

Give God no rest (Isaiah 62:6-12)

Why should God get to sleep, like parents who have finished wrapping presents?

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“Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth.”

What do you want for Christmas?

The education begins at an early age—parents ask kiddies this question, and as kiddies grow, get married, and have their own kiddies, the question gets repeated. Over time, it seems like a sensible enough question, part of being a good parent.

Kiddies learn, too, what acceptable answers are. Without ever getting into household finances, a child learns that some Lego sets are too expensive, others are affordable. There are reasonable answers to what one wants for Christmas and unreasonable ones.

The Wise Men gave gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus, and so it's fine for us to give stuff on Christmas Day. These gentiles coming to pay homage fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies of the vindication of Israel before all the nations—but how far are our Christmas desires from Isaiah's deep longings.

Parents want to keep spending under control, and so we keep our desires under control. Yet in this passage, Isaiah calls for neither resting nor giving God rest until

God's promises are fulfilled. It's not quite the same as encouraging kids to pester their parents ceaselessly until they get what they want—but it is not far off.

This is not a “be a good child and get what you want for Christmas” pious passage. This is a daring passage prodding us to risk disobedience for the sake of faithfulness. We are not called to bow our heads piously and simply accept God's ways as mysteries beyond our knowing.

From the perspective of this text, there is nothing mysterious about what God has already said, and we should not pretend otherwise. God has promised the vindication of God's people. Or, in the language of the New Testament, God has declared that the kingdom of God is at hand. There are to be healings and power and liberation.

Instead, we or those we love still suffer chronic pain, psychological instability, or betrayal and abandonment. And there are also those millions whom wealthy Americans see only darkly through the glass of our screens—the people who still live in abject poverty, enduring curable diseases and unnecessary hunger.

And we want to let God get some rest, like parents who have finished wrapping presents?

When a parent suggests that a certain toy just might be under the tree as a way of getting the kiddies to stop the pestering, that parent had better deliver. Isaiah reminds us that God has yet to deliver on God's promises. A faithful person responds by pounding on the gates of heaven reminding God of what God has said. Why should God get to rest?

For many, this is a disturbing, impious, even childish image. But what is unfaithful or immature about crying out to God, “I've read your book! I know who you are! And all I really, really want is for you to be who you say you are!”?

But, then again, on the other hand, maybe I could keep my desires minimal (within, say, the range of the affordable Lego sets). If I don't ask too much of God, maybe God won't ask too much of me.