

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

ISAIAH 63:1-4

THE VICTOR COMES MARCHING HOME AGAIN -- HURRAH! HURRAH!

QUESTION: *Who is this who comes from Edom? with dyed garments from Bozrah? this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength?*

ANSWER: *"I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save."*

QUESTION: *Why is Your apparel red and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?*

ANSWER: *"I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come."*

Did any of you sing, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again" on Veterans Days? It would have been fitting on the day we honor those who have served in the armed forces to defend our nation and people. "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again – Hurrah! Hurrah!" was written during the Civil War. Family and friends in the North were longing for their sons, brothers, and fathers to return victorious from the battle. Everyone would be so happy.

The text for today bears similarities to that song and situation. The Prophet Isaiah was speaking to God's physical people Judah (Judah was all that was left of "Israel"). Judah was soon to be chastised by God, and driven out of its homeland, suffering the destruction of towns, homes, and Temple. Judah had been repeatedly wayward, turning away from the Lord. But on the larger scale, Isaiah was also talking about the gathering of all God's people—all Believers in Christ.

How wayward are you? You've not turned to the Muslim faith and to Allah, have you? You do not worship Buddha and follow Buddhism, do you? You do not hold to the Hindu faith, do you? But how wayward are you? Has the devil succeeded in leading you to accept loose sexual morals of our time, where the commitment and loyalty of marriage is so frequently scoffed at. Satan's opportunities to lust and to imbibe in pornography abound. Popular and favorite television shows, movies, books, entertainment at large, involve misguided sexual activity and principles -- heterosexual and homosexual. Do you actively join in? Or, do you enjoy and indulge from a distance, claiming, "Well I am not actually doing anything. I'm on the sidelines." Do you know what God says in Romans chapter 1? Paul writes against those who have turned away from the love of the Lord for the foolish and dark sins of this world and against those who approved on the sidelines. ". . . knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:32). Even silent approval of sin is wrong. Do you perhaps plead "Close enough! My actions, my priorities, my ideas, aren't exactly what God says, but close enough. It's ok. You can't be good all the time," But, Not so! Waywardness leads to trouble, in life and with God. The devil isn't satisfied with your small little "slip-ups so-called." He keeps pushing for a bigger and deeper sin—slavery—from you to him.

Amazingly Isaiah, speaking for God, holds out rescue to God's people of Judah, who would be captive and exiled away from their homeland. And he holds out rescue and hope for us too, for each sinner, helpless before the devil's cunning, and entrapped in sin, facing God's disfavor. God sends, and has already sent, the Savior for rescue and forgiveness! Isaiah had told the people a few chapters earlier, "*Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. for behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you*" (Isaiah 60). There is light and glory, mercy and life from the Father in the Rescue to come. Also in Isaiah 61, he had written words of the promised Rescuer Himself, "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God.*" The promised Savior would bring freedom from the captivity and all consequences of sin, forgiveness from the Father. He would also bring destruction of all the foes of God and God's people.

In text--Isaiah 63--Isaiah speaks regarding that very Christ, returning from the war for our souls, returning from the defeat of the devil and all wickedness, Christ returning in glory and victory. *Who is this who comes from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah? this One who is glorious in His apparel? traveling in the greatness of His strength?* Edom was a bitter Old Testament enemy of Israel. Bozrah was one of its major cities. Isaiah sees Jesus coming back from battle, battle with Edom, yes, but in the deeper sense battle with Satan and all the forces of evil. He comes back with His garments dyed—the word is not so much “dyed” as “eye-catching.” He comes with glorious, ornamented, decorated, majestic apparel. Isaiah sees Him “traveling” in the greatness of His strength. He is not coming back defeated, dejected, hurting, cast down. He comes back “traveling” in His strength, “traveling” meaning “at an incline,” One can think in terms of someone marching forward, “inclined” with purpose and determination, who “means business.” One can also think of it in terms of the Victor returning from the battle, not walking dejected, but inclined a bit backward, with head held high, in accomplishment and authority. Who is this? The answer, *“I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”* This is Jesus with His personal righteousness, with righteousness of angry judgement, but also with the saving righteousness that He imparts to us by faith. In Romans 3 Paul talks about this saving *righteousness of God* and clearly says it is ours *through faith in Christ Jesus to all and on all who believe.* Righteousness that saves you. Jesus is mighty “to save.” The name Jesus means “Savior / He saves!” This is even greater than “When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again”!

There’s more. Isaiah asks, *Why is Your apparel red and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?* You know how the clothing of a mechanic looks--working on the car, the pickup, the tractor all day. Dark with grease and oil stains. The same was true at Isaiah’s time during grape harvest. Those who walked the winepress, those who crushed the juice out of the grapes were treading them with bare feet. They wore the evidence of their work, not just on feet and ankles, but their garments were spattered with juice. Here we see that the eye-catching color of the garments of this One returning from battle was RED, spattered RED. Why so?

The Messiah answers, *“I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes.* Jesus has just trampled all His people’s foes. He has trampled Satan and all forces with His fury. Satan is no friend of the Lord’s. Nor is the Lord any friend of Satan. (Which one is your Master?) In His anger and in His fury (not some gentle stepping) Jesus has attacked and crushed the enemy and now is spattered with blood. He fought them, all of them, Himself, with no one to help Him. No one could help Him. Jesus told His disciples, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now” (John 13:36). Only Holy God Himself could successfully battle Satan. The Scriptures also say, “I will smite the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Matthew 26:31). No one helped or could help Jesus. When a wolf attacks the flock, does the shepherd look for help from the sheep? He fights alone and all the blood spatters on him.

Jesus, returning from battle says, *For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come.* It is both a day of vengeance and a day of redemption. Jesus strikes with vengeance upon Satan and all his forces—a day of punishment, a day of doom, a day of come-uppance for the wicked. Not just a slight slap, but fury and vengeance from God! That day was ushered in when Christ died on the cross for sins, sins instigated by the devil. Had the devil known how the crucifixion would end, he would not have pushed Jesus’ enemies to put Christ on the cross. It became the day of his undoing. The day of Christ’s crucifixion reaches its ultimate fulfillment on Judgment Day. Satan, the demons, the evil angels, the earthly godless government, earthly false prophets laboring without and within the church, and every unbeliever will be cast into the lake of burning sulfur as pictured in Revelation; that is into hell. Want part of that? Run from the devil and every temptation—whether it’s those of sexual nature as brought up at the beginning of the sermon, or any other sin. God’s wrath is not to be toyed with. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

But Christ’s day of vengeance is also the season, “the year,” of victory for Christ’s redeemed! Foolish, wretched sins forgiven. Deeds, words, and thoughts, that one so badly wishes to undo are gone from the record! The guilty conscience, washed clean and now whiter than snow. The one-way ticket to hell, shredded and discarded. And as a gift, an extremely high-priced pass, free to you, to God’s arms of love and heaven. Christ who went to war for you has freely given it to you. His crucifixion and the empty tomb are your day of being set free. You are redeemed. Your captivity has ended because Jesus paid the price. He bought you back from condemnation. You have life! This too was accomplished at Calvary but will reach its ultimate fulfillment at the end of time. Jesus will raise you from the grave and take you to the eternal bliss of heaven! Your great day of Rescue and Redemption!

We sing and celebrate something greater than Johnny Comes Marching Home Again. In Hymn 209 we sing: “Who is this that comes from Edom, all His garments stained with blood? to the captive speaking freedom giving and bestowing good? ‘Tis the Savior now victorious, traveling onward in His might. ‘Tis the Savior, oh how glorious to His people is the sight! Satan conquered and the grave, Jesus now is strong to save!” Hurrah!

So be it! Amen!

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