

**November 27, 2011**  
**Advent 1**

*“Lord Jesus, Tear Open the Heavens and Come Down!”*

**ISAIAH 63:16B, 17, 64:1-8**

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**B**ut you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.<sup>17</sup> Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance.<sup>64:1</sup> Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! <sup>2</sup> As 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! <sup>3</sup> For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> You 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? <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. <sup>8</sup> Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

I am holding in my hand a piece of cloth that I am going to tear in my hands. As I tear this cloth, I want you to think of the words that we just read to you that call on the Lord to rend or tear open the heavens and come down. When trouble and evil overwhelm us we want the Lord to come down and rescue us.

In the song by Carrie Underwood, “Jesus Take the Wheel” a young mother is traveling home on Christmas Eve. It is getting late and she has only 50 miles to her parents’ house. She hits black ice, the car goes into a spin, and she cries out “Jesus take the wheel.” The car comes to a safe stop and her little child does not even wake up in the back seat. And then she prays again for Jesus to take the wheel and help her through the hard times she is facing in life.

Today is the beginning of the Advent season. The word advent means “coming.” We think of Jesus coming down to rescue us and take over the wheel. We celebrate how he came into this world as little baby born in Bethlehem. We celebrate how he comes to us in his Word, especially those amazing prophecies in the Old Testament that strengthen our faith. We celebrate the hope that at any time Jesus can tear open the heavens and end this world in which we are living and take us home in glory.

**Tear open the heavens and bring justice**

When you read the Old Testament you hear God’s people repeatedly crying out to the Lord

to come and deliver them. They confess their sin before God as we do. Then they cry out for God's mercy. Listen again to their cry for help. "You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer, from of old is your name. Why, O Lord, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance."

For a while the Lord abandoned his people and hardened their hearts because of their idolatry. Listen to how the Lord speaks in Isaiah chapter one about his people. "I reared up children and they rebelled against me. ... Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption. He told Isaiah to speak his word to the people with this charge: "Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn and be healed." Romans one tells us when people harden their hearts against God, he turns them over to their evil desires. He allows people wallow in the filth of sin and unbelief so they finally cry out, "Lord, we have had enough of sinful rebellion against you. Come to us and rescue us." These people hardened their hearts against the Lord and then the Lord hardened their hearts. Now they are yearning for the Lord to turn to them in mercy and deliver them.

We know that in the last days people will becoming increasingly more and more opposed to the Lord. Our Lord Jesus warned us that because of the increase of wickedness, the love of many will grow cold. Remember the story Jesus told about the lost son. He took his portion of the inheritance the father gave to him and spent it foolishly in wild living. His life sank down so low that he longed to fill his hungry belly with the pods the pigs ate. In that deepest, darkest pit of his life, he finally came to his senses and decided to return to his father. In these words from Isaiah we hear God's Old Testament people crying out to the Lord at the end of their rope, calling out to God as their Father and redeemed to come back and rescue them.

Listen again to their cry for justice. "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down and make your name know to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you. For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you." Take some time reading the book of Isaiah and look at all the vivid pictures used to show God's judgment and his mercy, his law and his gospel. How quickly fire moves through dry twigs and brings water to boil. These people are yearning for God to come down and strike their enemies the way he had done in the past such as at the Red Sea.

Someone once gave me a picture of Egyptian chariot wheels that they have found beneath the waters of the Red Sea. Remember how the charioteers of Pharaoh were trying to cross the Red Sea to mercilessly destroy God's people. Suddenly their wheels started coming off, and they looked with terror at each other and shouted out, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt!" If Jesus comes in clouds of glory the Revelation tells us that some will be crying out to the hills and mountains: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask the Lord to deliver us from evil. One of the ways the Lord will deliver us from evil is to end this world in which we are living and take us

home to the place he has prepared for us. We get tired of hearing the news about the gang stabbings in our communities, the immoral lives of those in Hollywood, the false teachings within the church, the ever increasing threat from Muslim extremists. We find ourselves praying with people in Isaiah. "As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down and make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you." We long for the Lord to tear open the heavens and come down. (Tear another cloth)

### **Tear open the heavens and bring salvation**

Do we really want the Lord to come down and destroy all evil? What about the evil that even finds its way into our hearts and lives? Our only hope of escaping the Lord's wrath against evil is to find refuge in his plan to rescue us and save us.

Listen now as these Old Testament people speak of their confidence in the Lord's to rescue them from their sin. "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." There is not a religion in the world that teaches God would send his Son into the world to die on the cross to rescue us from our sin. The Apostle Paul uses these words about no one hearing and no eye seeing to show in 1 Corinthians two that without the spirit of God everything that Jesus has done for us at the cross is foolishness and nonsense to people. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see God's plan to rescue us, and leads us to wait on the Lord and cry out for him to come to forgive us and rescue us. Psalm 130 says, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope." Then it goes on to say, "O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins."

We have no place to put our hope except in the Lord. We certainly cannot put our hope in ourselves because what we see in ourselves always falls short of what God expects of us. "You 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?" A woman once told me that her favorite verse in the Bible was "God helps those who help themselves." A perfect and holy God would help us and rescue us if we could measure up to what he expects of us as it says here, "You come to the help of those who gladly do right and remember your ways." Do you always remember God's ways? Do you always do right? The result of this constant failure to do right and remember God's ways is the painful cry, "How then can we be saved?"

How far will God's Word go to show us we have no hope in ourselves? God's Word dares to tell us that even our righteous acts, our good things we do in life, are tainted and fouled by sin. "All of us have become like who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins." If you look at these words closely, you can quickly see that you have no reason to put any hope in what you try to do to save yourself. We are unclean. Even our righteous acts are like filthy rags. I was really nice to someone recently who called on the phone to sell me something I didn't need, even though he interrupted my lunch. And then comes the sinful thought of pride that says, "I sure wish other people were as good as I am and could control themselves as I do." "We all shrivel like a leaf and

like wind our sins sweep us away." The leaves wither and perish and so will we. On Friday we want for hike along the Santa Ynez River. I have never seen the autumn leaves more beautiful. These leaves will perish and so will we. No one strives and calls on the name of the Lord as they should. We waste away in our sin. The cry goes up, "Who then can be saved?" God's Word makes it clear we can find no hope in ourselves to be loved and accepted by God.

Where is our hope found? It is found in the Lord. Listen again to these comforting words. "Yet, O Lord, you are the Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." We are the work of God's hand. He created us and gave us the bodies that miraculously digested all that turkey and green beans and mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie. The Lord our God is the potter and we are the clay. He is the one that also make us new people who are his new creation, his dear children, loved by him in this life and for all eternity. The hand of God transferred your sin and mine to Jesus. The hands of Jesus were nailed to a cross to make full payment. It is the hand of God who brought this forgiveness to you and created faith to believe. It is the hand of God that keeps you in your faith. It is the hand of God that works out everything for your good. It is the hand of God that will take you home to heaven when Jesus returns. And so we long for Jesus to come to us again this Advent season. We long for him to return in glory to take us home to the place prepared for us. Maybe this will be the first Christmas we all spend in heaven with Jesus. Even so Lord, Jesus tear open the heavens and come down (tearing cloth). Amen.