

Sermon Isaiah 64 1 9 1st Sunday in Advent series B

Sermon: 1st Sunday in Advent

Text: Isaiah 64:1-9 (v.1)

Theme: An Advent Prayer

Goal: To encourage God's people to pray for Jesus' coming in grace.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Do you pray for the coming of Jesus? The Apostle Paul used to pray "Maranata", and Aramaic word that means: Come, Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 16:22). And it seems that the first Christian Church added this word to the end of its Liturgy: Maranata = Come, Lord Jesus. – We pray at the table: Come, Lord, Jesus, be our Guest... But a guest comes and goes... - My question is: Do we pray for the second coming of Jesus? ...I have to confess it: I myself very seldom pray for it ... only in the church. It seems that the Last Event is very far away and is not part of our plans...

Advent Season wants to focus our faith on the Holy Babe Jesus, who came already on the first Christmas; but also to focus our hope on the same Jesus who promised to come again at the end of the times. Maranata: Come, Lord Jesus!

I – Come down!

The Prophet Isaiah prays boldly in our text: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down." It expresses the strong hope of the prophet that God would come down to interfere and to help His people in the midst of distress and lots of problems they were facing. This prayer expresses the faith and the prayer of God's people of the Old Testament: Once God Himself would come down to their aid. This was their Advent Prayer, and they pulled themselves forward in ardent faith to the day when God would visit His people.

Their prayer was answered when Jesus came. Very few accepted Him as the answer to their prayers. But this was the way God had chosen to help His people: He sent His only begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, to rescue people from eternal damnation and to give them life, eternal life as God's people! God rend the heavens and came down on Christmas!

II - A missionary prayer

The Prophet had a broader vision of God's help when he should come. He prayed: "Come down to make your name known to your enemies." The name of God should be proclaimed to all, to convert the enemies to the truth, or to condemn the stubborn enemies of God's people. It's a missionary prayer and on the other hand a judgment prayer. The name of God heals or condemns, depending on accepting or rejecting the Holy name of God. – Jesus made God's name known and commanded His disciples to go to the entire world to proclaim God's name to all and what He had done through His Son Jesus.

III – God had come in Sinai

The Prophet's prayer is based on His previous experience, according to the Scriptures. God had already come in the past on Mount Sinai, revealing Himself to the people. "For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you." Exodus reports when God gave the Ten Commandments: "There was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast (Exodus 19:16).

The heavens were opened again when God came down on Christmas Eve, not with thunders and lightning, but with the glory of God and with the angel's choir singing Gloria and Peace. God came in grace and love! Not the Commandments, but the Gospel= Good News for

all the people was proclaimed: The Saviour has been born! He is Christ, the Lord! (Luke 2:10,11).

IV – God had helped in the past

The Prophet was confident that God would come to help His people as He did in the past. “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. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember Your ways.” This is faith, and therefore the prophet can pray: “Come down!” He is not afraid of God, but he trusts God in His mercy and love, as the experience of the forefathers had shown. The Bible tells us about God’s acts on behalf of those who are expecting Him.

We shall not be afraid of God. We shall fear Him, of course. But this is the holy fear, which respects and trusts. Hebrews 4:14,16 says: “Therefore, since we have ...Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

V – We are unworthy

But on the other hand, if we reject God’s mercy and continue to live in sin, what can we expect? The Prophet is very honest before God. He is praying on behalf of his people. And he confesses: “But when we continued to sin against them (your ways), you are angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean... no one calls on your name...” – The prophet had a fit of desperation when he thought about the impenitence of his own people. God was hiding His face from the people and was punishing them because of their sins. There wasn’t repentance. The prophet acknowledged it and asked for mercy:

VI – We believe in God’s mercy

“Yet, o Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. 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.” What a humble confession of sins and what a strong confession of faith! - God is our Father. Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father who at in heaven.” – God is the potter; we are the clay. We depend totally on Him, and He takes the dirty, useless clay and moulds us into a useful pot – work of His hand! – He is the Lord, we are His people!

Conclusion: All these promises were repeated by Jesus and the forgiveness of our sins are assured by His death and resurrection. Therefore we don’t need to be scared when we think about Jesus’ second coming; but we can pray boldly with the prophet: “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!” As we prepare for Christmas in happiness and decorate the church and our homes, remembering the gracious coming of our Saviour, we can also rejoice in preparation for His second coming and pray for it. Let us rely on His grace, and not be scared like those who don’t have hope. Without bigger concerns about, but being alert, let us live our lives with responsibility according to God’s will (as we talked about it at our last Bible Study). The hymn we sang before the sermon, *“Oh, come, oh, come Emmanuel”* (LSB 357) is a very old prayer of the Christian Church and matches with the prayer of the prophet Isaiah. Christ already comes in His Word, at the Baptism, and at the Lord’s Supper, where He comes with His body and blood for forgiveness of our sins. *Christ is here, but we wait for the day when we will see him with our eyes – when the veil that conceals Him now is torn away (Phil Brandt).* This is our Advent Prayer: “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!” - Maranata: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 30 November 2014