

NOTES: “Longing & Lament” Isaiah 63:15-64:9

WELCOME

My name is Tim

Do consulting work w/ churches

Been coming up from PDX regularly for 1.5 years to help

Worked with music

Now helping w/ preaching support

Great to be with you all again

Pray

INTRO: Longing & Lament

Today we continue in our survey of Isaiah

Near the end - finish next week

Want to start w/ a question:

How are we with difficult things in our lives?

Loss

Pain

Hurt

Trauma

Brokenness

Wars

When things you thought would be steady FALL APART?

- job
- finances
- church
- nation

When people you depend on LEAVE - in death or broken relationships?

When people you trusted BETRAY you?

Common responses among Christians:

Depending on your personality

The kind of family you grew up in

DENIAL

- emotions are problematic at best - maybe even from the Devil
- do your duty and don't complain
- smile
- when people ask you how you are → "better than I deserve" or "God is good"

DEPRESSION

- become overwhelmed by the pain
- despair of life
- dark places

ANGER

- lash out at the one who hurt you
- take justice or vengeance in your own hands
- become a crusader

Sometimes...

you DO have to soldier on

the tide of depression rolls over you like a wave and you can't control it

There is action to take to hold others accountable

But...

what if there was another way

A way that is almost invisible in modern American Christianity

But hiding in plain sight THROUGHOUT the scriptures

It's not the ONLY biblical response
But a consistent way of relating to the pain of our broken world
Almost without exception in the bible

The twofold movement of:

Longing & Lament

LONGING = a persistent, yearning, unfulfilled desire for something distant

LAMENT = a passionate expression of sorrow, pain, grief or confusion

This is what we're going to be talking about today

As we come to Isaiah 63 & 64

If you've been around for this study in Isaiah

Even with only a moment's reflection

You can see these two themes running throughout the book

By now you probably know the general story

God's people are in a TOUGH place

Turned from God

Kingdom divided in two

Assyria has come for Israel in the North

Babylon is threatening Judah in the south

God sends Isaiah in the midst

Starts off w/ a message of judgement from God

Essentially - "you've brought this tough place on yourselves..."

Then, the later part of the book

We come to a lot of longing and lament

Their circumstances haven't changed

Actually getting worse

But God is reassuring his people through Isaiah

That it's going to be tough

But there is still hope

And to cling to hope by

LAMENTING their sin → the pain and destruction it's brought

And

LONGING for God's mercy and deliverance → better times promised in the future

That brings us to our passage...

LONGING & LAMENT IN ISAIAH 63-64

One commentary helped me see a structure

Ray Ortlund - pastor in Nashville, OT seminary professor

The later part of ch 63 through ch 64 = 3 movements of longing & lament

Movement 1 - 63:15-19

LONGING: for God's attention

63:15

Look down from heaven and see,
from your holy and beautiful habitation.

Longing begins and ends w/ look down

The feeling that God doesn't seem to be paying attention

"God, where are you? Do you even see what's going on?"

Where are **your zeal and your might**?

The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion
are **held back from me**.

"where are your zeal = jealousy, passion, envy for your people

your might" = strength

I thought you were JEALOUS for your people?

You have always been known for your STRENGTH?

Have you changed?

You seem to be held back from me

16 For you are our Father,
though **Abraham does not know us,**
and **Israel does not acknowledge us;**
you, O Lord, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Abraham = ultimate father of the nation - Abraham → Isaac → Jacob → Israel

Israel = the man after whom the nation is named

Even though our ancestors wouldn't even recognize us as your people

We still belong to you

Isaiah LONGS for God's attention

To be noticed in the midst of their troubles

And then he...

LAMENT: How did we get to this point?

17 O Lord, **why do you make us wander from your ways**
and **harden our heart**, so that we fear you not?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes of your heritage.

Sounds like he's blaming God for their unfaithfulness

God doesn't CAUSE people to be unfaithful

He doesn't have to

EVERYONE is born UNFAITHFUL to God

Because of sin

And sometimes,

as people persist in their sin,
God says something like,
“Ok, if that’s really what you want, I’ll let you experience the full consequence.”
Like a parent who lets a kid touch a hot pan

Even then, it’s NOT vindictive punishment
It’s His mercy in letting us see the emptiness of our own ways

Isaiah cries out in pain, grief & confusion
Lamenting how broken things are

18 Your holy people **held possession for a little while;**
our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.

We only had it good for a couple generations
Now everything is falling apart

19 **We have become like those over whom you have never ruled,**
like those who are not called by your name.

And now **we have become like** we never belonged to You in the first place

Isaiah LONGS for God’s attention
He LAMENTS the brokenness their sin has led them to

NOTICE A FEW THINGS...

Both his longing & lament are:

- brutally honest - don’t put a nice face on it - no mining
- specific - does not downplay ANYTHING he’s feeling

He longs...

- true to the dictionary definition → persistent, yearning, unfulfilled desire
- voices unfulfilled desires
- looks to a future hope as the present is ROUGH

He laments...

- his sin
- the sin of his people
- the pain of loss
- the brokenness of the world

Then he repeats the pattern in ch. 64...

Movement 2

LONGING: for God's presence

64:1 Oh that you would **rend (tear) the heavens and come down,**
that the **mountains might quake** at your presence—

The picture is of the sky like a sheet

That He would tear the sheet and come down amongst God's people

LONGS for God's presence...

2 as when **fire kindles brushwood**
and the **fire causes water to boil**—

fire = often associated w/ God's presence

to **make your name known to your adversaries,**
and that **the nations might tremble** at your presence!

the nations = Gentiles, specifically the enemies of God's people

Assyria

Babylon

etc.

Longs for that day & time...

3 When you did **awesome things** that we **did not look for**,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

Remember past times God showed up and did **awesome things**

Waters parting in the exodus

Mountains shaking at Mt Sinai in the wilderness

These were things they **did not look for** → unexpected

“Oh that you would surprise us with your presence in the midst of our distress...”

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.

5a You meet him who **joyfully works righteousness**,
those who **remember you in your ways.**

Through all history **of old**

No one has **seen**, **heard** or **perceived** of any God like you

Who **acts** on behalf of **those who wait for Him**

Those who wait with a patient, confident, expectant faith

Not just obey God's commands

But follow Him **joyfully**

He LONGS...

If God would just come down & be present

It would change everything

Just like it has over and over again for his people

Notice his hope in his longing

All hangs on God's presence

But there's a problem...

LAMENT: The depth of our sin.

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

CSB is more clear: How can we be saved if we remain in our sins?

We're LONGING for You to come down and make things right

BUT... here's the reality

We are in sin

And You are angry

It's been this way a LONG, LONG time

150-200 years of downward spiral since the divided kingdom

Is salvation even possible for us after all these years ???

He describes their state in vivid/stark images...

6 We have all become **like one who is unclean**,
and all our righteous deeds are **like a polluted garment**.

unclean = like a leper who calls out so everyone else can avoid contact

Disease = OT idea of ceremonial uncleanness

Remember Leviticus

polluted garment = literally menstrual garment

Another image from Leviticus - bodily fluids/discharges = uncleanness

Even at our very best & most righteous before God

We are still a mixed bag - mixture

Goes both ways

At our most fallen we still bear God's image

And at our best we are still unclean

EVERY motive, thought, intention and action is MIXED

And because of this state...

We all fade **like a leaf**,
and our iniquities, **like the wind**, take us away.

Tis the season for falling leaves
They are beautiful - my favorite
But they die so quickly
Remember death and decline are the result of sin
This is true in each human life,
All of nature
Even our planet itself
Everything trends irreversibly towards death & decay

And just like the wind carries a fallen leaf away
We are, again and again,
Caught up by sin and carried away

⁷ There is **no one who calls upon your name**,
who **rouses himself** to take hold of you;

rouses himself = wakes from slumber

We're asleep in our sin
With no one willing to even wake or rise towards you

And so, you have justly...

for you have **hidden your face from us**,
and have made us **melt in the hand of our iniquities**.

melt = like metal working

Our sin melts us down into another form
We lose ourselves in it

Notice how Isaiah laments

We can't assume that Isaiah is sinless among a sinful people
But we can assume he's walking more closely w/ God than those around him
And yet,
He confesses and laments sin with INCLUSIVE/COMMUNAL language
We sinned
We have been our sin a long time
We have become unclean
We fade like a leaf

This = a COMMUNITY LAMENT

We know he has a small group of followers who gather with him at times
As much as he wrote this down
He also likely led others through it

Longing & Lament are BOTH
Individual AND Communal

One more...

LONGING: to be shaped by God's touch

8 But now, O Lord, **you are our Father;**
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all **the work of your hand.**

We have been deeply unfaithful to You O Lord
Yet you are STILL **our Father**
We belong to you
You made us individually
You brought the people of Israel into being

9 Be not so terribly angry, O Lord,
and **remember not iniquity forever.**
Behold, **please look**, we are all your people.

Don't forget us

please look = same word/verb as 63:15 - "Look down from heaven and see..."

His longing begins and ends

Pleading for God's attention

LAMENT: Why are you silent in the midst of our loss?

- 10** Your **holy cities have become a wilderness**;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a **desolation**.
- 11** Our holy and beautiful house,
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?

He concludes with the question all of us ask at one point or another:

Where are you?

How long?

Why do you not act on our behalf?

Why are you silent?

ISAIAH'S LONGING & LAMENT

Again and again Isaiah returns to these themes

In the specific passage and many more

He is BRUTALLY honest w/ God

Very specific - holds almost nothing back

He LONGS w/ persistent, yearning - voicing unfulfilled desires

He LAMENTS his sin, that of his people, his pain and loss

And he does so in a way
And with an intensity
That would make a lot of Christians UNCOMFORTABLE
Maybe some of us
Some might even condemn or criticize him

“Don’t be such a drama king/queen!”
“Don’t let your emotions carry you away!”
“Where’s your faith?”
“Don’t you know that God works out everything for good???”

And he’s not alone...

LONGING & LAMENT THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

Psalms...

“Psalms” = Heb. “Praises” → “Book of Praises”
Presupposes that EVERY Psalm is a song/poem of worship
God’s most definitive revelation about worship
More Psalms of LAMENT than any other kind
This means LAMENT is meant to play a SIGNIFICANT part in our gathered worship

Prophets...

The other prophets are FULL of these same themes
Remember you have a whole book called LAMENTATIONS
Mourning the destruction of Jerusalem in Judah by Babylon

Job...

Loses EVERYTHING - finances, children, house
Wife gives fantastic advice → “curse God and die”
But he doesn’t

How???

Laments/mourns the loss

Asks TOUGH questions of God

Longs for His presence in faith

The pattern continues with...

JESUS' LONGING & LAMENT

Jesus' Lament...

At least 2 times in the gospels

Jesus expresses heartbreaking lament

Over Jerusalem - the capitol city of God's people

Who should have welcomed & worshipped Him

But rejected Him instead

On a trip to Jerusalem earlier in his ministry:

Mt. 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!** How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and **you were not willing!**

As He entered the city for the last time:

Lk. 19:41 And when he drew near and saw the city, **he wept over it,** ⁴² saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, **because you did not know the time of your visitation.**"

Jesus' Longing...

For God's protection over his disciples

And those who will believe in the future

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”
(John 17:15, ESV)

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24, ESV)

God himself - in the flesh - lived a life marked by Lament & Longing

That’s why Isaiah prophetically calls him...

Jesus: The Man of Sorrows

³ He was despised and rejected by men,
a **man of sorrows** and **acquainted with grief**;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

man of sorrows

- full of sorrow and pain
- who he was
- what he was known for

acquainted with grief

- literally “known for”
- grief, sickness, suffering, sadness

Isaiah teaches us that sorrow & grief

Are foundational attributes of Jesus

Much of Jesus’ life was grief & sorrow

Betrayal by almost EVERYONE closest to him

Rejection by Israel, who should have worshipped him

Brought before government powers on fake charges
Executed for crimes he didn't commit

But on the cross it got even more intense for him...
As He took all our sin onto himself

5 But he was **pierced** for **our transgressions**,
he was **crushed** for **our iniquities**;
the **punishment that brought us peace** was upon him,
and **by his wounds we are healed**.

All weight of our sin & betrayal of him
Was added to the grief and suffering of his life
And it is THROUGH HIS SUFFERING - **BY HIS WOUNDS**
That **WE ARE HEALED**

But there's another details I've missed before...

His life was grief & sorrow
He took all our sin on himself
Bringing us peace

And he also...

4a Surely **he has borne our griefs**
and **carried our sorrows**;

He has **borne** - to bear, endure **OUR GRIEFS**
He **carried OUR SORROWS**

When we bring them to Him
He carries our grief & sorrow
He understands
We walk together under weight

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

When we go through something tough

Hurt, sadness, loss

“Christians” tend to pressure us to, “grow up, deal with it, not be ruled by emotions”

Some of us have been trained to ignore, stuff, denounce “negative emotions”

As if we would be led away from God by them

As if they are too overwhelming to deal with

As if putting on a fake positive persona is a better witness of the Christian life

How small a god do you have if he can't take sadness, loss and hurt?

What if it's in exactly these experiences and feelings where we actually meet Jesus

What if these are the places where we are most profoundly shaped by Him

Where we experience HIS presence

And become more open to others

This has been my experience

In the midst of:

Some deeply broken relationships in my family

A dear friend's sin destroying his family

So much brokenness and wreckage around ministry/leadership

When I stuff/ignore it

Or get angry

I feel my heart get harder and more dead

Judgement & self-righteousness grow

I feel abandoned by God

And isolated from others

But...

When I mourn the pain

Lament my sin & the sin of others that caused it

When I pour out my heart to God

Longing for his presence

And ultimately to be free from this body & world of death

My heart gets more soft

I feel God's presence reassuring me

And I surprisingly connect more deeply

Remember...

“The Lord is **near to the brokenhearted** and saves the **crushed in spirit**.” (Psalm 34:18, ESV)

Blessed are the **poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom** of heaven.

Blessed are **those who mourn, for they shall be comforted**. (Matthew 5:3-4, ESV)

What does this look like practically?

Not ALL of life is meant to be longing and lament

But they are meant to be consistent rhythms

Part of a lifestyle of faith

And just like there are individual & communal laments in scripture

We work it out in those ways

Individually...

In prayer, song & journaling

In Community...

Prayer, discussion, sharing, song, etc.

Lamenting...

Our sin and brokenness of the world

And...

Longing...

For the day when all things will finally be made right

Let's pray

RESPONSE