

**Isaiah 64:1-8**

If only you would tear open the heavens and come down!

Mountains would quake before you

like fire igniting brushwood or making water boil.

If you would make your name known to your enemies,

the nations would tremble in your presence.

When you accomplished wonders beyond all our expectations;

when you came down, mountains quaked before you.

From ancient times,

no one has heard,

no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any god but you

who acts on behalf of those who wait for him!

You look after those who gladly do right;

they will praise you for your ways.

But you were angry when we sinned;

you hid yourself when we did wrong.

We have all become like the unclean;

all our righteous deeds are like a dirty rag.

All of us wither like a leaf;

our sins, like the wind, carry us away.

No one calls on your name;

no one bothers to hold on to you,

for you have hidden yourself from us,

But now, Lord, you are our father.

We are the clay, and you are our potter.

All of us are the work of your hand.

### **Sermon**

I have noticed that a lot of people, including myself, are putting up their christmas decorations earlier this year - as if we think that our jingle bells, icicle lights, and gingerbread men are some kind of cure for what ails us. As if we're looking for an extra dose of Hope in a difficult year and we think that bringing Christmas in early might just do the trick.

And perhaps Christmas is exactly the place to look for hope, but I think we should be careful not to put too much hope in the garland and the tinsel or even the family gathered around the fireplace and the traditions we hold so dear.

- For our true hope is in the one who Isaiah waited for when he wrote this passage 700 years before Jesus' birth.
- Our hope is in the long-expected Jesus, whose return we still wait for today.

So, this might be a difficult season for people like me who can't wait until December to put up their Christmas lights. And this year is especially tough because we have used up all our patience. We have spent our spare persistence. We are fresh out of endurance. What was it Isaiah said? "If only you would tear open the heavens and come down already!"

- Isaiah was waiting in a difficult time as well. He and the people of Israel had been captured and carried into exile in Babylon. They were separated from the place they called home and the place they wanted to be. They had lost control of their lives and they didn't know when they would ever be able to go back to normal.
  - So you can understand why this passage feels so hopeless at times.
  - He says that the people had stopped calling out to God.
  - That they had let the winds of sin carry them away.

- It feels like some had given up on God and any hope of going back home.

And there may be times when we feel that hopelessness this year too.

- Our frustration and grief might cause us to question and doubt.
- Our prayer life may suffer as we wonder where God has gone.
- We may even be blown around by those winds of sin as we search for an easier way out rather than endure any more waiting. We may look toward the false promises of willful ignorance or instant gratification thinking that they can deliver us back to normal because we have waited long enough for that long-expected Jesus.
- And our frustration and anger over our situation might boil over in our relationships as well. We might find ourselves fighting with our loved ones or our friends - over politics and epidemiology, over how to wrap presents or which app is the best for video-chats or a million other little things that are really just an expression of our grief over our imperfect world and our imperfect lives.

But, right there, when we're at the end of our rope. Isn't that exactly where hope always grows?

- For it was when Isaiah sat in exile in Babylon, away from the home that he loved, that God's voice spoke to him with a promise.
- And Elizabeth was barren and well past the age to bear a child when the new life of John the Baptist began to grow in her.
- And John himself was out in the desert, eating bugs and giving up on the world, when a dove flew down from the heavens.
- And Mary was out in the cold in that dirty old barn, for there was nowhere else to go. And there she sat, at her most vulnerable. And only then, was the long expected Jesus born to save us. In that most unexpected place and time.

So if you find yourself frustrated and alone this year. If you find yourself fighting with your loved ones. If you feel doubt. If the winds of sin begin to carry you away. If you find yourself sick of waiting and ready to give up on this long night.

- Let me tell you, that is just the moment:
  - To pause and breathe.
  - To look around.
  - To listen up.
  - To feel around in the dark.
    - Because God has brought hope to the hopeless before. In fact, it is among the hopeless where God seems to do His best work.
    - It is when we find ourselves stumbling around in the dark, that we trip over the holy that was there all along.
    - It is when we have nowhere else to go that God meets us with the hope we need.

God comes with the promise that He can take the clay of our lives, no matter how shattered or smooshed or misshapen it may be. And He can reform it, giving us meaning and purpose, beauty and new life.

- And this great potter can take even our sin and our doubt, our impatience and our quarrels and He can mold them into the building blocks of the very kingdom of God. Because God's anger may pass with the morning, but God's forgiveness is eternal.
- And God's Kingdom is worth waiting for. So let us wait together, with faith in that long-expected Jesus who will come once again to shake the mountains and heal the viruses and light a fire of hope within us all.

Amen.



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