

Hope in His Coming

Isaiah 64:1—9 (v. 9)

Introduction

Isaiah longs for the coming of the Lord: *Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down (Isaiah 64:1)*. He longs to see heaven opened and the glory of the Lord fill the earth. He recounts awesome deeds God has done in the past. But there is a problem: *Behold, You were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? (v. 5)*. They didn't sin because God was angry. God became angry at them because of their sins, and in their sins, they did not properly respond to His anger, and kept on sinning. God's anger is directed toward sin. And if we remain in our sin, God will be angry with us. Do we really want Him to rend the heavens and come down to us if He is still angry with us?

The Majesty of God

Let us remind ourselves of the majesty, the awesomeness of God. *When You did awesome things that we did not look for, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence (v. 3)*. Is Isaiah possibly remembering the time when God came down to Mount Sainai to give the Law to Moses? Listen to the description of that day in **Exodus 19**. (Read **Exodus 19:16—18**). Even after God had Moses consecrate the people (**v. 14—15**), He warned them not to touch the mountain (**v. 21—23**). Turns out, they were so scared of this display of majesty, they were afraid to even come close. **Exodus 20:21** says: *The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.*

The Trembling Mountain

The mountain didn't tremble because of sin. The mountain trembled because the Creator had come down to it. The mere majesty of God demands a response. That seems to be something we have lost today. Jesus is fully divine and fully human. Through the years, scholars have emphasized one aspect over the other. Then the church would have to counter by emphasizing the other to maintain balance. One time, when the church was emphasizing and defending the divinity of Christ, the people began to feel that He was unapproachable. So, they started praying to Mary, His mother and asked her to intercede for them. This was how Mariology, the worship of Mary, got started in the Roman Catholic church. Since we know that we are not to pray to anyone but God, we try to make Christ more approachable. Maybe it's time we took a lesson from the mountain and remember His majesty and glory.

The Extent of Our Sin

Another thing that adds to our fear is sin. **Verse 6** says: *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.* Referencing this verse, the **Explanation of the Small Catechism** says that it's *our sin nature that makes it impossible for us to keep God's commandments perfectly*. That sin nature is so pervasive that Isaiah says our *righteous deeds*, not our sins, are like a polluted garment. The word "polluted garment" is a menstrual cloth, used by women on their period. At this time, they were unclean because of the discharge of blood. That's why Luther says in the **Large Catechism**, in the section on the Commandments: *In comparison with those works [keeping*

the commandments] all human holiness is just stench and filth. And besides, human holiness deserves nothing but wrath and damnation (LC 5th Commandment ¶198).

What Is Our Hope?

If that's the case, what is our hope? How can Isaiah long for God to *rend the heavens and come down* (v. 1)? How can we have hope in His coming? There are three things to remember here.

The Lord Makes Us Clean

The first thing to remember is there is nothing we can do. The Lord has made us in the first place. In **verse 8**, Isaiah says to God, *"But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our potter."* He has made us, and He is the One who makes us clean by the blood of the *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (**John 1:29**). All we can do is ask forgiveness, as Isaiah pleads for God to *remember not iniquity forever* (v. 9).

The First Coming of Christ

The second thing to remember is that we await the second coming of Christ in majesty, glory, and power in the light of His first coming in obscurity, humility, and apparent weakness. That time, He didn't come to judge, He came to save. He did what we can't do. He kept God's law perfectly because of His divine nature. That made Him the perfect Sacrifice. Because of His human nature, He was one of us, yet He was spotless and without blemish, just like sacrificial lambs must be. Then, He freely went to the cross to die in our place. His perfect life and death paid the price for all the sin of the whole world.

The Hope in His Second Coming

But He didn't just die for the world. He died for you and you and you and me. That's what the words of institution mean: "This is My body given *for you* ... This is My blood shed *for you*" (**Matthew 26:26, 28; Mark 14:22, 24; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25**). Yes, in the Greek, the "you" is plural because Jesus is talking to all His disciples. But His death was for each one of them and it's for each one of us. Because He died and rose again for each one of us, our sins are forgiven, and we can each look forward to His second coming in hope, because then our salvation will be made complete.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
