

Be Strong; Fear Not!

Isaiah 35

¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;

² it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart,

“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God

will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the Lord shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Introduction

During Advent the past couple of years I've regularly preached from the prophecy of Isaiah.

One reason for this is because Isaiah is filled with so many passages that speak of the Messiah's coming.

This morning's Gospel Lesson was on the birth of John the Baptist and the prophecy of his father Zechariah.

Zechariah prophesied that his son would be "the prophet of the Most High" and that he would "go before the Lord to prepare his ways."

This morning's sermon text from [Isaiah 35](#) also connects with John the baptist and the gospel of Christ.

This is because Jesus quotes from this passage when the John sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the messiah.

[Isaiah 35](#), like many of the messianic prophecies, points to the future coming of the Messiah.

But it does so in such a way to show the full scope and implications of the Messiah's coming.

As I hope to show this morning this includes not only the promise of the Messiah's advent, but also the hope of his second advent and the proper response of God's people who live between the two advents of Christ!

I have divided my sermon this morning into three parts:

1. In verses 1-2 we will consider "The Promise"
2. In verses 3-7 we will look at "The Plan"
3. Then, in verses 8-10 we will look the "The Path" our Lord would have us walk.

The Promise (vv. 1-2)

In [Isaiah 34](#), the chapter immediately before this one, the prophet declares God's just judgement upon the nations.

Specifically, Isaiah prophesies that God will judge Israel's rival Edom.

[Isaiah 34:9](#) states, "And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur; her land shall become burning pitch."

God will come and bring judgement upon the nations that oppose him.

And his judgement upon them is described in terms of the creation withering away.

Streams are turned into pitch; soil into sulfur; and the whole land a burning pitch.

But here in [Isaiah 35](#), we see the opposite promised for God's people.

God's promise to his people is that when he comes to save them, the creation will be restored.

The wilderness shall be glad

The desert shall rejoice and blossom

The glory of the surrounding nations will be given to it.

What Isaiah teaches is that God's salvation is cosmic.

This means that it is total and will touch everything.

If you go back to the beginning, to [Genesis 3:17](#), you'll recall that Adam's sin had an impact on the literal creation.

Genesis 3:17 **ESV**

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

Man's rebellion against God didn't just estrange man from God, it also estranged man from the creation.

What we find in the Bible is that God promises not only to restore man to a perfect relationship with himself, he also promises to restore us in our relationship with the whole creation!

This is something the Apostle Paul gets at in [Romans 8](#),

Romans 8:22–23 **ESV**

²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

At some level, everyone knows that things are "off", they aren't as they should be.

And that isn't just in our relationship with God, it is everything.

So the promise that we have in the Bible is that everything is going to be made right in the end.

Every Advent and Christmastide we are reminded that God promises to save us completely, not just our souls, but also our bodies, and the whole creation will be renewed.

And yet, we must not lose sight of the fact that God is the ultimate end of our salvation.

And this is how the promise culminates in verse 2.

The ultimate end of the promise is that we will see the glory of the Lord and the majesty of our God.

As Christians we must never lose sight of the fact that dwelling with God and enjoying his glory is the ultimate and highest end of our salvation.

This is exactly what David says in [Psalms 16](#) & 27:

Psalms 16:11 **ESV**

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalms 27:4 **ESV**

⁴ One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

This is the promised salvation, but a promise is something you hope for.

As Paul says in [Romans 8:24](#) “Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?”

So how does one live in light of the promise?

The Plan (vv. 3-7)

Verses 3-7 of [Isaiah 35](#) present “The Plan” for how God’s people are to live in light of the promise.

The thrust of the plan is found in verses 3-4,

Isaiah 35:3–4 ESV

³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God.”

What God tells his people through his prophet is that, even though the promises are great, there is need to gird oneself up in light of those promises.

This is because until the promise is made manifest there will be difficulty.

You need to strengthen your hands and make your knees stable while you wait.

You need to speak to your anxious heart to not fear.

This is the same kind of thing you read of in [Psalm 42](#).

Psalm 42:5 ESV

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

The language used here in Isaiah to “Be strong” and “fear not” echoes the call of Joshua to the generation that was about to enter into the Promised Land.

Joshua called them to, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.” ([Josh 1:6](#))

The promise land was in front of them, God’s promises were with them, but in order to take hold of the promise, they had to “be strong and courageous”.

But notice also that the call to strength is immediately followed by another set of promises.

One scholar pointed out that this call to strength is “bracketed” by the promises of God.

Verses 1-2 promise God’s restoration.

Verses 3-4 are a call to resolve.

But verses 5-7 are a reaffirmation of God’s promises.

God will come; and when he does come he will bring vengeance against his enemies and salvation for his people.

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame shall leap like a deer, and the mute will sing for joy.

Waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

God does call you to action.

But he surrounds that call to action with his promises.

And as is the case with all of God's promises, we know that they ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ.

And in the case of verses 5-7 it is quite explicit.

In [Matthew 11](#), Jesus quotes these verses to speak of his ministry.

John the Baptist had been imprisoned by King Herod he sent word by his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he was the promised messiah to come or if they should look for another.

Jesus chose to quote these verses from [Isaiah 35](#) to answer the disciples of John the Baptist. [Matt. 11:4-6](#)

Matthew 11:4-6 ESV

⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Take notice of the last thing that Jesus says in response to John the Baptist, "blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Why would Jesus say this?

It is very likely that John the Baptists was hoping that the messiah would show up bringing the vengeance and recompense that is spoken of in verse 4 of [Isaiah 35](#).

But Jesus doesn't do that at first.

His earthly ministry is marked by healing the blind, the lame, the leper, and the deaf.

Jesus will bring judgement upon God's enemies, but the likes of John the Baptist and others will have to wait for that, and not be offended by Jesus' ministry in the meantime.

So, there is a sense that John the Baptist, as well as those who were waiting for the Messiah, and for us who wait for the second advent of Jesus, are all called to the same plan:

"Strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees, [and] say to [the] anxious heart, 'Be strong, fear not!'"

The Path (vv. 8-10)

And this leads to our concluding point, "The Path"

[Isaiah 35](#) ends with a description of a highway that leads to Zion.

It began with a promise of God's salvation.

It then gave directions for how God's people would live in light of that coming promise.

And now it ends with they way God's people will take to reach that final promise.

As God's people look toward God's promise and strengthen their hands and knees they will find themselves walking in, what verse 8 describes as, "the Way of Holiness".

In the gospels Jesus spoke of himself as "the Way".

In [John 14:6](#) Jesus said,

John 14:6 ESV

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Then, in [John 10:9](#) he stated,

John 10:9 ESV

⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

And again, in [John 8:12](#) he says,

John 8:12 ESV

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Though the way is narrow and hard that leads to salvation, it is ultimately the way that is travelled in Christ.

And though great difficulties assail the Christian in their journey to Zion, we have promises that God will keep us.

As verses 8-9 state, God's people will not go astray nor shall they be taken from the path.

And at the last we, the ransomed of the Lord, shall return and come to Zion with singing upon their lips and everlasting joy upon our heads.

And on that last great day we shall obtain gladness and joy, and all our sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

This is the promise.

It is a promise that is guaranteed for us in Christ and made manifest in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is a promise that God's people looked for as they looked for the advent of the messiah, and it is the promise we hold to, as we look to Christ's return.

Let us look to Christ and believe the promises and give thanks to God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!