

## Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel...Defying Expectations

### Isaiah 64:1-9 (NIV)

<sup>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 have given us over to our sins. <sup>8</sup> Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. <sup>9</sup> Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.

The cry for the last few weeks in the season of End Times was “Come, Lord Jesus!” Come, because then the battle will be over. We will go from being saints militant to saints triumphant. When you come, all sin will be eradicated, never to enter into our lives again. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain or suffering of any kind. When you come, we can be done and just go and enjoy heaven having a peace unlike any other. So, we plead, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

This is not new for believers. Some 2700 years ago, Isaiah was pleading the same thing. He lived in a time before Jesus was born. However, the Lord through Isaiah prophesied of the virgin birth of one who would be called Emmanuel, meaning God is with us. He also prophesied that this Emmanuel would be a light for the world, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. The reign of this Emmanuel would never end, even though he would suffer and die taking on the sins of all people of all time.

So, Isaiah prayed, “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.” (verses 1-3)

What exactly did Isaiah expect God to do when he came? Maybe he had in mind Mount Sinai quaking, covered with smoke, lightning crashing, trumpets blaring, and a consuming fire blazing where Moses received the 10 Commandments. Maybe he thought it would be like the fire that came down from heaven for Elijah when he went up against the prophets of the false god Baal. Maybe he thought of the flood in Noah’s time with mountains being submerged in water, almost as if they were falling into the heart of the sea. Whatever Isaiah exactly expected, he expected an awesome show of power when his God came.

What do we expect when we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus”? Do we expect the same rending of the heavens, a display of power that will finally get all the naysayers to see that there is only one actual God? Do we expect him to banish in an instance all the problems of our world – everything from COVID to political strife? And when he doesn’t immediately rend open the heavens and do our bidding, do we feel let down, that he failed us, and that he isn’t as powerful as he made himself out to be?

Is this what we should expect – a display of power, God rending the heavens to do our bidding? Isaiah sets our expectations with his confession. “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? 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. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins.” (verses 5-7)

With this confession, we should not expect God to answer a single one of our prayers because we have kept sinning against God. For Isaiah, even his best work, the righteous acts that he did as a prophet, were not enough to make God come, rending open the heavens at his beck and call. Isaiah knew his sin. It was always with him. Do you feel the same? Do you confess the same? Do you look at the work of your hands, all the good things that you have done, and you still know you are completely inadequate to demand anything of God? Do you feel shriveled up like a leaf because your sins are wasting you away? Do you sometimes hesitate to pray because you know that you are so unworthy to ask God to do anything for you? Because of our sins, God should not come or do anything for me. That, sadly, should be our expectation.

But this was not Isaiah's expectation as he prayed for God to come. He professed: "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." (verse 4) Wait for God to act because he will, but the way that the Lord rent the heavens and came the first time was probably not how Isaiah pictured it.

When the Lord rent the heavens and came down in answer to Isaiah's prayer, it was with an angel to two people, to Mary and Joseph, announcing that this virgin would bear and give birth to the Emmanuel, the God with us. Mary and Joseph didn't wear crowns. They had family ties to King David, but no one considered them royalty. There was no royal parade, no golden throne for this Emmanuel to sit on. When Mary began to show her baby bump, there were probably accusations of sexual immorality or at the very least eyebrows raised. When Emmanuel came, he was placed in a lowly manger because his parents couldn't get proper accommodations. Emmanuel, God with us, came down looking like a plain ordinary child.

With this, God defied expectations. Instead of sitting in some ivory tower casually oblivious of what the people down below were going through, he himself came down. He engaged us on our level. He took on human flesh. He answered our prayers with a babe in a manger. This was probably not what Isaiah expected and maybe not what we expected when we prayed to God to deliver us.

By being the Emmanuel, the God with us, God in the flesh, God that no one else can be, he kept all of God's ways, his ways. He resisted every temptation while in the flesh, every one that we face, and he never once sinned. And then conquered our sin and displayed his power by dying, by sacrificing himself, on the cross. That was his great show of strength. This is what has taken our sins away. By doing so, he formed us and made us his people, no longer remembering any of our sins. He didn't just have us try to bridge the gap to God. No, he wiped out that gap by coming down as Emmanuel. In this way, Emmanuel shook the world.

This is why our God acts on our behalf: because he is the Emmanuel who took away our sins and then formed us into his family. Isaiah looked forward to this day and put his confidence in it. "Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people." (verses 8-9) God did this for Israel through the promises passed down to him of this offspring of the woman, this king over all the nations that would come from David's lineage.

As New Testament Christians, God puts our hope and confidence in the same place as Isaiah through his Word fulfilled. God has specially put his name on us through baptism. Defying expectations, he used simple water and his Word to form us into his family on that day. Defying expectations even more, on that day all our sins, even our future sins, were wiped out. God remembers them no more. He has clothed us with Emmanuel, with Christ's perfect life lived for us.

God defied expectations and came to us as Emmanuel. He didn't take on human flesh just to be company for us, but to be the God who acts to save us and people like Isaiah who waited for him to do so. As Emmanuel, he has formed us his people as he forgave all our sins and remembers them no more. He has formed us to belong to his family just as a potter forms the clay. For this reason, God our Father will never abandon us, his children.

So, our prayer matches Isaiah's and continues. Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel in the unexpected and awesome ways that you do to form us a part of your family and reform us with Christ's perfection so that you never remember our sins. Amen.