

When God Seems Silent – Is 63:15-64:12

Is 64; If you've been with us for any length of time, you're well aware that Isaiah is a book that's filled w/ all *kinds* of writing
From poetry and prophecy, to history and narrative – it's all there; Complete with the ups and downs of exhortation and encouragement, and back again

But in terms of raw emotion, I think this passage tops them all
B/c it's written like a person who is so beside themselves that they're almost incoherent
You know what I'm saying? Have you ever been there?
Have you ever been at a point in your life where you were so mad or sad, that your thoughts were all over the map and almost entirely disjointed?
I sure have; It's raw, it's painful, it's desperate, and it's messy

And that's exactly what we find here; It's a cry from the heart, the heart of Isaiah, on behalf of his people; Even us
And to make sense of it, I'm going to trace each thought through the passage as he introduces it, jumping from verse to verse when necessary . . .
Instead of working verse by verse

And the first thought we find, is that . . .

Sometimes God seems silent (63:15-16; 64:9b-12)

In fact, it's one of the reasons he's so distraught; 63:15; Speaking to God, he says . . .
[63:15] Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me. [16] For you are our Father [as in, pay attention to us God, we're your children], though Abraham does not know us, and Israel [another name for Jacob] does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

"The patriarchs of old may not know us personally, but *you* do, God; *They* may not consider us their children, but *you* do; So why the silence? Why so aloof?"

And then, after a bunch of other thoughts in the next few verses, he comes *back* to this one in 64:9b

Behold, please look, we are all your people. [10] Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. [11] Our holy and beautiful house [the temple], where our fathers praised you, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins. [12] Will you restrain yourself at these things, O LORD? Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

➤ It's a heart cry; A dark night of the soul; B/c sometimes God seems silent, doesn't he?
Almost withdrawn
Not that he is; But sometimes it seems that way
Sometimes it just doesn't seem like he's there; Or if he is, that he doesn't care

Other times, we just don't hear him; Like when he speaks with a still small voice in the midst of a storm; Or the business of our life drowns him out
Or, maybe he's *already* spoken and we just forgot it; Or it's in black and white (Bible) and we fail to see it; Or we check out
Whatever the case, sometimes God seems silent; And it's no fun; Even scary at times

What's more . . .

Sometimes God seems harsh (63:17-19; 64:7,12)

[63:17] O LORD, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Let's stop right there for a second

Certainly God is completely sovereign in our lives to *do* things like this; Like hardening people's hearts and turning them away from him; It's an explicit truth in the Bible
God told Moses as much in Ex 33 (v19), and the Apostle Paul expanded on it in Rom 9
Saying that God *has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills* (18); It's an explicit truth

But I don't think this is meant to be a proof of that

Rather, I think this is the irrational heart cry of someone who is grieved; So grieved, that they're shaking their fist and blaming God for anything and everything they can
"Lord, why do you do that? *Why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not?* Why God, why?" Have you been there?

➤ And then he says in v17b – *Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage* [as in restore us as a people, to our land, will you?]. *[18] Your holy people held possession for a little while; [we were there for a bit; but] our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary* [the temple; the focal point of our lives and worship].
[19] We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name.

"It's like we don't even exist, God; And never did; Persona non grata"

64:7b – *You have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.* IOW you're so harsh
And then v12b again – *Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?* So harshly

➤ Ever been there? Have you ever been at a place in your life when things are so bad, and you've lost so much perspective . . .
That you've been reduced to a fist-pounding puddle of tears? Through which you cry nothing but "why?" Why are you doing this to me? B/c that's where Isaiah was

Or how about those times when you well know that you're suffering God's discipline for the *sin* in your life, but it *still* seems harsh?

It happens; B/c we still sin, and God still loves us; Sanctifying us for *our* good, and his glory; Sometimes God seems harsh

And right along with that . . .

Sometimes God seems angry (64:5b,9)

64:5b – *Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?*

The order in the first part there, is *not* meant to imply a cause and effect – that b/c God was angry with them, they sinned; Rather, it's simply a statement of two facts
God was angry; And they sinned

And then Isaiah alludes to it again in v9a – *Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever.*
God was angry with them; Period; And sometimes he's angry with us

Like Jesus was on occasion with those in *his* day; And God is in ours, toward those who reject his invitation – Lk 14
And those who are ungodly and unrighteous – Rom 1:18; And those who break the law of the land – Rom 13:4; Sometimes God's angry with us

And our only saving grace, is *Jesus*; B/c he *appeases* God's wrath toward us
That's what the Bible means when it says he's *the propitiation* for our sins (1 Jn 2:2)

But that doesn't change the fact that sometimes he still *seems* angry – especially when the discipline and chastisement in our life seems harsh; Or his attention, lacking
Sometimes it seems that way; Sometimes God seems silent (**Summary**)

➤ But here's the deal – all is not always as it seems; Nor are we always thinking rightly
In fact, when these kind of thoughts and feelings crop up, it's vital that we respond *biblically*; According to what's *true*; Not according to what we feel
God is not silent; And when it seems that way . . .

Check your **attitude** (64:5a)

When God seems silent, or harsh, or angry – instead of scrutinizing *him*, check *yourself*
Starting with the disposition of your heart; Your motives; Your mindset
Check it; Stop pointing the finger at God, and start looking at yourself

Especially so in the areas of *joy* and *perspective*
V5 – *You meet him* [you draw near to him, you're with him] *who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways.*
Far from being aloof, God meets, God abides, with those who obey him with *joy*
You meet him who joyfully works righteousness

Leave the joy out of your obedience, and I don't care how many t's you cross and i's you dot; Or how many hours you spend in the Word . . .
Or how much you pray; Or how much you serve; Or how much you give . . .
God *will* not draw near to you, God *will* not speak to you, and God *will* not bless you;
Not fully

Dt 28:47-48 says – *Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, [48] therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything.*

And lest you think that's just an Old Testament principle, that joyful obedience was only for them, think again; B/c in the NT, it's the second fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5)
And therefore ought to mark every single thing we do and say; B/c he's *in* us every single minute of the day*****

That's the *first* part of your attitude that you should check when God seems distant, or harsh, or angry; How's your joy?

➤ The 2nd, is your perspective; Look at v5 again – *You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways.*
Those who keep God in the forefront of their mind, as they see him work in the world

Those who *look* for his handiwork, and give him the credit
Those who assume there's far more they *don't* see, than what they do
Those who pray for his will to be done, and watch for the results
God meets those who *remember* him in his ways
It's the difference between a *God*-centered perspective on life, and a *self*-centered one

Check your attitude in that respect; B/c chances are he hasn't gone dark, you've just stopped looking, or listening, or obeying with joy

2nd . . .

Repent of your sin (64:5b-7a)

When God seems silent, there's often good reason for it; And it usually has *nothing* to do with him; In fact, most often, it's due to your *sin*
Most often, you've stuffed the cotton of *sin* in your ears, and can't *hear* him

The solution to which isn't ranting and raving, but repentance; Which Isaiah expresses by admitting their sin, quantifying it, and then characterizing it
64:5b says – *Behold, you were angry, and we sinned*
And in v7 Isaiah says – *There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you*
That's the admission part – it's simple and straightforward; No caveats and no excuses

And then he quantifies their sin, again in v5 – *in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?*
He confesses the *length* of their sin, and by his question, recognizes the *depth*
He quantifies it

➤ And then he *characterizes* it – v6; *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

Using 4 comparisons, he characterizes himself and the people in pretty stark fashion
The first of which, is to . . .

1. A leprous person – that's the connotation of the word *unclean*
We have all become like one who is unclean [one who is leprous; diseased; deformed]

2. A polluted garment – or, more literally, a menstrual cloth; That's the Hebrew word *All our righteous deeds are like* [menstrual cloths]
And if that violates your sensibilities, welcome to how God feels about your sin
Especially having clothed us w/ *robes of righteousness & garments of salvation* (ch61)

3. A faded leaf – someone who loses their vibrancy and shrivels up in the depths of their soul; Eventually fading into insignificance

4. A piece of debris – debris that's carried away in a storm
Our iniquities, like the wind, take us away

When God seems silent, take the cotton of *sin* out of your ears (**Summary**)
Not with a half-hearted prayer of convenience, but a whole-hearted prayer of repentance
Admitting your sin, quantifying it, and characterizing it

3rd . . .

Renew your patience (64:4)

[64:4] *From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.*

Which means we ought to renew our patience every single day, by drawing on God's mercy every single morning

B/c that's the key to God's blessing; Whether it's the blessing of his provision, or power, or peace, or whatever – patience is the key

And the implication is that he *won't* act for those who take matters into their own hands

Not that we should sit around and do nothing; But that we should do what we can, even in the silence, while waiting patiently for God to do what he wants

When God seems silent, renew your patience

4th . . .

Submit to his will (64:8)

Or better yet, express your submission; Just like Isaiah did in v8

But now, O LORD [in spite of your silence, or discipline, or anger], you are our Father [as in, you love us, you know best, and you're in charge]; *we are the clay, and you are our potter* [you're in control]; *we are all the work of your hand.*

It's a confession of submission; When God seems silent, submit to his will

Not that you aren't *already* subject to it – you are; He's Lord; It's his world, and you're living in it

But that's not submission; That's not the **picture** of a moist clay pot subjecting itself to the firm but gentle hands of a potter

Submission is yielding to the leadership and authority of another, joyfully

Submission is throwing yourself on the mercy of God not b/c it's your last resort, but b/c there's no better place to be*****

It's like yielding to the force of gravity; You can embrace it and be thankful for it, b/c it doesn't allow you to drift into space and die . . .

Or you can fight it and hate it, and spend your life trying to overcome it

Still subject to it, but not submissive; When God seems silent, express your submission

And then last . . .

Ask him to intervene (64:1-3)

[64:1] *Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—[2] as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! [3] When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.*

When God seems silent, ask him to intervene; Ask him to show up; Ask him to make himself known; To show himself strong; That's the idea here

And the obvious reference is to Mt Sinai

That time in Israel's history when they were 3 months out of Egypt, traveling through the desert, and God showed up in a big way

Like it says in **Ex 19:18** – *Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln [an especially hot furnace], and the whole mountain trembled greatly.*

And **Ex 24:17** – *Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.*

It was overwhelming, unexpected, and frightening

And Isaiah's like – “Do it again, God;” Intervene*****

And we can too; The form may not be the same, the *means* of his intervention, but the power sure is; And the *effect*; You just have to ask

Ask him to intervene; Not just in the situation at hand, but in your heart

“God, intervene in *me*; Start with me” (**Summary**)

And don't be surprised when you're once again overwhelmed with a sense of his presence, with your passion restored

B/c that's what he does; Even in his “silence”

Prayer – Lord, do it again; Intervene in our lives; Intervene in our church, always; Purify our hearts with your consuming presence; Renew our patience to reflect yours; And find us submissive to your sovereign will

We love you, we worship you, and we give now in joyful obedience