

You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name. Why, O LORD, do You make us wander from Your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes that are Your inheritance. ... 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. 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 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 made us waste away because of our sins. Yet, O LORD, You are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand.

Text: Isaiah 63:16b-17; 64:1-8 SS 11/27/11 1 Cor. 1:3-9 Mark 13:32-37 Psalm 32
Hymns: 62, 92, 709, 715

THE SON OF GOD CAME TO SAVE SINNERS

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Back during the time of the Old Testament when Isaiah was a prophet of God, most of the Jewish people had turned away from God in unbelief. Yet Isaiah begins our text by calling God, *“our Father.”* Isaiah knew that GOD still wanted to be the Father of them all; and that God WAS the Father of all who wanted Him as their Father. Isaiah said, *“You, O LORD, are our Father.”* God wanted the whole nation of Israel to come back to Him and be saved.

Isaiah calls God, *“our Redeemer.”* *“Redeem”* means *“buy back.”* God was going to send His Son, the Messiah, who would be born as a baby in Bethlehem, and later offer up His life and rise again. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would pay the price to buy all people back from sin and death and Satan and hell.

Isaiah calls God *“our Redeemer from of old.”* The first chapter of Ephesians tells us that *“[God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world. ... In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins”* (vv. 4a, 7a). God knew before He created everything that we would fall into sin. Before Creation God planned our redemption in Jesus. From the beginning of time God chose us as His people and had our salvation in Jesus all planned. What a testimony to our God’s amazing grace!

Isaiah asks, *“Why, O LORD, do You make us wander from Your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere You? ... You have hidden Your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.”* Isaiah knew it wasn’t God’s fault that so many of the Jewish people had turned away from Him. The Lord had tried again and again through Isaiah and His other faithful prophets to bring His people back to Him, but they kept turning away. Finally God gave them over to their hardness of heart.

God sent Moses to warn Pharaoh before each of the ten plagues. Pharaoh wouldn't listen. The Bible tells us that he kept hardening his heart against God (Ex. 7:13; 8:32; etc.). The Bible also tells us that God finally hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 9:12). The first chapter of Romans reminds us that if people keep rejecting God and defying Him, God will *"give them over to the lusts of their hearts"* (v. 24). Scripture warns us, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, this he shall also reap"* (Gal. 6:7).

Isaiah implored God on behalf of His people, *"Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes that are Your inheritance."* Isaiah reminded the Lord that it was He, God, who had chosen the Jews as His people and promised to send the Messiah – the Savior of the world – through their race. Isaiah begged God to have mercy on them and not give up on them. As the Bible says, *"God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet.3:9b).

Isaiah cried out to God, *"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."* God had sent the ten plagues on Egypt, divided the Red Sea and later the Jordan River so His people could safely pass through them to the Promised Land. He had sent them manna – a sweet bread – every day throughout their forty years in the wilderness. God had made water come out of a rock in the desert so they could stay alive. He made the walls of Jericho fall down flat. He had fought for His people and made the heathen nations who opposed Him fear His name. Isaiah knew God's awesome power. He prayed that God would show His great power among His people again to make the heathen nations tremble before Him once more, and make His straying people return to Him.

Sometimes we wish God would do something dramatic to make people we care about wake up and believe in Him. God can and does use miracles and earth-shaking and life-shaking events to bring people to Him. But as He made clear to the prophet Elijah, often it is not in powerful wind, or earthquakes, or fire, but through the *"still, small voice"* of His Word that God speaks to us (1 Ki. 19:11f.). The rich man wanted God to send Lazarus back from the dead to speak to his brothers so they would believe in God. The rich man was told, *"They have Moses and the prophets,"* (that is, they have the Scriptures), *"let them hear them."* GOD'S WORD alone has the power to bring people to believe in Jesus and be saved. *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"* (Ro. 1:16).

Isaiah tells the Lord, *"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."* Many of Isaiah's fellow Jews tried to worship other gods along with God. But there is only one God – the God of the Bible, and only one Savior of the world – His Son, Jesus Christ. God says in His Word, *"I am the Lord; that is My name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols"* (Is. 42:8). The fourth chapter of Acts says about Jesus, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved."*

Isaiah says that God *"acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. 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.” The Lord had told His people through Isaiah, *“Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of My sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! ... ‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool’”* (1:16-17a, 18). When we repent of our sins, God forgives us. When we ask God to help us to do what is right, He will, and He will bless us for it. Isaiah hoped that the Lord would lead his countrymen to repentance, and change their hearts from unbelief to faith.

“How then can we be saved?” Isaiah asks. Up to this point Isaiah had been thinking mainly of his fellow Jews who had turned away from God. Now Isaiah is thinking also about himself; and for that matter, everyone. Isaiah confesses on behalf of us all by our human nature, *“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.”* Many of Isaiah’s fellow Jews thought they could make up for their sins and earn their way to heaven through obeying the Old Testament Law, but they were wrong. No one – not Isaiah or his fellow Jews, not you and me, no one – can save himself by trying to be good enough. In fact, Isaiah confesses that before God *“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags”* by themselves because of our sinfulness.

So *“how then can we be saved?”* Isaiah confessed to the Lord about himself and every one of us by nature, *“No one calls on Your name or strives to lay hold of You.”* By nature we do not have the freedom of will to choose to believe in Jesus. Ephesians 2:1 says, *“You were dead in your trespasses and sins.”* By nature without God we are spiritually dead. Ever since the Fall into sin, the only thing any of us can do by nature is reject God.

“Yet,” Isaiah adds, *“O LORD, You are our Father,”* This is the second time in our text that Isaiah says to God, *“You are our Father,”* reassuring himself and everyone of us who looks to God for our salvation that God is still our heavenly Father, and we are still His children. Isaiah knew that it is GOD who, purely by His grace, chooses us and accepts us. Isaiah was so grateful to God for having saved him and all of the Jews whom God had brought to believe in Him. And Isaiah looked to God in His mercy to bring his fellow Jews who had turned away from God to believe in Him and be saved.

It was Isaiah who said, *“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given”* (9:6). In the face of the unbelief of so many of his fellow Jews, in the face of his own sins, and in the face of the sins of the whole world, Isaiah knew that one day God, *“our Redeemer from of old,”* would send His Son to provide salvation for us all. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born into our world, lived, died on the cross, and rose again. Everyone who believes in Jesus has forgiveness for all of his sins, and eternal salvation. And THAT brings us to what we are celebrating at Christmas time: **THE SON OF GOD CAME TO SAVE SINNERS.** Amen.