

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge  
Sermon- Isaiah 64:1-9  
Sunday, December 3, 2017

### Isaiah longed for God to return to earth and make himself known

1. Bonnie and I got engaged after three months of dating, and we had a running joke throughout our engagement. As many of you are aware, planning a wedding can be stressful, especially when we were both in grad school as well. When things would get stressful, we would jokingly refer back to the good old days when our life together was simpler, which was like a month before.
2. We often look back on the past as easier or better times. The oft repeated mantra is that the world is falling apart, and things were much better back when I was young- *I* being all of us when we tend to reflect this way. It can often seem like the present days are the darkest days. Yet my grandparents went through the Great Depression and World War II, which included monstrous actions as the Germans committed genocide on entire groups of innocent people.
  - a. That leaves the question, is the past really better, or do we have memories that often whitewash the worst of what happened long ago?
3. Isaiah was a prophet of the Lord during a very tumultuous time in both Israel and Judah. His oracles are generally about the unfaithfulness of the Jews, God's punishment, and the promise of an eventual redemption and restoration. All of this revolved around God's goodness to continue to provide for a people who had turned away from him completely.
4. In chapter 64, Isaiah is looking back on the better times of Israel's history when God was with them and they followed him. "When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence."
  - a. Isaiah wants God to do this again. "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence— <sup>2</sup>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!"
5. While Isaiah wasn't alive for the so called golden years of Israel, which weren't particularly golden, he knows that there were times in the past when God made himself known to Israel and to her enemies. Isaiah's job was to prophesy the terrible things that would come. He also got to tell about the restoration, but people would be more interested in the bad stuff, if they listened at all. Isaiah took to heart the problems that had befallen his people. God had hidden his face from them, and while Isaiah knew God's anger was just, he still wanted to see better days.

### God hid his face because of Israel's sin

1. After his nostalgic longing for a better day, Isaiah came back to the reality that God had hidden his face because of the people's sin. While it was deserved, God removing his presence from his people allowed them to sink even further into sin and idolatry. Isaiah wanted them to see their God again with the hopes that they would change.
2. But Isaiah was realistic and honest about the situation of the people.
  - a. "Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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.”

3. Isaiah recognizes the precarious situation of his people. They have fallen far and deserve what they get. They don't deserve salvation. He uses some graphic language in describing their sin, calling them unclean, disgusting (which is what a polluted garment is), withered, and blown away by their iniquities.
4. Isaiah knows they are desperately lost, which is why he calls on God to intervene on Israel's behalf. As he says, not even those who were the chosen race of God's people sought him. He knows that their only hope is for God to intervene and save his own people. “Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever.”

### Jesus is the answer to Isaiah's prayer

1. As the prophet of these many oracles, Isaiah knew that God would eventually restore his people, though not entirely as the Jews would hope. Israel went into exile and stayed there. Judah went into exile and eventually returned, but still wasn't particularly faithful. A reestablishment of an earthly Israel wasn't God's restoration plan. Salvation of sins through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son was always the plan.
2. Furthermore, the restoration which God had in mind had a much bigger audience than what Israel thought. God's plan was to seek and save his people from all nations across the earth.
3. It is unclear to what degree Isaiah understood God's larger plan, but he is responsible for many of the messianic prophecies that point to Jesus, and because of that, he is quoted dozens of times in the NT. Jesus understood himself to be the fulfillment of God's promises in Isaiah, and after his death and resurrection, his apostles recognized that he was the suffering servant about whom Isaiah prophesied to come and save the people through his death.
4. Isaiah prayed for a restoration, for God to show his face again and be present with his people. In Jesus, he did just that. Jesus came as God in the flesh and dwelt among the people. He interacted very personally and compassionately with his people. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and taught with authority.
  - a. And even then, even when God was with the people as a human, they rejected him, just as they had so many times. Even as so many do today. Even as we did before he sought us out and saved us.
  - b. What was true in Isaiah's day is just as true now. There is no one who calls upon his name, who rouses themselves to take hold of him. Yet he came; he came to call us to his name; he came to rouse us from our slumber; he came to restore us fully and completely, wiping away the debt of sin forever.
5. God answered Isaiah's prayer in Jesus. Through Jesus, we have been found, restored, and redeemed.