

Men's Bible Study – Wednesday, November 25, 2020 (11am) – Advent I

I. The Common Thread: We are restored and saved in a most important way. God has come down in his Christ and saved us. This is that awesome deed that we could never have expected of him. But he does not stop there; he enriches us with **good gifts to be used to bear fruit** for his kingdom until he returns. He sustains us until **that Day** when he comes in the clouds with great power and glory to gather us with all the elect. This is his word to us, so we must be on guard, watching for his return.

II. TEXT: Isaiah 64:1-9 – Prayer for Mercy

1. We have been in our sins for a long time. Then, when least expected—nor could we have expected it—God did something awesome. He acted for those who wait for him in hope of forgiveness. No one has ever imagined a God who meets with his people, though they are sinners (Mt. 9:10; Romans 5:8).
2. Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66). Likely dating to **the early days after Persia took over Babylon**, two things would have been happening in relationship to Jerusalem at this time (late 6th century BCE). **First**, those residents who had remained after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem would have received some new freedoms under the realm of Persia. **Second**, those who had been exiled to Babylon would have been given permission to return to their homeland. While much of the Old Testament witness from this time period is full of hope and joy, anxiety lies just below the surface. News of a new beginning does not mean that everything happens at once or that the past pain is erased. Even in the midst of the joy there can be disappointment and disillusion. In Isaiah 64:1-9 (**Isaiah 63:15-64:12**), this is expressed in **lament**. **God as Father/Potter, & we as the clay** in His hands!
3. **Is. 64:1 begins with a three-fold appeal:** that God would tear open the heavens, that God would come down, and that the mountains would quake at the divine presence (vs. 1). The metaphors used to describe the coming of God -- a pot of water boiling over and mountains shaking -- are not terribly comforting (vs. 2). Boiling water scalds. It cannot be put back into the pot. Shaking mountains may crumble and reduce the environment to chaos. **In Verse 9 a second three-fold appeal** to God is made: do not be exceedingly angry; do not remember iniquity forever; consider that we are your people. In the **intervening verses, the people confess their transgression and waver as to whether or not they are solely responsible for it.** In verse 6 they confess their iniquity, but in verses 5 and 7 (also 63:17) they contend that their sin was at least partially caused by God looking away from them. In verse 9 there is less concern as to the source of their transgression. Rather their hope/appeal is that the LORD would now heal the breach between them; that they would once more be considered God's own people.
4. **In Hebrew**, one is struck by the repeated phrase **"all of us" (kulanu)**; the word hangs on somewhat awkwardly at the ends of the phrases. We are like one unclean -- all of us (vs. 6a). We drooped like a leaf -- all of us (vs. 6b). We are the work of your hand -- all of us (vs.8). Consider, we are your people -- all of us (vs. 9). This four-fold emphasis on the totality of the people -- **all of us** -- reminds us that we as humans are in this together and we -- all of us -- belong to God.

III. TEXT: Psalm 80:1-7 – Restore Us O God

1. Psalm 80 is **a national lament**. References to the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh) suggest that this Psalm may have been written in response to the Assyrian campaign. This Psalm envisions the **northern kingdom of Israel in a panic mode** over the impending invasion of the Assyrians. **The fledgling kingdom doesn't have a prayer** -- **or all they have is a prayer**. God is asked to "give ear," to "shine forth," to "let your face shine." The backdrop of their plea is they quite rightly sense they are out of sorts with God. They understandably, wrongly and yet wisely, assume that God is: "angry with your people's prayers."
2. Refugees have come from Israel to the Jerusalem sanctuary to pray for restoration and peace. God is the Shepherd (protection & sacrifice), enthroned on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant (Cherubim). God's face:

Numbers 6:24-26 – Aaronic Benediction. Prayer: Give Ear! Restore (vv. 3, 7, 19)! How Long? Messianic prophecy: Jesus is the true Son of Man who sits at the right hand of the Father. Invitation to repentance. How have we turned away? God does not remain angry with his people forever. He will yet smile upon us & restore us. On that day, he will save us from ourselves, from our sin; the laughter of our enemies will cease.

IV. TEXT: I Corinthians 1:3-9 – Greeting & Thanksgiving

1. Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth; a church established by Paul during his 2nd Missionary Journey; AD 50-52—Acts 15:36-18:23. This portion of a letter was known as *captatio benevolentiae*, **capturing good will**. Paul opens his letter **by softening up his readers**. In this introduction Paul praises his friends in Christ and recognizes the gifts God has given them; gifts that they are not always using wisely. It appears that the church in Corinth had forgotten that Christ would come again, & that they were living in the in-between-time as people of the new creation. They would seem to be so focused on what God had already done in Jesus they were no longer waiting or living in anticipation of **"the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"** (1 Cor. 1:8). They have not arrived at the end of their journey. They have forgotten the "not yet". If they are not always clear about how to live their life in Christ, they should not be surprised. There is still more to be revealed. **Live as Resurrected People! Paul: called an Apostle. Corinthian Believers: called Saints!**
2. Notice the **name of Jesus is mentioned 8 times** in verses 1-9. Everything Paul has to say is about JESUS—the source and content of grace and peace—sustained by a faithful God, guiltless to the end!

V. TEXT: Mark 13:24-37 – The Advent/Coming of the Son of Man

1. **"Are we there yet? How much longer?"** – The cry of impatience or impending hope. The **"second coming"** (Parousia) should not be simply a doctrine to which we officially subscribe (Creeds—He will come again to judge the living and the dead.); it should be **a defining reality that impacts our faith and lives** in the present. Living in the END TIMES. What would you do if you knew that the world would end tomorrow?
2. Mark 13 is known as a mini Apocalypse (end-time literature). One popular proposal holds that Mark stitched this chapter together from two "apocalyptic tracts" that originally sounded competing themes (paradoxical messages). Try this: First, read Mark 13:1-2, 8, 14-22, 24-30. The text flows smoothly, warning Christians to **prepare for an imminent apocalypse**. Now, read Mark 13:3-7, 9-13, 21-23, & 32-37. Again, the text flows smoothly, but it offers counsel of another sort: **believers need to dig in, stay faithful, and prepare for the long haul**. The **key verses** are **Mark 13:22-23**: we need to live as though the end is at hand and we need to dig-in for the long haul because the eschatological timetable is known only to God. We are always living in the END TIME; not with fear/trepidation, but with fortitude/faith. Hope does not disappoint us!
3. In today's church, many Christians seem to think, "Since the time of Jesus' coming cannot be known, we need not think much about it." Mark draws the opposite conclusion: **since the timing is unknown, we should think about it all the time!** Jesus says that no one will know the day or the hour and so we have to keep close watch. He compares our situation to that of servants who do not know when their master will return and yet are expected to be prepared for it; a **call to constant vigilance**. We are called always be on the look-out for our Lord -- whether at the end of time, or in the face of our neighbors' need.
4. **What time is it?** Holy Week. 2 days before Passover. **"We do not know,"** Jesus says, **whether the master will come in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn**. Notice the way in which Mark divides the scenes leading up to the crucifixion: **1)** Last Supper: "When it was evening, he came with the twelve..." (14:17). **2)** Jesus' prayer & betrayal: "And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy" (14:40). Why so tired? It was the middle of the night. **3)** Jesus' trial & Peter's denial: "But he began to curse, & he swore an oath, 'I do not know this man you are talking about.' At that moment the cock crowed for the second time" (14:71-72a). **4)** Trial before Pilate: "As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate" (15:1). **STAY AWAKE!** God's Word will not PASS AWAY!