

Oh, that You would **Come Down!**

Isaiah 64:1-9

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"Come on down, Lord! Come on down! Tear open those heavens and come down and make the mountains shake. Kindle the fire, boil the water, make those heathen quake in their boots at the sound of Your Name! Do like you used to do back in the good old days when you used to shake things up in a big way! Show yourself for who you are, God, and come down to save us!" Don't you feel like talking like that sometimes? Don't you feel like having an Isaiah 64 moment and looking to heaven and saying, "Come on down, Lord, and do something about my situation"? (William Cwirla)

Isaiah wrote during the stormy period marking the expansion of the Assyrian Empire and the decline of Israel. Isaiah warned Judah that her sin would bring captivity at the hands of the future Babylonian Kingdom, which is what eventually happened. Outwardly, seeming like things are okay. Yet inwardly, things seem to be unraveling. A sense that things are not what they should be. A growing interest in enjoying life, but an increasing indifference to God and the things that matter to Him. This is the danger of any age, including our own. This is a danger for any person, including you and me.

A little history. Isaiah 63:7-19 *I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Savior. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths?

... 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. Your holy people held possession for a little while; our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name.

Most of the book of Isaiah contains various prophetic messages to the people. This is also a message to the people, but it's written as a prayer. This kind of prayer is called a *lament*. A biblical lament **cries out to God**. This isn't an internally focused process of grieving, it's first and foremost a prayer, a conversation with God. Who is it we're talking to? We're crying out to an all-powerful God, a good and merciful God, a just God, a God who grants us access to himself and invites us into personal relationship with him.

A lament honestly and specifically **names a situation or circumstance** that is painful, wrong, or unjust; not right — in other words, a circumstance that doesn't seem to align with God's character, and therefore, doesn't make sense within God's kingdom. The *emotional* tone of the complaint varies, depending on the type of lament, whether sorrow, remorse, weariness, anger, disappointment, or doubt.

A lament **expects a response or an answer**. It expects that God will be able to do something, about the situation. Most often the request sounds like a demand: it's the heart-rending cry, "God, *do* something!" A lament generally includes **an explicit expression of trust**, sometimes woven through the complaint and request, "but, I trust in You O Lord!" Biblical lament, then, is an honest cry to a God who is powerful, good, and just. It's a cry that expects an answer from God, and therefore results, not in despair, but in hope, in trust, in joy. Hope in God. Trust in God. Joy in God. (Stacey Gleddiesmith)

Isaiah 64 follows the general pattern for community lament Psalms. There are two elements to it: the subjective and the objective. The feelings and the facts. Personal feelings and objective facts. An example is Psalm 13 *"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ... But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me."*

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down ... "Come down" is an appeal for God to act in the world. It uses the common imagery of God dwelling in the heavens, or "sky". Portraying God enthroned above the earth was a poetic means of affirming God's "otherness" from humanity (His holiness), and His majesty as Creator.

The prayer for God to *come down* doesn't mean that the people thought He really lived "out there" somewhere. It did, thought, emphasize that the people were experiencing difficulties. They were hurting. And God seemed to be nowhere in sight. They expressed their problems as God being far away, hidden, silent, or absent. Do you know what that's like? Can you relate to Isaiah's prayer?

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. God has done, and continues to do, extraordinary things in His world. But God's great acts of revelation in history don't occur every day or even frequently. Much, if not most, of the Bible deals with living in the long gaps between God's revelations of Himself.

Throughout history, God's people have spent most of their time in Advent, *waiting*. It's an *expectant* waiting, *anticipating* God's bringing justice, deliverance and the kingdom of God to the world. But it's *not* a waiting that *only* has the *future* in view. Neither is it an idle, self-centered waiting, as seen in those who sell everything they have and then sit on a mountain waiting for God to come.

Biblical waiting, advent, is an *active* waiting. A waiting that focuses on being God's people in this world. The kind of waiting that involves a lifestyle, both of faithfulness to God (*who remember your ways*) and of proper relationship with other people (*who gladly do right*). There's *future* hope. Yet, the *focus* falls clearly on being God's people in the *present* world.

The *lack* of God's present actions in the world (*you have hidden your face*) had led the people into spiritual indifference (*no one calls on your name*). They had simply given up believing, and hoping in God. The same thing that happens to us when God doesn't do *what we want, when we want, how we want*. (Dennis Bratcher)

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? 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. There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. YET. The central feature in most laments is a shift, toward *trust*, that begins with a strong "but now" or "but as for me". This marks the turn from looking at our adverse circumstances, to trust in God. From feelings to facts.

Throughout the second half of the book of Isaiah (chpts 40-66), a *central* theme is an *appeal* for *continued* faith and hope in God, even when we don't immediately experience His deliverance. The prophets during the time of Israel's exile in Babylon had consistently maintained, that God was at work, in the very events that the people experienced as harmful. Perhaps we should not so quickly judge events good (God present) or bad (God absent) based only on how they affect us personally (Gen 50:20). There's a subtle warning not to tie faith in God, too closely, to what we can witness him doing in the world! (Heb 11:1) (Bratcher)

To recognize the ugliness inside of us, to confess the inadequacy of our righteousness; of our faith, is the beginning of advent preparation. But it's also a plea, a cry for mercy, a renewed call of trust in the mercy of God. *Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people.*

Come on down, Lord! Come on down! Tear open those heavens and come down. "Oh, that you would come down!" Have you ever prayed that, that God would come down and act on your behalf? It's the prayer heard around the world, that God would come down and do something for us. We pray it every time a prayer request comes to us. We pray it whenever something goes wrong and we don't know what to do, when we don't know where else to turn. We're in need, and need God's help. And so, we pray that prayer, "Oh God, that you would come down!"

A lament. A prayer that cries out to God from the midst of desperate grief, pain, or any circumstance that seems out of control. It *vocalizes* the hurt, to God, with the conviction, the faith, that God can and will bring relief. Lament. Cry out to God. Grieve. Talk to God; He can handle it. He wants to handle it. Share your feelings with God and then recall the facts about Him. Lament. It's a cry that expects an answer from God, and therefore results, not in despair, but in hope, in trust, in joy. Hope in God. Trust in God. Joy in God. (Bratcher)

"Show yourself for who you are, God, and come down to save us!" And they waited ... and they waited ... and they waited. Advent ... waiting for Him to come. And God responded. He came down. Unlike any god anyone had ever heard of, He came down. He came down for one who was unclean. He came down for one who did not call upon His name. He came down for *you*. He came down to save from iniquity. He came down to save you from being swept away.

He came down ... all the way to a manger. The One we're waiting for is already here. The kingdom we're waiting for is the kingdom that has already come. The glory we're waiting for is the glory that is already here, now in a humble and hidden way, but still very much here. As Paul's says in his opening paragraph to the Corinthian congregation, *"You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

You may not always feel Advent ready. You may not always feel close to God. Faith is trust in the Promise of God, whether you feel it or not. Faith in His promise of things to come; a certainty of things not yet seen. (Heb 11:1) Advent is a time of faith. Looking into the darkness, and seeing the Light. Looking at the end, and seeing the beginning of a new creation.

Whether you feel it or not, you lack nothing, spiritually speaking. You have every spiritual gift you need, because you have Jesus, which prepares you for His next Advent. The coming of our Lord in great glory to judge the living and the dead!

There is a coming Day, when sin is no more, when Death is finally ended, when Life reigns, when the Lordship of Jesus is made visible to all. That's what Advent is really all about. Not shopping days until Christmas. Not preparing for the holidays. Not cooking and baking and eating. Though we do all these things, and there is nothing wrong with any of those things, there is something *more* going on. The Day is coming. The Light has dawned. Get ready. The One who came in humility will come in glory. (Cwirla)

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth ... stir up your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved! (Ps 80) Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him!