DEEP-DIVE LESSON · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

Will God Come? Four Readings, Three Comings, One Hope

BIG IDEA	The Advent readings move from lament to promise. God answered Isaiah's prayer to "tear the heavens" in the Incarnation, answers it now in Word and Sacrament, and will answer it fully at Christ's return.
READINGS	All four: Isaiah 64:1–9, Psalm 80, 1 Corinthians 1:3–9, Mark 13:24–37; also Mark 1:10 and 15:38
BEFORE CLASS	Ask the group to read How the readings tie together and one sermon from Sermons Through the Ages. You may also want Robert Jenson on Israel for the Psalm 80 discussion.
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles, the student handout, whiteboard

1 The lament tradition 10 min

Ask: "Is it faithful to complain to God?" Then point out that about a third of the Psalms are laments, and that this week's Old Testament reading and psalm both are. Lament is not unbelief; it is faith arguing with God on the basis of his own promises. Jesus himself prayed a lament psalm on the cross (Psalm 22).

2 Isaiah 64: Prayer from the ruins 20 min

Isaiah 64:1 Oh that you would tear the heavens, that you would come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence.

Isaiah 64:6 For we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Isaiah 64:8–9 But now, LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay and you our potter. We all are the work of your hand. Don't be furious, LORD. Don't remember iniquity forever. Look and see, we beg you, we are all your people.

1. **Isaiah 56–66 looks back on the return from Babylon to a ruined Jerusalem. Why might a people back home still pray "come down"?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   The return didn't bring the glory they expected. The Temple was rebuilt small; foreign rulers remained. Physical return, but not yet full restoration. Many Christians know this feeling: saved, but still waiting.

2. **Verse 6 is a classic text for the Reformation teaching that our righteousness cannot save us. Does the context support that use?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Yes, but notice it is a confession made by God's own people about themselves, not a lecture to outsiders. Confession of sin is the posture of the faithful. See this week's debate on "filthy rags" for how Catholics and Protestants read it differently.

3. **Mark's Gospel uses the same verb, "tear," twice: the heavens are torn at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:10) and the Temple curtain is torn at his death (15:38). What is Mark saying?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Isaiah's prayer is being answered in Jesus. God has come down. The torn curtain means the way into God's presence is open. This is a lovely "aha" moment; give the group time with it.

3 Psalm 80: The shining face 10 min

Psalm 80:3 Turn us again, God. Cause your face to shine, and we will be saved.

1. **The refrain grows each time: "God," "God of Armies," "LORD God of Armies." What does that build toward?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE
   Rising urgency and a fuller confession of who God is. The prayer gets bolder as it goes.

2. **Verse 17 prays for "the son of man whom you made strong." Originally that likely meant Israel or its king. How did the church come to hear it?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE
   As a prayer for Christ, the true Son of Man, who comes in glory in Mark 13:26. The early church read the Psalms as the prayers of Christ and his people.

4 Mark 13: Watch 20 min

Mark 13:26–27 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Then he will send out his angels, and will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the sky.

Mark 13:32–33 But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Watch, keep alert, and pray; for you don't know when the time is.

1. **How do you handle verse 30, "this generation will not pass away"?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE
   Review the main options in the Olivet Discourse article: AD 70 fulfillment, "this kind of people," or near-and-far prophecy. Let the group weigh them; no need to settle it.

2. **The Church Fathers often read "nor the Son" as referring to Christ's human nature. Is that a dodge or a real insight?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> It ties to the Athanasian Creed: "equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood" (read it). Lutherans add that in his humility Christ did not always use the divine powers he had.

3. **Lutherans and Reformed differ on how Christ is present in the Supper but agree on his bodily return. How might each tradition answer: "How does Christ come to us now?"**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Lutheran: truly, bodily, in, with and under the bread and wine. Reformed: truly, by the Spirit lifting us up to Christ in heaven. See Four corners on Christ in the Supper.

5 Grace and the goal 15 min

1. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:8 ("blameless in the day of our Lord") next to Isaiah 64:6 ("all our righteousness is like a polluted garment"). How does the second become the first?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Justification: Christ's righteousness credited to us as a gift, received by faith. This is the heart of the Reformation, and Lutherans and Reformed are one here.

2. **Where do Christians today treat grace as permission rather than power?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Let the group answer honestly. The Reformers insisted faith is never alone; it always works. The Eastern churches describe salvation's goal as *theosis*, being made like God in Christ (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2). Our motto: we stand with the Reformers on how we are saved, and with the whole Church, East and West, on what we are saved for.

Keep the balance. Christ's coming is good news because he comes to save sinners, not to reward the good. But "watch" is a real command. Grace that makes no one watchful is not the grace of the New Testament. God forgives us in order to make us like his Son (1 John 3:2–3).

6 Pray and send 15 min

Pray Psalm 80 responsively, with the refrain as the group's answer. Then ask each person to name, silently or aloud, one area where they have been asleep and one person they will serve this week.

Refrain: **"Turn us again, LORD God of Armies. Cause your face to shine, and we will be saved."**
Close: "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen."

Scripture: World English Bible (public domain). Free to print and copy.