

JJ<sup>1</sup>

It's been over 200 years since a foreign army has invaded our borders and waged war on our soil with the intent to occupy us. Yes, we have fought in wars against nations who had that intention, but they never succeeded. But what if that were to change? What would you do if a foreign army was marching through our land and conquering it? What if this foreign army were just on the Sawyer side of Sturgeon Bay? This army is devouring everything in it's path. No one can resist. Those who do are slaughtered. Not only that, but those they don't kill are torn from their homes, families separated and sent off to live in a foreign land. What would you do? How would you react?

What I've just described is very similar to the situation Isaiah found himself in later in his ministry. The great and mighty Assyrian Empire had already destroyed and carried off the Northern Kingdom of Israel—never to be heard of again. And now they had come to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Judah had been walking down the same spiritual path that their northern brothers had been. A path that loved the world and everything in it, but despised the LORD. But there had been a small spiritual revival. King Hezekiah came to power and restored true worship of the LORD in the temple, which had been repurposed to worship the false god, Baal, among others. While Hezekiah "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done" (2 Chronicles 29:2 NIV84), the Assyrian army appeared to be irresistible. They marched straight through the Judean defenses and surrounded Jerusalem.

The commander of the Assyrian army came with a message, taunting Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem. In part of his taunt he declared, "Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses—if you can put riders on them!" (Is. 36:8 NIV84). The times were desperate, and "when King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD" (Is. 37:1 NIV84). The writer of Chronicles records, "King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amor cried out in prayer to heaven about this" (2 Chron. 32:20 NIV84).

While the text before us today isn't the prayer they prayed that day, it carries the same thoughts. The prayer of Isaiah we study today is the prayer of God's people in times of distress, especially when the wicked world seems to be winning. For so long, God's Old Testament people waited for the LORD to keep his promise of his first coming, his first Advent, with the promise of the Savior. During these three Sundays in Advent we gather under the theme **WAITING WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH**. Today we see that we **WAIT WITH PRAYER**.

"You, the LORD, are our Father. Our Redeemer from everlasting is your name." Isaiah begins his prayer with a beautiful confession of faith and a recognition of his status before God. It sounds just like the beginning of the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us, "Our Father, who art in heaven..."

But very quickly we see the distress in Isaiah's heart. "Why do you cause us to

<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

wander from your ways, LORD? Why do you harden our heart so that we do not fear you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your heritage.”

Even without a foreign army surrounding us, we can feel like Isaiah did so long ago because of the growing unbelief in our land and the hatred both for God and his followers that is brewing stronger and stronger. How much greater the grief when we see what Isaiah describes—God’s own people turning away in unbelief! Even though Scripture tells us again and again that God hardens the hearts of those who reject him, it doesn’t make it any easier. Even when we bring the truth of God’s gospel promises to them, it seems as though they only grow colder.

As the world grows darker and darker with unbelief and sin, we often fall into the temptation of fear and defeatism. The prospect of growing Christ’s Church in our land sometimes looks hopeless. Sometimes it looks as though God is silent. Everything seems to be out of balance. Evil seems to triumph. God’s enemies shake their fists in his face, and walk away arrogantly thinking they have won. And we’re tempted to think it’s true!

It’s especially at these time that we, in faith, must pray with Isaiah: O LORD, “return for the sake of your servants...Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and come down. Mountains then would quake because of your presence. As fire ignites stubble and as fire makes water boil, make your name

known to your adversaries. Then nations would quake in your presence.”

As we pray this Advent prayer, it’s important for us to understand the consequences of what we’re praying for. Maybe you’ve had a really hot campfire that as soon as you put on last year’s Christmas tree it nearly exploded in flame. You’ve all seen how fire heats water, turns it into vapor and it vanishes into the air. This is what we’re praying for those who stand against God, and therefore us. We simply want them to disappear like steam and leave us in peace. We pray that God’s wrath burn them up as brush in a hot fire. We see God did this very thing in the Old Testament: Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, and Elijah with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel.



But we don’t just pray for their destruction with the eternal fires of hell. We also pray that God would come and “make [his] name known to [his] adversaries” and cause the nations to “quake in [his] presence.”

We’re also asking that the LORD come to them in such a preaching of the law that their hearts would melt in fear and their walls of unbelief would crumble. This, of course, is our greatest desire, because not only are we delivered from oppression, but others are won for Christ. You see, friends, every time we “thy will be done” and “thy kingdom come” we’re praying both things. That God would save us from our enemies, bringing about their swift destruction and that they all would repent and call on the name of the LORD.

Isaiah's prayer continues: "You meet anyone who joyfully practices righteousness, who remembers you by walking in your ways!" We may quickly say, "Yes, this is me!" By God's grace alone, this is true, but who of us can say we have always joyfully practiced righteousness and always walked in God's ways?

We often say, "Be careful what you pray for." And more often than not, it's true. Consider who you're including in your prayer when you ask God to come down in judgment on all nations. You're including yourself! To make sure all the enemies of God are revealed, Isaiah turns his attention from the external enemies, to the enemy within us.

"But you were angry because we sinned. We have remained in our sins for a long time. Can we still be saved? All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth. All of us have withered like a leaf, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. There is no one who calls on your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you. So you hid your face from us. You made us melt by the power of our guilt."

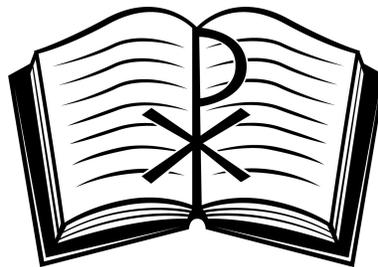
When we consider our sin and the guilt we carry because of it, we see an enemy in our own hearts too. We confess with Isaiah that we have not always practiced righteousness or walked in God's ways. By nature we are unclean and we prove it every day not just with our sinful words, actions and thoughts, but we also prove it because even "all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth."

To this point, the writer of this section of the *People's Bible* notes: "The righteous acts of

any human are nothing but filthy rags. The translation does not offend our sensitivities, but the original calls these righteous acts menstrual rags. How can we be saved when we are as unclean as such in God's eyes? Why should God deliver us when even our best—"all our righteous acts"—are nothing more than dirty...menstrual rags? Because of sin, we are disgusting in God's eyes. The words convey the true nature of human sinfulness. Why indeed should the Holy One of Israel save anyone?"<sup>2</sup>

The answer is found in Isaiah's Advent prayer: "But now, LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are our potter. All of us are the work of your hand." Yes, we are sinful. We are awful because of our sin, yet

God is still our Father, and here's why. Isaiah writes: "You did amazing things that we did not expect... From ancient times no one has heard. No ear understood. No eye has seen any god except you, who goes into action for the one who waits for him."



Like Isaiah, we rest all the hope of our salvation and our prayers being answered on the grace of our God. We can consider all the mighty acts God displayed in the Old Testament that no one ever could have imagined God doing, but for today, let's consider our LORD's first Advent. Who would imagine that one day the heavens would be ripped open when Christ came, but not as we'd expect? The angels came in the glory of heaven to announce to the shepherds that their Savior had been born in a lowly stable! Who would imagine that God would come in such a way in order to give his one and only Son to deliver us from all our enemies—the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh? Who would have ever

<sup>2</sup> Braun, *People's Bible: Isaiah 2*, p. 370

imagined that God would accomplish this by sacrificing his own Son? Who would have ever imagined that his tomb would be left empty after three days? Who would ever imagine that not only does God reveal all these saving truths to mankind, but that he offers everything freely to all so that we would no longer be his enemies, but his children forever and ever?

Friends, in much the same way we **WAIT WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH.** We wait in prayer because a heart of faith turns to the Lord in prayer. “Even when God appears barricaded in heaven, ignoring the suffering of his people, faith prays.”<sup>3</sup> We pray trusting God’s promises. We pray believing that he is indeed our Father, and by his grace we are his children. He hears us! He will deliver us! Amen.

SDG<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Braun, *People’s Bible: Isaiah 2*, p. 365

<sup>4</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

Artwork by Ian M. Welch—Copyright 2013 Ian M. Welch. All Rights Reserved. [paramentics.com](http://paramentics.com)

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from The Holy Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version™ (EHV™) copyright © 2016 The Wartburg Project. All rights reserved. [www.wartburgproject.org](http://www.wartburgproject.org)