

Rend the Heavens! – Isaiah 63:15 – 64:12

Introduction - The book of Isaiah is a single vision, a prophecy of judgment upon a rebellious people, and that vision is there from beginning to end (1:2, 66:24). And yet, within the walls of judgment, the mercy of the LORD for His people and His unthwarted plan for the salvation of the world swells in overwhelming triumph. If there is any chronology to this book, then these chapters may be coming at the end of more than fifty years of preaching for Isaiah. Overwhelmed by the glory of God, amazed at the unimaginable future blessing, devastated at the lack of response by Israel in his day, and burdened over the promised judgment and destruction of Jerusalem, Isaiah prays. When you are overwhelmed with the glory of God, or amazed at unimaginable future blessing, or devastated at the response of yourself or your people, or burdened over the judgment upon us in our day, Isaiah teaches us to pray; how to pray, what to pray, to Whom to pray.

Look Down From Heaven: So Far Away (63:15-19) – “Where are You? Can you see me? Can you see the state of the world? Where are your mercies?” Isaiah speaks for the people; he speaks for all those who have at one time or another endured what John of the Cross called “the dark night of the soul.” These are the times when we feel so forsaken (Psalm 22:1). He appeals to the fact that we were created to have our deepest relations with our heavenly Father, deeper than any human relations (v16, Matt 10:37), but acknowledges that Abraham and Jacob wouldn’t even recognize them as their children (nor would Jesus – John 8:39-40). It almost seems as though God had hardened their hearts – why would He do this (v17)? And of course, this is fulfilling what God had told Isaiah would happen (6:9-10). The sanctuary would be trodden down (18), and the nation of holy people would become an old story of long ago (v19).

Straying - Romans 1:24-25 describes how God gives us over to our lusts when we refuse to acknowledge Him, thank Him, and glorify Him. No one reading the whole book could ever believe that Isaiah thought the people were forced to sin by God and yet no one could avoid seeing God’s active and sovereign hand in all the actions of man. Remember, this section is less of a theological treatise and more of a heartfelt, pleading, honest prayer. “*Why have you made us stray...*” is an appropriate complaint – to God.

Reminding – Isaiah reminds God that His name is “*Our Redeemer from Everlasting*” and that these people are “*Your inheritance*.” He has brought us out of Egypt. Can He afford to not allow His people to go unredeemed? What of His own reputation? Moses made this same argument – “you can’t afford to not save us!” (Exodus 32:11-14). Reminding God is an appropriate, arguing prayer.

Rend the Heavens: Come Down Here (64:1-7) – Isaiah does not just want God to “*look down from heaven*.” He wants God to rip the heavens open and come down (v1), to shake everything up, refine it all with His fire, make His name known and feared among all and do the awesome things He has done in the past that changed the world (vv2-3). To “*rend the heavens*” for a Jew would be to remove the separating veil between God and man as was symbolized by the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of holies in the Temple. This was principally accomplished in the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. When Jesus was baptized, the heavens broke open (Matt 3:16), and when He was crucified, the veil was torn and the earth quaked (Matt 27:51). Paul later makes clear that this prayer, including v4, was answered by God in the coming of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:1-12). He speaks of what has been revealed (Jesus Christ and Him crucified). We should and must continue to pray, but with greater hope than Isaiah had, for we know in the celebration of Good Friday and Easter that God has prepared something for the human race that will come to a glorious fruition in the course of history, prior to the resurrection. And it will stagger the imagination. Eye hasn’t seen it yet, and ear has not heard about it, and yet God is in the midst of doing it. These are the deep things of God manifested in human history.

Waiting – Waiting on the Lord is not passive but active (v5). It is practicing righteousness with joy, living in covenant life with God and your brothers and sisters. It is committing the future into God’s hands by means of daily living with “*...integrity, honesty, faithfulness, simplicity, mercy, generosity and self-denial*. The person who does not do these things may be waiting for something, but he or she is not waiting on the Lord” (Oswalt).

Fading – But the prayer quickly returns to a faithful lament. Our best efforts are but filthy rags and our lives fade like a leaf blown away by the wind of our iniquities (vv6-7). We must balance faithful hard work with cold hard facts that our best efforts cannot change ourselves or the world without the God of our salvation at work.

Our Father in Heaven, Remake Us and This World (64:8-12) – “But are you not our Father? Can you not reshape us as easily as a potter can a lump of clay?” (v8). It is right and proper to argue this to your heavenly Father as you complain to Him of how desolate things have become (or seem destined to be); it is as if the most holy places now give little evidence to God’s omnipotence and sovereignty (vv9-11). The rhetorical question of v12 is only rhetorical then if one asks it, laments it and pleads it with faith in a God Who is able and willing to answer it. Answering in justice, God would say, “you are done.” Answering in grace, He has said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30).

God has answered this prayer of Isaiah’s. And so we learn from Isaiah how, and what, and to Whom we should pray in our day.