

CWB - Old Testament Lesson - Advent 1 - November 30, 2014 - Kieth Bernard Kuschel

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Isaiah 63:16, 17; 64:1-8

(16) But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. {17} 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. (64:1) 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.

Good clothes
Filthy rags

Good clothes/ filthy rags

How then Can We Be Saved?

I. Watch Your Righteous Acts

A. Become like unclean

1. Reference
2. Became at birth
3. Became by thoughts, words, acts

B. Righteous acts

1. Examples of righteous acts
2. Examples of sinful motives
3. Filthy rags= justification

C. Tendency

1. Be angry with God
2. Keep on sinning

D. Call on God to punish

1. World would be better
2. We would be judged

II. Watch for the Lord

A. Yet

1. In spite of sins
2. God is Father
3. God is Potter

B. God's past performance

1. Helps those who wait on Him
2. Helps those who remember ways
3. Help those who do right

C. God's name

1. Lord
2. Redeemer

Advent = watching righteous acts or God?

IA1 All of us have become like one who is **unclean**. {6} The comparison was graphic for the people of Isaiah's day. People were unclean for a variety of reasons. Lepers for example were unclean because they were carrying a contagious disease. They were outcasts from society. They had to live off in colonies by themselves and could have no contact with other human beings. They had to yell out "Unclean" when people would begin to get too close to them. They could not go into the presence of the Lord at the temple because they were ceremonially unfit, an outward indication that nothing imperfect can approach a holy God.

2 All of us have **become** like one who is unclean. {6} How did we become people who are unable to stand in the presence of a holy God? How did we become people who are carrying around in ourselves something that we would not wish to pass on to anybody else? We became unclean the moment we were born. We were sinful human beings the moment we started existing. We inherited our inability to stand in the presence of a holy God from our parents and they in turn from theirs all the way back to Adam and Eve.

3 But our sinfulness wasn't a dormant state. We also became unclean by our sinful thoughts, words and actions. Isaiah mentions a couple. {7} No one calls on your name, O Lord, or strives to lay hold of you". Human beings on our own just don't believe in the true God. We can add more. Our schemes to discredit those around us make our minds unclean in God's sight. Our words which fail to give proper praise to our God make our words unclean in God's sight. Our failures to take care of the needs of the person who is totally dependent on others make our actions unclean in God's sight.

B1 {6} "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags." What righteous things have you been doing lately? Righteous acts are those acts which appear to be right in their outward appearance. You spoke well of your fellow worker when everybody else was really shredding him. You used some of your hard earned money to feed a couple of people on Thanksgiving Day. You took special note of some loving action which your marriage partner did for you. You taught somebody something from the Bible. You told somebody about the Lord.

2 But to God they looked like filthy rags. He saw that you were expecting a big favor back from the person you defended. He saw that you were just trying to look good in the eyes of the community when you took care of those poor people. He saw that you were just trying to divert your mate's attention from some selfish thing that you were planning when you made that nice comment. He saw that you were trying to show off your intelligence when you mentioned something from the Bible. He saw that you were just trying to act religious in a setting when it was expected. Those motives make our outwardly righteous acts filthy rags in God's sight.

3 When the Lord looks at human beings who on their own try to be acceptable to him, all He sees is filthy rags. That is because none of us on our own has the right motives for our actions. Thus, God would have to declare us to be unacceptable to Him. Even the actions, which other human beings would deem righteous, God doesn't, because the motives are not correct.

C1 What tendency do we as human beings have when we are led to understand that no matter how hard we try on our own, we can't produce anything but filthy rags in God's sight? We tend to throw in the towel. We tend to get angry at God for demanding something that we can't produce. Isaiah gives a vivid description of this in the first paragraph: {17} "Why, O Lord, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you?" Lord, it is Your fault that we are drifting from you. It is your fault that we do not revere you. If you wouldn't be so unreasonable to demand perfection from us, we wouldn't wander away and say "What's the use in trying?".

2 The other tendency we have is to continue to sin. Since we can't measure up on our own to God's standard, why bother? It's too hard to try to do things God's way. It's much easier to just do whatever comes to mind or whatever everybody else is doing. I already have filthy rags. I can't get any worse than that. I am already unclean, I can't get any worse than that either.

D1 Even though we acknowledge that we are sinful human beings, we at least hold onto the concept that we are not as bad as most people in our world. When we think about that, we have a tendency to cry out with Isaiah: {1} "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!" We want God to come and punish all the evil doers in our world around us. Then this world would certainly be a better place in which to live.

2 We need to be aware however, that if we are calling on the Lord to come down and judge people on the basis of their sinfulness, we are also calling on God to judge us on the basis of our sinfulness too. And we know what the result would be. "Like the wind our sins sweep us away." {6} If we are watching our righteous acts very carefully because we think that through them we are going to be saved, we have another think coming. We are watching the wrong things.

IIA1 Yet. That little word is a very important word in the last sentence of the section before us today. In spite of everything we have just discussed. In spite of the fact that we are unclean. In spite of the fact that our outwardly righteous acts are filthy rags in God's sight. In spite of the fact that we tend to blame God. In spite of the fact that we tend to go on sinning. In spite of the fact that God is the judge who would justly condemn the world including us. Yet.

2 You are our Father{8}. When Scripture uses that comparison, it does so on the basis of what a Father is supposed to be like, not on the basis of what sinful human males have done. A Father is not one who lords it over his family. A Father is one who has concern for the well-being of his family. A Father is not one who takes advantage of his position and the people in his family. A Father is one who uses his position to benefit the people in His family. "Lord, in spite of everything discussed earlier, you love me, you are concerned about my body and soul, you carry out your job as God in order to keep me in your family for the present and for eternity."

3 Yet. "You are the potter; we are the clay; we are all the work of your hand."{8} "Lord, if we are going to be clean, You must make us so. If we are going to produce truly righteous actions, you have to make it happen through us. If we are going to seek You rather than wander away from You, You are going to have to bring it about. If we are going to not want to continue to sin, You are going to have to produce that in us."

B1 Is there any possibility that the Lord, the potter would do all of these things that we need in our lives? All we can do is look at past performance. {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. Those who wait for him. That is a very interesting description of believers. Believers are people who wait for the Lord. Now it's advent season, so I suppose our first thoughts turn to Jesus' coming. Believers are people who wait for the Lord. We are waiting for him to come back. But that is only a small part of our waiting for the Lord. We just discussed a whole list of things relative to our spiritual lives for which believers wait for the Lord. We can sum them all up by saying "Believers realize that they can't make themselves right with God, so we wait for the Lord to bring it about." But believers also wait for the Lord for everything else in life too. We wait for the Lord to grant us success in our earthly pursuits rather than thinking that we have to achieve them all by ourselves. We wait for the Lord to grant us the necessities of life rather than thinking it

is completely up to us to get all those things together. Believers are truly people who wait for the Lord. And Isaiah reminds us that on the basis of past history we can be confident that the Lord is going to on behalf of those who wait for him.

2 Past performance also indicates that God comes to {5} “help those who remember His ways.” Another interesting description of believers. Those who remember His ways. Isaiah mentions some of the ways of God which he remembered. {3} “When Lord you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.” Maybe he was thinking of the ten plagues, or the Red Sea or Mt Sinai. We are also people who remember the Lord’s ways. We remember his loving grace to Adam & Eve. He promised them the Savior immediately after they had sinned. We remember his loving grace to the people of Judah. He brought them back from captivity after so many centuries of abandoning Him earlier. We remember his loving grace when He kept his promise to have His Son come into our world to be the Savior. We remember His loving grace which gave us forgiveness because of Jesus’ death, righteousness because Jesus lived for us and never sinned, and eternal life because of Jesus’ resurrection. Believers are people who remember the Lord’s ways. Isaiah reminds us that on the basis of past history we can be confident that the Lord is going to come to help those who remember His ways.

3 Past performance indicates that God comes “to help those who gladly do right.”{5} Believers are those who gladly do what is right. No human being on his own does what is right. No human being on his own gladly does what is right. Believers have God the Holy Spirit working inside of us. He gives us the power to overcome our selfishness and the temptations of the devil. We can do what is right. Believers know and believe that God loves us so much that he had Jesus live and die and rise for us, so we have a reason to want to do what is right in God’s sight to thank Him for all that he has done for us. Believers are people who gladly do what is right. Isaiah reminds us that on the basis of past history we can be confident that the Lord is going to come to help those who gladly do what is right.

C1 Yet, you O Lord, are our Father. {16}. Why can we be confident that he will act on our behalf and come to help us? Because he is the Lord. The Lord just is that way. He doesn’t change. He isn’t conditionally like that. He isn’t like that on the rebound. He has made a one-sided agreement to be our forgiver and our Savior. And that’s just the way it will always be. “From of old is your name.” {16}. “That’s the way you will be and that’s the way you have always been.”

2 Yet, O Lord, you are Redeemer{16}. I am unclean, you bought me back with your shed blood. I am covered with filthy rags, you bought me back by covering me with your holiness. I belonged to the devil. You bought me back by conquering hell. I deserved death. You bought me back by experiencing it and conquering it.

Conc. Advent. A time when we watch for the return of Jesus. A time when we watch for the celebration of Jesus’ birth. A time when we ask the daily question: How then can we be saved? The answer to that question is another question: Are you watching your righteous acts or are you watching for the Lord our Redeemer? **Lord Jesus, lead us to be watching for You.**