Text: Isaiah 64:1-9

**Introduction**

Depending upon what survey you look at and how the question is asked, between 50% and 76% of the US public says they have had a mystical or religious experience. Which is much higher than responses in between the 70’s and 90’s which were generally 20 – 30%. Part of that difference is the availability and acceptability of psychedelic drugs. Part of the difference is the loosening interpretive framework. In the days of normative mainline Protestantism, you might not admit them. Most Presbyterians were officially cessationist meaning these things aren’t real. Which might have an effect on the numbers who would admit having them. And if you admitted them, you probably assumed any meaning or interpretation would come from outside of the experience itself. It would be normed by the Scriptures and Confessions of your tradition. And if the experience was unexplainable? You’d be surprised at how quickly it never happened. But today, the vast majority of people, if they even know they exists, do not look at Scripture or Confessions as normative. They define what it means to themselves by their own lights.

The other thing I wonder slightly about that difference in reporting I might call “knowing what you are asking for.” When catechisms were memorized and Christian doctrine was more deeply understood, people realized that having seen bares more responsibility. Jesus in multiple places says things like, “if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. (Matt. 11:23 ESV)” and “blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.” Also that God cares about faith not knowledge. The generation that saw the plagues died in the wilderness. A generation far removed from even a Sunday School understanding actively seeks such experiences out, not knowing what they are doing.

But there is also a far side of this hill. I’m not even talking about when the world presses hard. In times of persecution there is a nearness of God. It is in times of dismissal that I’d call the far side. Whether is it being 100% right about cultural slippery slopes, yet being dismissed even at the bottom of the slide. Or having time tested and proven answers to experiences or at least paths of wisdom, yet Eat, Pray, Love silliness sells millions and inspires flights around the world to yogis, while having a conversation with a local pastor would never even be considered.

**Text**

“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down…”

The book of Isaiah is roughly divided into three audiences. Chapters 1-39 are addressed to Isaiah’s pre-exile contemporaries. Chapters 40-55 are addressed to those who are in exile. And chapters 56-66 are addressed to those who have returned from exile. So imagine that general hill. Pre-exile is still the fight. Calls to repentance and restoration and renewal. Take down the high places and stop bowing to idols. Judge with righteousness. Take care of the widow and the orphan. Cease the corruption and unbelief. But you find yourself in Babylon anyway. But while in Babylon, you recognize what it lost. And while you might weep for what is lost, God says pray for the city I sent you to. Continue to live, because I still have plans. And it is in this part that you have the servant songs. The servant of God who comes to his people both in suffering and in majesty. You have the great promises, you will be restored. But then it happens. Empires fall and rise and you are back in the land.

But it isn’t the same. It isn’t really yours. The heir of David is not on the throne. The temple built is a pail reflection and the glory of God is no longer present. And it takes a Herod – not even a full Jew – to restore some of the luster. Of course various empires conquer and try to stick statues of their rulers in your temple profaning it.

And people drift away. This God doesn’t seem to be around anymore, if he ever was. Yes, he promised things, and some of them happened, but not what we expected and wanted. Too much suffering, not enough glory. Too much waiting, not enough deliverance. Too much heaven, not enough payoff here and now.

“Make you name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presesnce.”

You did it before, do it now. We know that there are no others. You are the only God that has ever shown up. “From of old no one has heard, or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you.” There have always been pretenders – demons aping your power, the world stealing your glory. You have allowed them their times and then swept them away. And everyone knew. Yet that knowledge fades. Do it again. Your people beg you. “You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember your ways.”

**Christology**

But right here is the point that you have to ask a few questions.

Who is righteous? Who joyfully works? Who remembers your ways?

This is part of the wisdom those who rashly seek out experiences so lightly chuck aside. “Behold”, look, see, understand, perceive, smell, use whatever sense is your best. “Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been an long time…

We have all become like one who is unclean…

We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away…

There is no one who calls upon your name…”

If we are honest most of our acts are not righteous, but are done for our immediate temporal benefit. The eternal things are a burden. We don’t do their works joyfully. We often don’t even remember them. We want God to rend the heavens and come down to remind all those evil ones. Yet the second he might come down would be the second we ourselves might remember and see our unpreparedness.

“in our sins we have been a long time, shall we be saved?”

Isaiah’s hope is one that we have seen. “You have hidden your face from us” Isaiah laments. But to us we have seen his face. We have seen the face of Christ. Jesus who is the righteous one. Jesus who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. The only Son of the Father who remembered the ways of his Father – slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The way of the one who remembers his covenants and keeps his promises. The one who did rend the heavens and come down. Came down first as that little child. The fullness of grace and truth. God has not hidden his face from us. We have seen in that life and on that cross. For us. That we might be saved.

**Moral**

So the call of that salvation, is the call not to be our own interpreter. We’ve tried that. We have all gone astray. The call is to submit to the hand of God.

“Now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter, we are all the work of your hand.”

And what the Father is molding is a people in the shape of his son Jesus. He desires to mold a people in righteousness. He desires to mold a people who joyfully take part in the mission of God. He desires to mold a people who remember his ways. Who remember not their sins, but the salvation He has given us, and return in thanks.

**Eschatological**

Being human, wanting to see I think is impossible to escape. And being Christian, asking after the LORD to rend the heavens is not necessarily a sinful or rash act.

If we are asking for the proper reasons. And those reasons are for God himself to keep his promises. Not that we might get back at our enemies, or that we might not feel so stupid, or self-righteous, or proving that we were right. Those are often the reasons that bubble up for me before I stop and pray.

“Be not so terribly angry, O LORD.” You have promised grace and mercy and steadfast love. As a Fatehr you mold and discipline rightly, but remember your grace.

“Remember not iniquity forever.” Your promise on that cross was forgiveness. Include me in it.

“Behold, please look, we are all your people.” You have promised from all time, that you would have your people. Here we are. No longer turn your eyes from us. But through your son, please look upon us. Come down. Rend the heavens and come down, abide with us most lowly as you have promised. Abide with us in grace, until that day all your people shall abide with you in glory. Amen