60, *title*, ^{<1083>}2 Samuel 8:13, 14. But this is not all:

2. It is a victory obtained by the grace of God in Christ over our spiritual enemies. We find the garments dipped in blood adorning him whose name is called *The Word of God*, ^{<693>}Revelation 19:13. And who that is we know very well; for it is through him that we are more than conquerors over those principalities and powers which on the cross he spoiled and triumphed over.

In this representation of the victory we have,

I. An admiring question put to the conqueror, v. 1, 2. It is put by the church, or by the prophet in the name of the church. He sees a mighty hero returning in triumph from a bloody engagement, and makes bold to ask him two questions: —

1. Who he is. He observes him to come from the country of Edom, to come in such apparel as was glorious to a soldier, not embroidered or laced, but besmeared with blood and dirt. He observes that he does not come as one either frightened or fatigued, but that he *travels in the greatness of his strength*, altogether unbroken.

*Triumphant and victorious he appears,
And honour in his looks and habit wears.
How strong he treads! how stately doth he go!
Pompous and solemn is his pace,
And full of majesty, as is his face;
Who is this mighty hero — who!
— Mr. Norris*

The question, *Who is this?* perhaps means the same with that which Joshua put to the same person when he appeared to him with his sword drawn (^{<MR3>}Joshua 5:13): *Art thou for us or for our adversaries?* Or, rather, the same with that which Israel put in a way of adoration (^{<DS1>}Exodus 15:11): *Who is a God like unto thee?*

2. The other question it, “*Wherefore art thou red in thy apparel? What hard service hast thou been engaged in, that thou carriest with thee these marks of toil and danger?*” Is it possible that one who has such majesty and terror in his countenance should be employed in the mean and servile work of *treading the wine-press*? Surely it is not. That which is really the glory of the Redeemer seems, *primf facie* — *at first*, a disparagement to him, as it would be to a mighty prince to do the work of the wine-dressers and husbandmen; for he *took upon him the form of a servant*, and carried with him the marks of servitude.

II. An admirable answer returned by him.

1. He tells who he is: *I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.* He is the Saviour. God was Israel's Saviour out of the hand of their oppressors; the Lord Jesus is ours; his name, *Jesus*, signifies a *Saviour*, for he *saves his people from their sins*. In the salvation wrought he will have us to take notice,

(1.) Of the truth of his promise, which is therein performed: He speaks *in righteousness*, and will therefore make good every word that he has spoken with which he will have us to compare what he does, that, setting the word and the work the one over against the other, what he does may ratify what he has said and what he has said may justify what he does.

(2.) Of the efficacy of his power, which is therein exerted: He is *mighty to save*, able to bring about the promised redemption, whatever difficulties and oppositions may lie in the way of it.

*'Tis I who to my promise faithful stand,
I, who the powers of death, hell, and the grave,
Have foil'd with this all-conquering hand,
I, who most ready am, and mighty too, to save.*
— Mr. Norris

2. He tells how he came to appear in this hue (v. 3): *I have trodden the wine-press alone*. Being compared to one that treads in the wine-fat, such is his condescension, in the midst of his triumphs, that he does not scorn the comparison, but admits it and carries it on. He does indeed *tread the wine-press*, but it is *the great wine-press of the wrath of God* (Revelation 14:19), in which we sinners deserved to be cast; but Christ was pleased to cast our enemies into it, and to *destroy him that had the power of death*, that he might deliver us. And of this the bloody work which God sometimes made among the enemies of the Jews, and which is here foretold, was a type and figure. Observe the account the conqueror gives of his victory.

(1.) He gains the victory purely by his own strength: *I have trodden the wine-press alone*, v. 3. When God delivered his people and destroyed their enemies, if he made use of instruments, he did not need them. But among his people, for whom the salvation was to be wrought, no assistance offered itself; they were weak and helpless, and had no ability to do any thing for their own relief; they were desponding and listless, and had no heart to do any thing; they were not disposed to give the least stroke or struggle for liberty, neither the captives themselves nor any of their friends for them (v. 5): “*I looked, and there was none to help*, as one would have expected, nothing of a bold active spirit appeared among them; nay, there was not only none to lead, but, which was more strange, *there was none to uphold*, none that would come in as a second, that had the courage to join with Cyrus against their oppressors; *therefore my arm brought about the salvation; not by created might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, my own arm.” Note, God can help when all other helpers fail; nay, that is his time to help, and therefore for that very reason he will put forth his own power so much the more gloriously. But this is most fully applicable to Christ's victories over our spiritual enemies, which he obtained by a single combat. He trod the wine-press of his Father's wrath alone, and triumphed over principalities and powers *in himself*, Colossians 2:15. *Of the people there was none with him*; for, when he entered the lists with the powers of darkness, *all his disciples forsook him*

and fled. There was *non to help*, none that could, none that durst; and he might well wonder that among the children of men, whose concern it was, there was not only *none to uphold*, but that there were so many to oppose and hinder it if they could.

(2.) He undertakes the war purely out of his own zeal. It is *in his anger*, it is *in his fury*, that he *treads down* his enemies (v. 3), and that *fury upholds him* and carries him on in this enterprise, v. 5. God wrought salvation for the oppressed Jews purely because he was very angry with the oppressing Babylonians, angry at their idolatries and sorceries, their pride and cruelty, and the injuries they did to his people, and, as they increased their abominations and grew more insolent and outrageous, his anger increased to fury. Our Lord Jesus wrought out our redemption in a holy zeal for the honour of his Father and the happiness of mankind, and a holy indignation at the daring attempts Satan had made upon both; this zeal and indignation upheld him throughout his whole undertaking. Two branches there were of this zeal that animated him: —

[1.] He had a zeal against his and his people's enemies: *The day of vengeance is in my heart* (v. 4), the day fixed in the eternal counsels for taking vengeance on them; this was written in his heart, so that he could not forget it, could not let it slip; his heart was full of it, and it lay as a charge, as a weight, upon him, which made him push on this holy war with so much vigour. Note, There is a day fixed for divine vengeance, which may be long deferred, but will come at last; and we may be content to wait for it, for the Redeemer himself does so, though his heart is upon it.

[2.] He had a zeal for his people, and for all that he designed to make sharers in the intended salvation: "*The year of my redeemed has come*, the year appointed for their redemption." There was a year fixed for the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and God kept time to a day (^(~~TIME~~) Exodus 12:41); so there was for their release out of Babylon (^(~~TIME~~) Daniel 9:2); so there was for Christ's coming to destroy the works of the devil; so there is for all the deliverances of the church, and the deliverer has an eye to it. Observe, *First*, With what pleasure he speaks of his people; they are his *redeemed*; they are his own, dear to him. Though their redemption is not yet wrought out, yet he calls them *his redeemed*, because it shall as surely be done as if it were done already. *Secondly*, With what pleasure he speaks of his people's redemption; how glad he is that *the time has come*, though

he is likely to meet with a sharp encounter. “Now that the year of my redeemed has come, *Lo, I come*; delay shall be no longer. *Now will I arise*, saith the Lord. *Now thou shalt see what I will do to Pharaoh.*” Note, The promised salvation must be patiently waited for till the time appointed comes; yet we must attend the promises with our prayers. Does Christ say, *Surely I come quickly*; let our hearts reply, *Even so come*; let the *year of the redeemed come*.

(3.) He will obtain a complete victory over them all.

[1.] Much is already done; for he now appears *red in his apparel*; such abundance of blood is shed that the conqueror's garments are all stained with it. This was predicted, long before, by dying Jacob, concerning *Shiloh* (that is, *Christ*), that he should *wash his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes*, which perhaps this alludes to, ^(Gen)Genesis 49:11.

*With ornamental drops bedeck'd I stood,
And wrote my vict'ry with my en'my's blood.
— Mr. Norris*

In the destruction of the antichristian powers we meet with abundance of blood shed (^(Rev)Revelation 14:20, 19:13), which yet, according to the dialect of prophecy, may be understood spiritually, and doubtless so may this here.

[2.] More shall yet be done (v. 6): *I will tread down the people* that yet stand it out against me, *in my anger*; for the victorious Redeemer, when the *year of the redeemed shall have come*, will go on *conquering and to conquer*, ^(Rev)Revelation 6:2. When he begins he will also make an end. Observe how he will complete his victories over the enemies of his church. *First*, He will infatuate them; he will make them drunk, so that there shall be neither sense nor steadiness in their counsels; they shall drink of the cup of his fury, and that shall intoxicate them: or he will make them *drunk with their own blood*, ^(Rev)Revelation 17:6. Let those that make themselves drunk with the cup of riot (and then they are in their fury) repent and reform, lest God make them drunk with the *cup of trembling*, the cup of his fury. *Secondly*, He will enfeeble them; he will *bring down their strength*, and so bring them down *to the earth*; for what strength can hold out against Omnipotence?

ISAIAH 63:7-14

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF DIVINE GOODNESS

The prophet is here, in the name of the church, taking a review, and making a thankful recognition, of God's dealings with his church all along, ever since he founded it, before he comes, in the latter end of this chapter and in the next, as a watchman upon the walls, earnestly to pray to God for his compassion towards her in her present deplorable state; and it was usual for God's people, in their prayers, thus to look back.

I. Here is a general acknowledgment of God's goodness to them all along, v. 7. It was said, in general, of God's prophets and people (²³¹⁶Isaiah 62:6) that they *made mention of the Lord*; now here we are told what it is in God that they do especially delight to make mention of, and that is his goodness, which the prophet here so makes mention of as if he thought he could never say enough of it. He mentions the *kindness of God* (which never appeared so evident, so eminent, as in his love to mankind in *sending his Son* to save us, ³⁰⁰⁴Titus 3:4), his loving-kindness, kindness that shows itself in every thing that is endearing; nay, so plenteous are the springs, and so various the streams, of divine mercy, that he speaks of it in the plural number — *his loving-kindnesses*; for, if we would count the fruits of his loving-kindness, they are *more in number than the sand*. With his loving-kindnesses he mentions his *praises*, that is, the thankful acknowledgments which the saints make of his loving-kindness, and the angels too. It must be mentioned, to God's honour, what a tribute of praise is paid to him by all his creatures in consideration of his loving-kindness. See how copiously he speaks,

1. Of the goodness that is from God, the gifts of his loving-kindness — *all that the Lord has bestowed* on us in particular, relating to life and godliness, in our personal and family capacity. Let every man speak for himself, speak as he has found, and he must own that he has had a great deal bestowed upon him by the divine bounty. But we must also mention the favours bestowed upon his church, his *great goodness towards the house of Israel, which he has bestowed on them*. Note, We must bless God for the mercies enjoyed by others as well as for those enjoyed by ourselves, and reckon that bestowed on ourselves which is bestowed on *the house of Israel*.

2. Of the goodness that is in God. God does good because he is good; what he bestowed upon us must be traced up to the original; it is *according to his mercies* (not according to our merits) and *according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses*, which can never be spent. Thus we should magnify God's goodness, and speak honourably of it, not only when we plead it (as David, ^{<50>}Psalm 51:1), but when we praise it.

II. Here is particular notice taken of the steps of God's mercy to Israel ever since it was formed into a nation.

1. The expectations God had concerning them that they would conduct themselves well, v. 8. When he brought them out of Egypt and took them into covenant with himself he said, "*Surely they are my people*, I take them as such, and am willing to hope they will approve themselves so, *children that will not lie*," that will not *dissemble with God* in their covenantings with him, nor treacherously depart from him by breaking their covenant and starting aside like a broken bow. They said, more than once, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do and will be obedient*; and thereupon he took them to be his peculiar people, saying, *Surely they will not lie*. God deals fairly and faithfully with them, and therefore expects they should deal so with him. They are *children of the covenant* (^{<48>}Acts 3:25), children of those that clave unto the Lord, and therefore it may be hoped that they will tread in the steps of their fathers' constancy. Note, God's people are *children that will not lie*; for those that will are not his children but the devil's.

2. The favour he showed them with an eye to these expectations: *So he was their Saviour* out of the bondage of Egypt and all the calamities of their wilderness-state, and many a time since he had been their Saviour. See particularly (v. 9) what he did for them as their Saviour.

(1.) The principle that moved him to work salvation for them; it was *in his love and in his pity*, out of mere compassion to them and a tender affection for them, not because he either needed them or could be benefited by them. This is strangely expressed here: *In all their affliction he was afflicted*; not that the Eternal Mind is capable of grieving or God's infinite blessedness of suffering the least damage or diminution (God cannot be afflicted); but thus he is pleased to show forth the love and concern he has for his people in their affliction; thus far he sympathizes with them, that he takes what injury is done to them as done to himself and will reckon for it

accordingly. Their cries move him (^{<087>}Exodus 3:7), and he appears for them as vigorously as if he were pained in their pain. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* This is matter of great comfort to God's people in their affliction that God is so far from *afflicting willingly* (^{<283>}Lamentations 3:33) that, if they humble themselves under his hand, he is *afflicted in their affliction*, as the tender parents are in the severe operations which the case of a sick child calls for. There is another reading of these words in the original: *In all their affliction there was no affliction*; though they were in great affliction, yet the property of it was so altered by the grace of God sanctifying it to them for their good, the rigour of it was so mitigated and it was so allayed and balanced with mercies, they were so wonderfully supported and comforted under it, and it proved so short, and ended so well, that it was in effect no affliction. The troubles of the saints are not that to them which they are to others; they are not afflictions, but medicines; saints are enabled to call them *light*, and *but for a moment*, and, with an eye to heaven as all in all, to make nothing of them.

(2.) The person employed in their salvation — *the angel of his face*, or presence. Some understand it of a created angel. The highest angel in heaven, even the angel of his presence, that attends next the throne of his glory, is not thought too great, too good, to be sent on this errand. Thus the little ones' angels are said to be those that *always behold the face of our Father*, ^{<480>}Matthew 18:10. But this is rather to be understood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, that angel of whom God spoke to Moses (^{<020>}Exodus 23:20, 21), whose *voice Israel was to obey*. He is called *Jehovah*, ^{<021>}Exodus 13:21; 14:21, 24. He is the angel of the covenant, God's messenger to the world, ^{<301>}Malachi 3:1. He is the *angel of God's face*, for he is the *express image of his person*; and the glory of God shines in the face of Christ. He that was to work out the eternal salvation, as an earnest of that, wrought out the temporal salvations that were typical of it.

(3.) The progress and perseverance of this favour. He not only redeemed them out of their bondage, but *he bore them and carried them all the days of old*; they were weak, but he supported them by his power, sustained them by his bounty; when they were burdened, and ready to sink, he bore them up; in the wars they made upon the nations he stood by them and bore them out; though they were peevish, he bore with them and suffered their manners, ^{<413>}Acts 13:18. He carried them as the nursing father does the child, though they would have tired any arms but his; he carried them as the eagle her young upon her wings, ^{<021>}Deuteronomy 32:11. And it was

a long time that he was *troubled with them* (if we may so speak): it was *all the days of old*; his care of them was not at an end even when they had grown up and were settled in Canaan. All this was *in his love and pity, ex mero motu — of his mere good-will*; he loved them because he would love them, as he says, ^{<800>}Deuteronomy 7:7, 8.

3. Their disingenuous conduct towards him, and the trouble they thereby brought upon themselves (v. 10): *But they rebelled*. Things looked very hopeful and promising; one would have thought that they should have continued dutiful children to God, and then there was no doubt but he would have continued a gracious Father to them; but here is a sad change on both sides, and *on them be the breach*.

(1.) They revolted from their allegiance to God and took up arms against him: *They rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit* with their unbelief and murmuring, besides the iniquity of the golden calf; and this had been their way and manner ever since. Though he was ready to say of them, *They will not lie*, though he had done so much for them, *borne them and carried them*, yet they thus ill requited him, like *foolish people and unwise*, ^{<5316>}Deuteronomy 32:6. This grieved him, ^{<950>}Psalm 95:10. The ungrateful rebellions of God's children against him are a vexation to his Holy Spirit.

(2.) Thereupon he justly withdrew his protection, and not only so, but made war upon them, as a prince justly does upon the rebels. He who had been so much their friend was *turned to be their enemy and fought against them*, by one judgment after another, both in the wilderness and after their settlement in Canaan. See the malignity and mischievousness of sin; it makes God an enemy even to those for whom he has done the part of a good friend, and makes him angry who was all love and pity. See the folly of sinners; they wilfully lose him for a friend who is the most desirable friend, and make him their enemy who is the most formidable enemy. This refers especially to those calamities that were of late brought upon them by their captivity in Babylon for their idolatries and other sins. That which is both the original and the great aggravation of their troubles was that God was *turned to be their enemy*.

4. A particular reflection made, on this occasion, upon what God did for them when he first formed them into a people: *Then he remembered the days of old*, v. 11.

(1.) This may be understood either of the people or of God.

[1.] We may understand it of the people. Israel then (spoken of as a single person) *remembered the days of old*, looked into their Bibles, read the story of God's bringing their fathers out of Egypt, considered it more closely than ever they did before, and reasoned upon it, as Gideon did (^{<063>}Judges 6:13), *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of? "Where is he that brought them up out of Egypt? Is he not as able to bring us up out of Babylon? Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Where is the Lord God of our fathers?"* This they consider as an inducement and an encouragement to them to repent and return to him; their fathers were a provoking people and yet found him a pardoning God; and why may not they find him so if they return to him? They also use it as a plea with God in prayer for the turning again of their captivity, like that ^{<250>}Isaiah 51:9, 10. Note, When the present days are dark and cloudy it is good to *remember the days of old*, to recollect our own and others' experiences of the divine power and goodness and make use of them, to look back upon *the years of the right hand of the Most High* (^{<375>}Psalm 77:5, 10), and remember that he is *God, and changes not*.

[2.] We may understand it of God; he put himself in mind of the days of old, of his covenant with Abraham (^{<062>}Leviticus 26:42); he said, *Where is he that brought Israel up out of the sea?* stirring up himself to come and save them with this consideration, "Why should not I appear for them now as I did for their fathers, who were as undeserving, as ill-deserving, as they are?" See how far off divine mercy will go, how far back it will look, to find out a reason for doing good to his people, when no present considerations appear but what make against them. Nay, it makes that a reason for relieving them which might have been used as a reason for abandoning them. He might have said, "I have delivered them formerly, but they have again brought trouble upon themselves (^{<109>}Proverbs 19:19); there *I will deliver them no more,*" ^{<073>}Judges 10:13. But no; mercy rejoices against judgment, and turns the argument the other way: "I have formerly delivered them and therefore will now."

(2.) Which way soever we take it, whether the people plead it with God or God with himself, let us view the particulars, and they agree very much with the confession and prayer which the children of the captivity made upon a solemn fast-day (^{<405>}Nehemiah 9:5. etc.), which may serve as a comment on these verses which call to mind *Moses and his people*, that is, what God did by Moses for his people, especially in bringing them through the Red Sea, for that is it that is here most insisted on; for it was a

work which he much gloried in and which his people therefore may in a particular manner encourage themselves with the remembrance of.

[1.] God *led them by the right hand of Moses* (v. 12) and the wonder-working rod in his hand. ^{<4972>}Psalm 77:20, *Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses*. It was not Moses that led them, any more than it was Moses that fed them (^{<4972>}John 6:32), but God by Moses; for it was he that qualified Moses for, called him to, assisted and prospered him in that great undertaking. Moses is here called *the shepherd of his flock*; God was the owner of the flock and the chief shepherd of Israel (^{<4981>}Psalm 80:1); but Moses was a shepherd under him, and he was inured to labour and patience, and so fitted for this pastoral care, by his being trained up to *keep the flock of his father Jethro*. Herein he was a type of Christ the good shepherd, that *lays down his life for the sheep*, which was more than Moses did for Israel, though he did a great deal for them.

[2.] He *put his holy Spirit within him; the Spirit of God was among them*, and not only his providence, but his grace, did work for them. ^{<4982>}Nehemiah 9:20, *Thou gavest thy good Spirit to instruct them*. The spirit of wisdom and courage, as well as the Spirit of prophecy, was put into Moses, to qualify him for that service among them to which he was called; and some of his spirit was put upon the seventy elders, ^{<4987>}Numbers 11:17. This was a great blessing to Israel, that they had among them not only inspired writings, but inspired men.

[3.] He carried them safely through the Red Sea, and thereby saved them out of the hands of Pharaoh. *First, He divided the water before them* (v. 12), so that it gave them not only passage, but protection, not only opened them a lane, but erected them a wall on either side. *Secondly, He led them through the deep as a horse in the wilderness, or in the plain* (v. 13); they and their wives and children, with all their baggage, went as easily and readily through the bottom of the sea (though we may suppose it muddy or stony, or both) as a horse goes along upon even ground; so that they did not stumble, though it was an untrodden path, which neither they nor any one else ever went before. If God make us a way, he will make it plain and level; the road he opens to his people he will lead them in. *Thirdly, To complete the mercy, he brought them up out of the sea*, v. 11. Though the ascent, it is likely, was very steep, dirty, slippery, and unconquerable (at least by the women and children, and the men, considering how they were loaded, ^{<4973>}Exodus 12:34, and how fatigued), yet God by his power

brought them up from the depths of the earth; and it was a kind of resurrection to them; it was as *life from the dead*.

[4.] He brought them safely to a place of rest: *As a beast goes down into the valley*, carefully and gradually, so *the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest*. Many a time in their march through the wilderness they had resting-places provided for them by the direction of the Spirit of the Lord in Moses, v. 11. And at length they were made to rest finally in Canaan, and the Spirit of the Lord gave them that rest according to the promise. It is by the Spirit of the Lord that God's Israel are caused to return to God and repose in him as their rest.

[5.] All this he did for them by his own power, for his own praise. *First*, It was by his own power, as the God of nature, that has all the powers of nature at his command; he did it with his glorious arm, *the arm of his gallantry*, or *bravery*; so the word signifies. It was not Moses's rod, but God's glorious arm, that did it. *Secondly*, It was for his own praise, to *make himself an everlasting name* (v. 12), *a glorious name* (v. 14), that he might be glorified, everlastingly glorified, upon this account. This is that which God is doing in the world with his glorious arm, he is making to himself a glorious name, and it shall last to endless ages, when the most celebrated names of the great ones of the earth shall be written in the dust.

~~2315~~ ISAIAH 63:15-19

EARNEST PLEADINGS

The foregoing praises were intended as an introduction to this prayer, which is continued to the end of the next chapter, and it is an affectionate, importunate, pleading prayer. It is calculated for the time of the captivity. As they had promises, so they had prayers, prepared for them against that time of need, that they might take with them words in turning to the Lord, and say unto him what he himself taught them to say, in which they might the better hope to prevail, the words being of God's own inditing. Some good interpreters think this prayer looks further, and that it expresses the complaints of the Jews under their last and final rejection from God and destruction by the Romans; for there is one passage in it (~~2304~~ Isaiah 64:4) which is applied to the grace of the gospel by the apostle (~~409~~ 1 Corinthians

2:9), that grace for the rejecting of which they were rejected. In these verses we may observe,

I. The petitions they put up to God.

1. That he would take cognizance of their case and of the desires of their souls towards him: *Look down from heaven, and behold*, v. 15. They knew very well that God sees all, but they prayed that he would regard them, would condescend to favour them, would look upon them with an eye of compassion and concern, as he looked upon the affliction of his people in Egypt when he was about to appear for their deliverance. In begging that he would only look down upon them and behold them they did in effect appeal to his justice against their enemies, and pray for judgment against them (as Jehoshaphat, ~~2~~2 Chronicles 20:11, 12, *Behold, how they reward us. Wilt thou not judge them?*), implicitly confiding in his mercy and wisdom as to the way in which he will relieve them (~~25~~Psalm 25:18, *Look upon my affliction and my pain*): *Look down from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory*. God's holiness is his glory. Heaven is his habitation, the throne of his glory, where he most manifests his glory, and whence he is said to look down upon the earth, ~~33~~Psalm 33:14. His holiness is in a special manner celebrated there by the blessed angels (ch. 6:3; ~~4~~Revelation 4:8); there his holy ones attend him, and are continually about him; so that it is the *habitation of his holiness*. It is an encouragement to all his praying people, who desire to be holy as he is holy, that he *dwells in a holy place*.

2. That he would take a course for their relief (v. 17): “*Return; change thy way towards us, and proceed not in thy controversy with us; return in mercy, and let us have not only a gracious look towards us, but thy gracious presence with us.*” God's people dread nothing more than his departures from them and desire nothing more than his returns to them.

II. The complaints they made to God. Two things they complained of: —

1. That they were given up to themselves, and God's grace did not recover them, v. 17. It is a strange expostulation, “*Why hast thou made us to err from thy ways*, that is, many among us, the generality of us; and this complaint we have all of us some cause to make that *thou hast hardened our heart from thy fear.*” Some make it to be the language of those among them that were impious and profane; when the prophets reproved them for the *error of their ways*, their *hardness of heart*, and *contempt of God's*

word and commandments, they with a daring impudence charged their sin upon God, made him the author of it, and asked *why doth he then find fault?* Note, Those are wicked indeed that lay the blame of their wickedness upon God. But I rather take it to be the language of those among them that lamented the unbelief and impenitence of their people, not accusing God of being the author of their wickedness, but complaining of it to him. They owned that they had *erred from God's ways*, that their hearts had been *hardened from his fear*, that they had not received the impressions which the fear of God ought to make upon them and this was the cause of all their errors from his ways; or *from his fear* may mean from the true worship of God, and that is a hard heart indeed which is alienated from the service of a God so incontestably great and good. Now this they complain of, as their great misery and burden, that God had for their sins left them to this, had permitted them to *err from his ways* and had justly withheld his grace, so that their *hearts were hardened from his fear*. When they ask, *Why hast thou done this?* it is not as charging him with wrong, but lamenting it as a sore judgment. God had *caused them to err and hardened their hearts*, not only by withdrawing his Spirit from them, because they had grieved, and vexed, and quenched him (v. 10), but by a judicial sentence upon them (*Go, make the heart of this people fat*, ⁽²⁰⁶⁾Isaiah 6:9, 10) and by his providences concerning them, which had proved sad occasions for their departure from him. David complains of his banishment, because in it he was in effect bidden to *go and serve other gods*, ⁽¹²³⁾1 Samuel 26:19. Their troubles had alienated many of them from God, and prejudiced them against his service; and, because the *rod of the wicked had lain long on their lot*, they were ready to *put forth their hand unto iniquity* (⁽¹³³⁾Psalms 125:3), and this was the thing they complained most of; their afflictions were their temptations, and to many of them invincible ones. Note, Convinced consciences complain most of spiritual judgments and dread that most in an affliction which draws them from God and duty.

2. That they were given up to their enemies, and God's providence did not rescue and relieve them (v. 18): *Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary*. As it was a grief to them that in their captivity the generality of them had lost their affection to God's worship, and had their hearts hardened from it by their affliction, so it was a further grief that they were deprived of their opportunities of worshipping God in solemn assemblies. They complained not so much of the adversaries treading down their

houses and cities as of their treading down God's sanctuary, because thereby God was immediately affronted, and they were robbed of the comforts they valued most and took most pleasure in.

III. The pleas they urged with God for mercy and deliverance.

1. They pleaded the tender compassion God used to show to his people and his ability and readiness to appear for them, v. 15. The most prevailing arguments in prayer are those that are taken *from God himself*; such these are. *Where is thy zeal and thy strength?* God has a zeal for his own glory, and for the comfort of his people; his name is *Jealous*; and he is a jealous God; and he has strength proportionable to secure his own glory and the interest of his people, in despite of all opposition. Now where are these? Have they not formerly appeared? Why do they not appear now? It cannot be that divine zeal, which is infinitely wise and just, should be cooled, that divine strength, which is infinite, should be weakened. Nay, his people had experienced not only *his zeal and his strength, but the sounding of his bowels*, or rather the yearning of them, such a degree of compassion to them as in men causes a commotion and agitation within them, as ^{<318>}Hosea 11:8, *My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together*; and ^{<320>}Jeremiah 31:20, *My bowels are troubled (or sound) for him*. “Thus God used to be affected towards his people, and to express a *multitude of mercies towards them*; but where are they now? *Are they restrained?* ^{<379>}Psalm 77:9. Has God, who so often remembered to be gracious, now forgotten to be so? *Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* It can never be.” Note, We may ground good expectations of further mercy upon our experiences of former mercy.

2. They pleaded God's relation to them as their Father (v. 16): “Thy tender mercies are not restrained, for they are the tender mercies of a father, who, though he may be for a time displeased with his child, will yet, through the force of natural affection, soon be reconciled. *Doubtless thou art our Father*, and therefore thy bowels will yearn towards us.” Such good thoughts of God as these we should always keep up in our hearts. *However it be, yet God is good*; for he is our Father. They own themselves fatherless if he be not their Father, and so cast themselves upon him with whom *the fatherless findeth mercy*, ^{<340>}Hosea 14:3. It was the honour of their nation that *they had Abraham to their father* (^{<400>}Matthew 3:9), who was the friend of God, and Israel, who was a prince with God; but what the better were they for that unless they had God himself for their Father?

“Abraham and Israel cannot help us; they have not the power that God has; they are dead long since, and are *ignorant of us, and acknowledge us not*; they know not what our case is, nor what our wants are, and therefore know not which way to do us a kindness. If Abraham and Israel were alive with us, they would intercede for us and advise us; but they have gone to the other world, and we know not that they have any communication at all with this world, and therefore they are not capable of doing us any kindness any further than that we have the honour of being called their children.” When the father is dead *his sons come to honour and he knows it not*, ^{<31>}Job 14:21. “But *thou, O Lord! art our Father still* (the fathers of our flesh may call themselves *ever-loving*; but they are not *ever-living*; it is God only that is the immortal Father, that always knows us, and is never at a distance from us), and therefore *our Redeemer from everlasting is thy name*, the name by which we will know and own thee. It is the name by which from of old thou hast been known; thy people have always looked upon thee as the God to whom they might appeal to redress their grievances and plead their cause. Nay” (according to the sense some give of this place), “though Abraham and Israel not only cannot, but would not, help us, thou wilt. They have not the pity thou hast. We are so degenerate and corrupt that Abraham and Israel would not own us for their children, yet we fly to thee as our Father. Abraham cast out his son Ishmael; Jacob disinherited his son Reuben and cursed Simeon and Levi; but our heavenly Father, in pardoning sin, is *God, and not man*,” ^{<31>}Hosea 11:9.

3. They pleaded God's interest in them, that he was their Lord, their owner and proprietor: “We are thy servants; what service we can do thou art entitled to, and therefore we ought not to serve strange kings and strange gods: *Return for thy servants' sake*.” As a father finds himself obliged by natural affection to relieve and protect his child, so a master thinks himself obliged in honour to rescue and protect his servant: “*We are thine* by the strongest engagements, as well as the highest endearments. Thou hast borne rule over us; therefore, Lord, assert thy own interest, maintain thy own right; for *we are called by thy name*, and therefore whither shall we go but to thee, to be righted and protected? *We are thine, save us* (^{<31>}Psalm 119:94), thy own, acknowledge us. We are the *tribes of thy inheritance*, not only thy servants, but thy tenants; we are thine, not only to do work for thee, but to pay rent to thee. The tribes of Israel are God's inheritance, whence issue the little praise and worship that he receives

from this lower world; and wilt thou suffer thy own servants and tenants to be thus abused?"

4. They pleaded that they had had but a short enjoyment of the land of promise and the privileges of the sanctuary (v. 18): *The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while*. From Abraham to David were but fourteen generations, and from David to the captivity but fourteen more (^{<4017>}Matthew 1:17), and that was but a little while in comparison with what might have been expected from the promise of the *land of Canaan for an everlasting possession* (^{<0178>}Genesis 17:8) and from the power that was put forth to bring them into that land and settle them in it. "Though we are *the people of thy holiness*, distinguished from other people and consecrated to thee, yet we are soon dislodged." But this they might thank themselves for; they were, in profession, the *people of God's holiness*, but it was their wickedness that turned them out of the possession of that land.

5. They pleaded that those who had and kept possession of their land were such as were strangers to God, such as he had no service or honour from: "*Thou never didst bear rule over them, nor did they ever yield thee any obedience; they were not called by thy name, but professed relation to other gods and were the worshippers of them. Will God suffer those that do not stand in any relation to him to trample upon those that do?*" Some give another reading of this: "*We have become as those over whom thou didst never bear rule and who were never called by thy name; we are rejected and abandoned, despised and trampled upon, as if we never had been in thy service nor had thy name called upon us.*" Thus the shield of *Saul was vilely cast away, as though he had not been anointed with oil*. But the covenant that seems to be forgotten shall be remembered again.