

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Working While Waiting” from the “Worth the Wait” Advent sermon series

Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-12

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- This section of Isaiah, we find the remnant (God’s people) pleading with the Lord to deliver them from bondage at the hands of the Babylonians. In these verses in chapter 64, they are pleading for God to show His power over their enemies.
- In verses 1-3, the remnant of God’s people are pleading for God to “...burst from the heavens and come down!” They are petitioning for God to come and demonstrate His power the same way He did on Mount Sinai, as we read in verse 3 (see Exodus 19:16-20).
- Verses 4-7 points out to us that God is unparalleled (v. 4), and yet v. 5 says, “You welcome those who gladly do good, who follow godly ways.” However, our sinful nature makes us unclean and separates us from God. Verses 5-6 say, “You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself, we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” A “filthy cloth” is used here to show something to be ritually unclean (see Leviticus 15:19-24).
- Verses 8-9 say, “Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.” The section concludes with the remnant pleading with God, their Creator and Father, to forgive and forget their iniquity and restore them. On God as “Father”, see Isaiah 63:16. On God as a “Potter”, see Isaiah 45:9-10.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- Today we are beginning a new series for Advent called “Worth the Wait.” We will be examining prophetic texts that point to the Way of the Christ child.
- Bill Monroe is known as the “father of Bluegrass” music. During his career, he created a high-pitched sound to his voice known as “high lonesome”. This sound came from his experience of listening to WWI veterans making a similar sound when they were returning home from the war. It was something between a spirited “Yippie!” and a painful wail. The magic of the high lonesome sound is the ability to capture our pain and deliver us at the same time.
- Today’s text from Isaiah can be thought of as a “high lonesome.” It is a communal lament that was born during a time of tremendous need. The Psalms fit into this as well, being 1/3 of psalms are lamentations of the Hebrew people. The inclusion of this genre in scripture affirms our need to give voice to our grief and our pain.
- The Advent begins with lighting the candle of hope and singing songs about the necessity of hope in our lives. There is something about this season that gives us hope and expectation. It also gives us a feeling of nostalgia and melancholy. We have walked this journey before and there are hopes that have not been fulfilled.
- The background to Isaiah 64: in 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah was ransacked. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, wiped out Jerusalem and destroyed the temple and deported the Jews from Jerusalem. For years, the Jewish people held out hope that God will bring them back home. It took 50 years before that occurred.
- Nostalgia: Sometimes the pain of the present causes us to become nostalgic about the past. This was the case in Isaiah (see Isaiah 63:11). The past is never as good as we remember, and the present is never as bad as we imagine! The past is nice to visit but not to live!
- Isaiah is feeling abandoned by God. The Advent of hope springs eternal, even in our high lonesome. God will never forget of abandon us (see Isaiah 46:15-16)!
- When God seems hidden, when hope hangs on a thread, isn’t it wonderful to know that the “Potter” becomes the clay and the Word become flesh. God wraps His arms around us, and our lamenting becomes joy. This becomes worth the wait!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- After reading Isaiah 64:1-9, with a focus on vv. 5-6, how can we be saved if we are so impure?
- Where else have the Israelites experienced God's presence up to this point (see Exodus 19)?
- Since our best efforts are still tainted by our sinful nature (v.6), where does our hope lie (see Romans 3)?
- Why do you think people today do not fear God the same way we read in Isaiah? How can we change this?
- How can we individually, and as a church, be the clay for God the "Potter"? What does this look like to you?
- What is the meaning of "high lonesome"? How can we see this genre in the Bible?
- How does the season of Advent give us hope? What does this mean to you?
- What causes us to be nostalgic? Are there certain things that give you a sense of nostalgia?
- Why do you think Isaiah reminds God of who God is throughout chapter 64?

