



Isaiah 64:1-9 - Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!
 ² 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!
³ For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.
 ⁴ 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.
⁵ 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?
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.
 ⁷ 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.

 ⁸ Yet, O LORD, you 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, O LORD;
 do not remember our sins forever.
 Oh, look upon us, we pray,
 for we are all your people.

You're in good hands



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
(1 John 3:1)

“Are you in good hands?” You can hear it in his voice, though, right? That’s been the one-line slogan of the Allstate Insurance Company since 1950. You can hardly turn on the TV without hearing the deep, sonorous, velvety smooth voice of actor Dennis Haysbert in over 250 different commercials all asking the all important Allstate question, “Are you in good hands?” A few years ago, Northwestern University conducted a study and found that this slogan is the most recognizable in America. It’s recognizable because it’s been slapping us in the face for almost seven decades. It’s recognizable because it’s relatable. It touches a nerve. It’s something that deep down, everyone wants to know. Am I in good hands? I’m not talking about whether I’ve got liability, collision, or comprehensive coverage on my car. I mean, how can I know that I’m in good hands when it comes to my eternal soul? Do you ever think about that? Sadly, for many people in our world today that all-important question about true and lasting spiritual security doesn’t hold the mental gravitas it really deserves.

Things weren’t really that different for the prophet Isaiah at his time. The year was about 700 BC, and God’s chosen nation of Israel had made their choices about what would occupy their hearts, minds, and hands. Instead of worshipping the God who created humankind with his own hands, they used their hands to carve and build idols of wood and stone. Rather than give heartfelt praise to the faithful God of the covenant for leading them by the hand out of Egypt, by in large, the people of Israel set their hearts after what their eyes could see and what their sinful appetites could crave. Sure, at the time of the prophet Isaiah, Israel seemed to be a prosperous nation, but except for a faithful few, they were spiritually bankrupt. God was growing tired of their unbelief, so he sent prophets to warn them and turn them from their faithless, sinful ways in repentance and turn back to their Savior God who kept calling, inviting, and reaching out to them in love. But they weren’t listening. They were exercising the terrible freedom, really the slavery, of the human will – to reject and resist God and his promises. Within about 100 years, the Lord would carry out his discipline against his unfaithful people. They would be taken away from their homeland and carted off to live in exile in Babylon. But it all could’ve been so different!

The prophet Isaiah could have thrown up his hands in frustration, but instead he puts his hands together in prayer to the Lord. That’s what this section of Isaiah 64 really is; it’s a prayer for God to come and make himself known to his people and to deliver them from their enemies. Isaiah prays, **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 to make your name known 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!** If only, right? Have you ever looked at the world around you or even at your own life and seen just how backwards things can be for God’s people? So maybe you’ve wanted to see such a stunning display of God’s awesome power at work? But usually we don’t see it, at least in the way we’re looking for it. So we’re left asking, “What is God doing?”

This isn’t a new question. Throughout the history of the Church, from the patriarchs, to the prophets and right up to the present, people have puzzled, “What is God doing?” Or, maybe more pointedly, “Why *isn’t* God doing something?” That’s the more accusatory, but more popular way the question is asked. Doesn’t God see what’s going on in the world today – the denial of anything that calls itself ‘truth,’ the wholesale rejection of his Word as something that may have been good for our grandparents, but doesn’t really apply to me, the apathy of so many – both outside and inside the church – when it comes to the eternal gifts of God, and instead they turn to the comforts and priorities of a fallen world. Why *isn’t* God doing something? Isn’t he bothered by the deafening silence of faithful people not praying to him or singing his praise? Why doesn’t he come and set things right? The Church is



oppressed, people cry out, even creation itself groans in frustration because things simply aren't the way they should be. What is God doing? Are we really in good hands with this God?

So, we find ourselves questioning the capability of God's "hands." But if we find ourselves there, we have to ask ourselves, isn't that exactly what Israel was doing? Before I can question whether God's hand can actually do what he promises, I need to ask myself, how do my hands look to a holy God? We sang it in our psalm for today, **Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.** For a sinful person, this is a terrifying truth. Do you remember when the prophet Isaiah received his call to serve God? He was standing in the temple. The Lord Almighty was seated on a throne, angels were flying around crying out praise to God. The glory of the Lord filled the whole place and even the holy angels covered their faces in the presence of God's glory. Face to face with this glorious display of the King of heaven, did Isaiah clap his hands in joy and pride? Isaiah came to the only conclusion he could rightly come to: **"Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips!"** When confronted with the unmistakable reality of God's holiness and the undeniable presence of our own sin, we are forced to come to that same conclusion.

As we stand at the beginning of a brand new church year, during this Advent season, our focus is on preparing for the coming of Jesus. But do we really want him to come and make his name known, making the mountains tremble, the nations quake, and setting everything ablaze with his perfect holiness? Listen to what Isaiah says in his prayer, **You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.** Does that sound like you? Do you have the **clean hands and a pure heart** to stand confidently before your coming King? Do I? The old saying tells us, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop," but our hands and hearts aren't very idle, are they? Sure, we may not fold our hands in prayer to an idol of wood or stone, but I'm more than ready to clench with an iron fist those few extra dollars that will somehow accomplish more in my pocket than in the hands of someone who needs help. I bet not one of us has ever shaken a defiant fist against God, but when it comes to prioritizing; doesn't it seem that the Maker of heaven and earth gets pushed down the list by ever-increasing self-made commitments and desires? Maybe your hands have never taken another person's life, but according to Jesus, if you've ever hated your neighbor that's the same thing. Your hands may never have reached for the spouse of another or stolen money from a bank, but those are just symptoms of the real problem – our sinful hearts. Isaiah said, **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.** Put face to face with the ugliness of our sin, are we so sure we want our King to come and make his presence known? If you're anything like me, you ask the question Isaiah did, **How then can we be saved?**

I thought the Christmas season was supposed to be a joyful time... Oh, but it is! This season of Advent is one of preparation for Christ's coming – a season of repentance – crushed by the law of God, I realize what I am by nature; prompted by the Spirit of God, I confess my sins to this holy God knowing that on my own, I have no hope. And wonder of wonders, he replaces guilt with grace, slavery with son-ship, death with life. But how? God is holy. He can't look on sin or just look past it. God's hands aren't, as so many assume, the hands of a doting old grandfather who overlooks rambunctious behavior with a wink and a smile and a pat on the head. No, the hands of God carry out promised punishment against sin, because he hates it and it needs its rightful wage – death...but not yours. Marvel with the prophet Isaiah today when he says, **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.** You have a God who acts on your behalf; a God who fights for you. Think of all the ways he's shown it throughout history! The Lord God brought the entire nation of Israel out from their slavery in Egypt. He would bring back the exiles from Babylon. Time and again throughout the Scriptures, we see a God who fights for his people. But the combined



military might of Egypt, Midian, Assyria, and Babylon couldn't hold an advent candle to the greatest battle our God fought – the battle for you.

Our God faced off against an enemy who had us dead to rights; the devil never stops accusing, convicting, and condemning, reminding the holy God that **the soul that sins (your soul and mine) is the one who will die**. Toe to toe with the old evil foe, our God wasn't going to wave his hand and send an angel into the fray. Instead the hand of the Almighty pointed at his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Martin Luther wrote it this way, *He spoke to his beloved Son; "Tis time to have compassion. Then go, bright jewel of my crown, and bring mankind salvation. From sin and sorrow set them free; slay bitter death for them that they may live with you forever*. This is what it took to bring mankind salvation – the perfect life of obedience, selfless service, total devotion to God and his will all worked perfectly by Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh. The hands that placed the stars in the sky became the spindly fingers of a newborn, reaching out for his mother. The hands that guided the course of history and presided over the rise and fall of nations, now stoop low to wash the dirty feet of Galilean fishermen. The only hands unstained by any sin of any kind are stretched out and nailed to a cross – for you. The hands that once were pierced are now raised up in blessing over you and all his people, *Peace be with you*. This is what it took to bring mankind salvation – the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. **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**. God wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty, if it meant saving you.

Are you in good hands? I don't care about your car insurance. I'm more interested in your eternal soul. This Advent season we turn our thoughts to Jesus' coming in glory and power, don't forget – he came once before. He came to take your place under God's law. He came to live the perfect life he knew you couldn't. He came to suffer, die, and rise from the dead to pay for your every sin. Isaiah said, **O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand**. Or maybe another way to say it: Rejoice, dear Christian, you're in good hands.

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen

(Jude 24-25)