

As some of you know, I am currently working my way through Ecclesiastes in my daily devotions.

The book takes a frighteningly honest look at life where God often seems distant.

I have asked God in recent days, “Lord, why is your world like it is?”

So often we feel that God is watching us from afar and not doing me much good. Hence this prayer.

My daughter Katie often asks me why God feels so far away, and prayers seem to go up into space, to nothing. Recently she shared with me how she was out one evening looking up at the night sky.

She thought about how far away are the moon and the stars and wondered why God seems even further off. She wondered, “God do you care? Do you love me? Why don’t you show up?”

Like her, we might ask the central request of this prayer, Isaiah 64:1

“Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down.”

The reader of Isaiah’s prophesy has been led through a series of revelations.

1. We are a mess... sins, rebellion, corruption.
2. We are in trouble, and we deserve it. God’s wrath is a real and terrible reality.
3. You, God, are the only one who can save us. We cannot save ourselves.
4. You, God, are coming to save us. You are coming in person in Your Messiah.
5. Now the text this morning: Where are you?

One of the challenges in reading the Old Testament prophets is in the organization of the text.

These words were not written with paragraphs, punctuation, spaces between words, or even vowels.

Hebrew prophecy and poetry were written to be read aloud by someone who knew the text.

You had to know how to read it!

You had to know how to begin and end sentences and paragraphs, how to read conversation.

You had to know who was speaking to whom and what to emphasize.

You had to know the major breaks in thoughts and events that set one section off from another.

You had to know that the words beginning this text (there were no chapter and verse numbers) began a prayer.

Prophecy is poetic discourse, conversation between God and His prophet and the people.

Usually, the conversation is coming from God or His prophet to the people.

Here we have God’s people speaking to God through the prophet.

It is, of course, prayer. And this prayer is refreshing, honest, and instructive. It reads like a psalm.

I. Lord, why are You so far away?

Isaiah 63:15-19

This prayer follows God’s warnings of coming judgment and certainty of coming salvation in recent chapters.

We have just seen in chapter 63 the terrifying image of the Messiah as blood-soaked warrior...

Coming to carry out God’s anger on all who have rejected Him and ignored Him.

And we have seen the promise of God who loves to save His people and has done so in the past.

The prayer opens with a request, “Look down from heaven and see...”

The request is that God would see from heaven in three senses.

1. From the place of beauty where God resides.
2. From the place of strength where God acts.
3. From God’s compassionate heart. If God is not compassionate, this prayer makes no sense.

The middle part of verse 15 is a question. For this is a prayer of longing.

“Where is Your zeal and Your might?”

You see what the question is? God, we have seen all Your works in the past and Your promises.

Why do you seem so far off now?

Can we pause for a moment and consider this question, for it is the mood of the entire prayer?

Do you feel this, a distance between heaven and earth, between God and my need?

Sometimes He seems so far away, so insensitive to our prayers, so unwilling to help.

Amazingly, our God understands the feeling.

The ultimate feeling of distance from God was experienced by Jesus on the Cross as He quoted Psalm 22.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” So, the Lord knows how it feels.

Though it makes the feeling no less real...

because we have an idea of where we ought to be with God, and God with us. Where? Next verse.

“You are our Father.” Twice in verse 16. It is a lament.

The rest of the chapter is a recognition that they are not where they ought to be in relationship with God.

Last line of verse 16, “Our Redeemer from of old is Your name.” God is the one who purchased them.

But they do not look like it. They do not act like it.

In verse 17 they even ask God, “Why do You make us wander from Your ways?”

God, “Why do You harden our hearts? Why is all this so that we don’t fear You?”

This is not an accusation that God should not have hardened their hearts. They are not blaming God.

They are acknowledging that without God’s action they cannot even seek God how they must.

Verses 18-19 describe a situation in which His people realize they are like those who don’t even know God.

Practically speaking, they are living like the world. Church on Sunday, but the rest of the time, nothing.

They have had moments of nearness to God, but no longer. It was so long ago, and like another person.

Have you ever felt that?

You are far from God, your sins and worldly desires are running your life, Bible like a foreign language.

What do you do? Well, you need God’s help. You have to pray. You have to really want the help.

You cannot fake-pray. You must truly repent-cry-for-help pray, and keep at it.

II. Lord, we need You soon, like now.

Isaiah 64:1-7

The prayer began by asking God to “look down.” (vs. 15) Now the request is for God to come down.

They want God to tear through the distance and show up in person and in power.

Do you know that you need this?

Memorize this first line of Isaiah 64. It is a great prayer. It is a desperate prayer for help.

And what kind of help? We need not wonder.

You have but to read the next three verses.

When did the mountain quake and fire kindle the brushwood?

When did the nations tremble at God’s presence?

When did God do awesome things that no one expected?

This was when the Lord saw them in slavery, heard their prayers, and came down to save them.

This was when the Lord miraculously rescued them and led them to Himself at Mount Sinai.

This was when the nations were all terrified that this God was Israel’s mighty warrior.

This was when the words of verse 4 lived in everyone’s experience.

Then, verses 5-7 are again an acknowledgement of their sins.

“God, you meet with those who are righteous and remember You... but that is not who we are.”

Do you know what we are reading in these verses?

Jesus said in Matthew 5, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

We see here, in Isaiah 64, a model prayer.

This is a prayer expressing spiritual poverty.

This is a prayer mourning for sin and the closeness we once had with our Father.

This is a prayer of meekness, humility before God.

This is a prayer yearning for righteousness because we can see that we don’t have it.

This prayer comes to God and offers Him nothing but need, because we have nothing but need.

This prayer says to God that we need Him now and cannot go on living on our own.

If you are a sinner and need God, this is a prayer you ought to memorize and pray.

III. Lord, forgive us and rescue us.

Isaiah 64:8-12

The prayer began by saying, "God, please look down, come back, we are too far away from You."

Then we prayed, "Lord, rend the heavens and come down. Save us like you saved your people from Egypt."

"All we have to bring to you is our own failure and our need to be saved."

This is a request for our Father's forgiveness in the present.

Notice how verse 8 begins, "But now, O Lord..." We are not waiting. We need God's help now.

You cannot put off your repentance.

You cannot say to God, "Ok I need your forgiveness and salvation, but I'll ask for real tomorrow."

If you harden your heart today, you don't know if you'll be willing to unhardened it tomorrow.

Today might just be your last chance. **2 Corinthians 6:1-2** (quote from Isaiah 49:8)

And I have visited with people who turned away from their last chance.

Years ago, Nancy and I were visiting with a woman at our dining room table.

She was married, but in an adulterous relationship.

(A warning: You might think you know who I am talking about. You don't.)

We were confronting her about what she was doing. We warned her about the wrath of God.

We warned her about ruining her family and her children.

We told her that if she continued there might be no way back because at some point you cannot repent.

She wept and confessed her sin. She was repentant and told us that she cared about her kids.

We prayed for her, and she wept. She knew that what she was doing was wrong.

We asked her if she was going to stop. She said that she thought so.

She left our house and went right to the man she had been seeing.

She wrecked her family and is far from God today. It had been her last chance.

In Isaiah 63:16 we read "You, O Lord, are our Father... from of old..."

Look at the words beginning in Isaiah 64:8, "You, O Lord, are our Father, NOW."

Next comes an acknowledgement that God is the one who forms us and shapes us.

We are his work. Or would you rather be your own work?

Then, in verse 9 comes three requests.

1. Do not be so angry with us.
2. Do not remember our sins.
3. Look at us. We are Your people.

The rest of the chapter continues the request for the Lord to look and see the terrible state of his people.

When you feel far from God and do not know how to pray, pray this prayer.

Pray it slow and sincerely. It might take you hours to pray it if God meets with you.

But this is the sort of prayer that the Lord answers.

He does just that in Isaiah.

Chapters 65-66 comprise an answer from God.

He answers, "I've don't this before for you and you rejected Me..."

"But I'm going to do it again for you and I, Myself, will come and do this inside of you and for keeps."

It is finally in Jesus Christ that He answers this prayer. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us.

What do you long for?

Do you long for God to come close to you, to save you, forgive your sin, and to shape you by His hand?

If so, this is your prayer.

If not, don't pray it. It won't work.

But if you want the Lord to rend the heavens and come down...

If you want the Lord's presence with You in your life, both the fear of Him and His comfort.

If you are a child of the Heavenly Father.

This is your prayer.