



November 29, 2020

First Sunday of Advent - Hope

Isaiah 64:1–9

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!
²As when fire sets twigs ablaze
and causes water to boil,
come down to make your name known to your enemies
and cause the nations to quake before you!
³For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.
⁴Since 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.
⁵You come to the help of those who gladly do right,
who remember your ways.
But when we continued to sin against them,
you were angry.
How then can we be saved?
⁶All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
⁷No one calls on your name
or strives to lay hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have given us over to our sins.
⁸Yet you, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord;
do not remember our sins forever.
Oh, look on us, we pray,
for we are all your people.

When everything is lost—when homes and lives are destroyed by war or natural disaster, when there is seemingly no way out—we call it a hopeless situation.

That is where our text lands us today—right in the middle of a hopeless situation. After decades of exile in Babylon, the Judeans are free to return to their homeland, only to find it destroyed and barren. What they thought would be a joyous homecoming has ended in

feelings of despair. They told the stories of this place to their children and their grandchildren, only to return to a place that was unrecognizable.

And in their despair, they feel this incredible distance from God. They question whether God is working on their behalf—if God is listening at all. In the midst of this great sorrow, in the midst of this despair, they raise up a great lament to God: “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!” The imagery here gives a great sense of longing for God to be revealed, to intervene, to interject some light into the midst of this darkness, to bring about some kind of hope into a seemingly hopeless situation.

I. Because of their hopeless situation, the Judeans cry out in lament to God.

a. They wonder where God is.

- i. They think they’ve been abandoned by God, and they want to know why God would leave them this way.
- ii. They ask God to draw near.
- iii. “come down” and “make known” point to the reality that they long for a great and visible intercession from God.
- iv. They recall the ways God has interceded in the past and wonder where God is this time.

II. The lament of the Judeans leads them to confession.

***⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.***

- a. As they petition God to draw close and reveal God’s power, the lament shifts to confession: they have continued to sin, and no one calls on the Lord’s name anymore.
- b. There is some true honesty happening in this lament-turned-confession. They believe their sin has caused God to turn away from them. They view their righteous acts as “filthy rags” in light of their sin. They are unclean and have forsaken God.
- c. This is a communal confession. It is not about individual sin. Many of these individuals weren’t even born yet when the nation of Israel entered exile—which means this confession is not about individual acts but about who they are and have historically been as a community of people.
 - i. This is about corporate sin—the ways that they as a society, as a people, have forsaken God; the ways they have been disobedient to whom God has called them to be.

1. Whom has God called them to be? A hospitable people who love God and love their neighbors.

2. They have repeatedly lived in opposition to the people they were called to be. (This is a theme repeated throughout the Old Testament.)

3. We can see the idea of collective sin in the language of their confession: “we continued to sin” in verse 5; “all of us” in verse 6; “no one” in verse 7.

d. This act of confession shows a shift in their thinking. God is not to blame for their present circumstances. They have a responsibility to own the choices and actions that have gotten them into their current situation.

e. Even in their desperation, they trust that God is listening to them.

i. Confession and lament often go hand in hand.

1. Lament is the act of crying out about circumstances.

2. Confession is both a plea for forgiveness and for relationship.

3. In both lament and confession, they long for something to be restored and renewed.

III. They reach a point where there’s nothing left to say.

***⁷ No one calls on your name
or strives to lay hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have given us over to our sins.***

a. There is a gap in the text between verses 7 and 8. It seems they have expressed so much despair that they have nothing left to say. All that’s left is complete and utter hopelessness.

IV. Their hope was only in the heavenly Father. And that’s still true for us today.

***⁸ Yet you, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹ Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord;
do not remember our sins forever.
Oh, look on us, we pray,
for we are all your people.***

i. There is hope—not because of the good the people have done. Their confession shows they have lacked good and right actions.

ii. There is hope—not because of their circumstances. Their homeland still lies in ruin. They have had no triumphal homecoming. They still have nowhere to live.

iii. Yet there is hope—because of who God is.

1. God is their Father. This is about relationship. They express their confidence in a God who loves them in spite of their failings.
2. God is the Potter. God is at work molding them, actively moving in ways that make God's people look more like God.
3. They are God's people. After the lament and the confession, the people remember their identity. Regardless of whether they have a home, they remain the people of God.

V. There is hope for us too, even in the midst of our hopeless situations.

- a. On this first Sunday of Advent, many of us are also walking through or toward seemingly hopeless situations.
- b. **God feels distant in the midst of hopeless situations.**
 - i. Despair has a way of robbing us of joy. We wonder where God is in the midst of this pain. We look longingly at where God has worked in the past and ask whether God is still close to us now.
- c. Confession is an important part of Advent. Not all of our hopeless situations are caused by our own choices, our own sins. Sometimes they are caused by the sins and choices of others. Yet we know there are places we need to confess. Or attitudes or thoughts in response to others.
 - i. **confession often leads us to look at things with new eyes.**
- d. Remember who God is and who we are.

Psalm 9:18

But God will never forget the needy; the **hope** of the afflicted will never perish.

Psalm 25:3

No one who **hopes** in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

Psalm 25:5

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my **hope** is in you all day long.

Psalm 25:21

May integrity and uprightness protect me because my **hope**, Lord, is in you.

Psalm 31:24

Be strong and take heart, all you who **hope** in the Lord.

Psalm 43:5

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your **hope** in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalm 52:9

For what you have done I will always praise you in the presence of your faithful people. And I will **hope** in your name, for your name is good.

Psalm 62:5

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my **hope** comes from him.

Isaiah 40:31

...but those who **hope** in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you **hope** and a future.

Romans 15:13

May the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.