

Advent of Joy – The Joy of Salvation

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Date: 12 December 2022

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[0:00] Okay, we continue our journey towards Christmas on this third Sunday of Advent by continuing! We're tracing the unfolding promises of God in the book of the prophet Isaiah.

! And this morning we're going to be in Isaiah chapter 35. It's on page 707 of your pew Bible. I do encourage you to open there and follow along. But before we go into the text, let us pray. Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Word. May it be a lantern to our feet, a light to our paths, and strength to our lives.

Take us and use us to love and serve all people in the power of the Holy Spirit. And in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. A garden.

I don't mean the little shrubs you have in your backyard or the little plants around your front lawn. No offense. I'm sure those are beautiful. But I mean a true garden oasis.

[1:13] A verdant and fertile place of beauty and plenty. A garden. A garden. A garden offers shade for protection.

It offers fruit for replenishment. Water to quench one's thirst. It is a fruitful place. A peaceful place. A place of joy. That's what imagery that was shown here in chapter 35 of Isaiah.

But it's contrasted with a desert. A desert in every category is the very opposite of a garden.

It's a place that is harsh and barren. A desert can best be described as a desolate place. Desolate. Here are the synonyms for the word desolate.

[2:09] Desolate. Bleak. Gloom. Gloomy. Misery. Sadness. That's what you want to experience in a desert.

Life flourishes in a garden. But it's near impossible for life to exist in a desert. And if you were to sum up your life now, this morning, would you say it's a desert or a garden?

Do you sometimes feel barren and empty? Are you longing for something that offers lasting joy? Or are you in a garden with no worries whatsoever or fear?

No sense of emptiness. No longing for something better. Are you fully content with life as it is? Well, Isaiah 35, I think, is for those who are in the desert.

It is a word for you, if you find yourself there. It is a promise of God. A promise of everlasting joy. And I hope this morning you do have a sense of longing.

[3:21] A sense that where you are now, wherever that may be, is not the best and final destination God has intended for you. I hope you do have a sense that there is something much more beautiful promised for you.

Now, just before this chapter, chapter 35 of Isaiah, God speaks of his judgment on the nations. In fact, we see some of that in chapter 34.

If you would just look ahead back in your Bible to chapter 34, we see God's pronouncement of judgment. In chapter 35, what we see, what we read, is the pronouncement of salvation.

But in 34, God uses a neighboring country to Israel, Edom, as an example of what will happen to all nations for opposing God.

Now, if you look there in chapter 34, verse 9, if you have your Bible open, this is what it says. The streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and a soil into sulfur.

[4:29] Her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day, it shall not be quenched. Its smoke shall go up forever.

From generation to generation, it shall lie in waste. None shall pass through it ever again. This is God's judgment. But God's judgment is not just against Edom, or the Gentile nations alone.

Isaiah has been saying all along, in the first third of Isaiah, he's been pronouncing that God's judgment is also upon Israel, the people of God, upon Judah, God's covenant people.

They will also go the way of Edom. Their land will be desolate, because they've turned from their creator, and their God, and instead, they've put their trust in created things.

Israel will also be driven from the promised land, and will be laid waste. The land, that is to be the land flowing with milk and honey, will become a desolate place, a desert.

[5:41] Now, what does a desert represent for us? It represents for Israel, and for the surrounding nations, a concrete, real truth, that the land, the very land upon which their foot is, will be truly, be a desolate place.

It will be laid waste. That's God's word. But I think the desert also reflects, an even truer, truer, spiritual reality. The desert represents the emptiness, of a life, in which God is at a distance. A life that refuses, to submit to God. A life where the satisfying joy, of Christ's, life-giving waters, is not present.

Now, you may live a comfortable, and affluent life, by worldly standards. You may have, vast wealth. You may have fame.

Maybe power in this world. And you still may be, in a desert. Because spiritually, you are in a parched, an harried land, where the river of living water, which Jesus, that Jesus promised, in John 7, is nowhere to be found.

[7:00] God's blessing of peace, and joy, is far away. His love, is alien to you. And life is an empty pursuit, of meaningless things, that only, leaves the God-shaped hole, even bigger, and emptier.

Now, why might this be the case? Why might you have, all that the world has to offer, and still be in a desert? Why might God be far off? I think the answer to that question, is the same, for Israel, as it is for us, in our day.

Sin. A life of disobedience, a life of disobedience, to God's word. God says to Israel, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Yet Israel didn't hear. Rather, she followed useless idols, and worshipped them, rather than her one, true, living God. But it's not just Israel, is it?

We today, are also called to hear, and heed, God's word. But we've turned aside to idols. And idolatry, is walking away from God.

[8:16] And to walk away from God, is to walk away from the source, of hope, and peace, and joy, and love. It's to give ourselves, over to destruction, and desolation.

And I wonder, if that's your story as well. I wonder if the stubborn pursuit, of your own way of living, of your own wisdom, has led you, to a dry and thirsty desert.

Now even as a Christian, that might have been true for you, in the past, maybe before you, you came to Christ. You know, what it means to be in a desert, starved of hope, a place, starved of peace, love, joy.

But I think even as a Christian, we can find ourselves, in desert places, even though you've been, marked out as Christ's own, you live as one, yet you still live, as one who is, of the world.

Or perhaps, maybe it's because, you're clinging, to a sin, and you refuse to bring it, to the light, and allow God, to cleanse you, and forgive you, as He promised to.

[9:37] All of these, can lead us, even as believers, into a desert place. And you may not even realize, you're in a desert. You may be busy, walking through the motions, or too busy, to know you're running in fumes.

You're detached, from the sustaining life, that Christ alone can give. Or maybe, it's that you're, in the midst of a trial, or temptation, that threatens, to overwhelm you.

It seems like, the trouble, and your temptation, and the trial, is too much, and God is not near, and God is far away. And you find yourself, in a desert.

Whatever the case, may be for you, let's look at the hope, God offers us, in Isaiah 35. Shall we? God wants to encourage you, in His word today.

God desires, to strengthen, your weak hands, to make firm, your feeble knees, to say to you, who are anxious of heart, be strong, fear not.

[10:51] And if you feel, that you are far from God, then, this, is God's word to you, this morning. Your God, will come, in power.

He will come in power, to transform, and renew, and save. Yes, He will come, to do that for you. God's encouragement, is for your weary hearts, this morning.

So that you may, persevere in faith, knowing that, God has come, into the world, to save you. He came to redeem you, with the price, of His own shed blood. And He's coming, again, to transform,

and to restore, all that sin is broken.

Look there, with me, in verse 1, of Isaiah 35. God says here, that He will bring life, to the parched desert.

Joy, and gladness, will spring up, as bubbling waters. The land, that is barren, will blossom, like, the crocus. A crocus, we know, a crocus today, is a flower.

[12 : 19] We know it, it's commonly known to us, as the Easter flower. I think it's a wonderful name, especially thinking of the way, it's described here in Isaiah. The Easter flower, that springs up here, in Isaiah's picture, from parched, hopeless, place, springing up with hope, and joy, and renewed life.

Well, a crocus is an Easter flower, and it's a perennial, spring plant. And the image, that we're meant to see here, is that of a dry, cracked earth. Now, that cracked earth, has become a verdant, field, of crocus, flowers, flowing, in that land.

A place where there is, where there is no life, has been transformed, to a place, teeming, with life, and plenty. Isaiah talks of, a place called, Lebanon, and Carmel, and Sharon.

Now, these three places, were famously, even in the, in the days of Isaiah, as fertile regions, in the Middle East. And so, this is what this desert, has become, like these fertile regions, has been transformed, into these such places.

And in fact, this place, this land, will be given, the glory, and majesty, of Lebanon. It will display, the, it will be a display, of the glory, and majesty, of God himself.

[13 : 47] And there will be people, who will see it. They, being the human, hung Lucas, those, they, will be identified, in verse 9 and 10, as the redeemed people, of God.

They will see, God's glory, and God's majesty, in this land. And this is why then, Isaiah encourages us, to strengthen our weak hands, and make firm our feeble knees, to say to our hearts, and anxious hearts, to be strong, and fear not.

Because, God will come. God will come, to restore, and to transform. And look there, in verse 5 to 7, the same power, which transformed, the landscape, in verses 1 and 2, will also bring, miraculous renewal, for the people, that are in the land.

And I want us to see, the key image here, is water, breaking forth, into the world. Streams in the desert. Water breaking forth, to bring life, and healing, to all that is broken, including broken humanity.

Verse 5 says, The eyes of the blind, shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf, unstopped. Then shall the lame man, leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute, sing for joy.

[15 : 21] This light-giving water, opens blind people's eyes. It opens deaf ears, it loosens mute tongues, and it brings strength, to the crippled.

This is a healing, a revitalizing, a rejuvenating stream, of life, that brings restoration. But it's not the water, that does it, really. The water is the sign, and proof, of God's presence.

It is God himself, who comes, and when he comes, he brings all of this, with him, in his coming. In verse 2, it is his majesty, and glory, that is seen, in all his works, in all these works, that were told of here.

In verse 4, Isaiah tells us, that it is God himself, who comes, with vengeance, and recompense, to save. It's interesting, that even during this, time Isaiah, the time Isaiah, is talking of, Isaiah says, that God is coming, that God's coming, is a coming of vengeance.

It's a coming, to judge the wicked, and evildoer. Even as he comes, to save, he comes to judge. And remember, as we've said before, when God comes, he comes, always, in salvation, and judgment.

[16 : 36] God's enemies, will have to face, God's perfect justice, when he comes. But wait a second, aren't we, God's enemies, in our disobedience, to God's word, just like Israel?

How can God, come to judge the wicked, and yet save, a people like us? Knowing full well, we are also wicked, deserving of God's judgment.

How can we be brought, into this garden, of the Lord? Look there, in verse 8. Isaiah speaks, of a highway.

This highway, is called, the way of holiness. Now, this way, is shut, to those who are unclean. They will not be found on it.

It's best not to think, when we think of highway here, about, better not to think about, modern highways, where, you know, we think of roads, where cars are zooming, past each other. Rather, I

think we should think of it, more literally.

[17:43] It's an, I way. It means, it's a way that goes up, leading up, to God's holy mountain. And, since, the fall, since, man, was exposed, from Eden, from God's garden, mankind, has always, sought, and strived, to build a highway, back to God's garden.

But, how is that, panned out? The tower, at Babel, is one such attempt, to build an highway, back to God's garden.

And, every man-made, highway, that is, every man-made religion, are duplications, of the failed attempt, at Babel. It all leads, to the same dead end.

It all leads, to destruction, and desolation. And, that's because, we're stuck in our sin. We're hopeless, in our state of misery. We have no health in us.

And, throughout the ages, we've tried, to construct roads, that are suitable, to approach the Holy One. And, all our patchwork, has, come to, to naught.

[19:04] We've done our very best, to turn the barren desert, of our existence, into a fertile, Eden. But, every attempt, has, proven futile.

We know this personally, as well, don't we? You may try, to cover your barrenness, with acquisitions. Acquisitions of wealth, of achievements, of power, of religious devotion.

But, ultimately, you find, that nothing, fills that void. Nothing, you can do, can possibly produce, lasting fruit. It all, ends up dying, and spoiling, and gets burned up, in the eat, and harshness, of the desert.

But, here, Isaiah, speaks of a road, made by God, himself, for us. We can be sure, that this road, is safe, and true. No lion, should be there.

Verse 9, Nor shall any ravenous, beast, come upon, on it. They shall not, be found there. But the redeemed, the redeemed, shall walk there, on this road.

[20:20] But this highway, is not for everyone. Do you see there, at the end of verse 9, it's only for the redeemed. Notice again, in verse 8, the unclean person, cannot walk, on this highway.

Now, before you say, well, that doesn't seem fair, that some are clean, and some are unclean. It's best to understand, that those, who are spoken of, as unclean here, are those, who are filled, to use the means of grace, provided for them, by God.

God has come. God has, made a way. He's invited us, and is a way of holiness. But the unclean, are those, who have self-disqualified, themselves, from the way, by rejecting, the free grace of God, by rejecting, the free offer, of the gospel.

Whereas, the redeemed, who walk on this road, do not, those who have laid hold, of God's promises, and those who are, benefiting from his grace, freely given to them.

Look there, as they say, even fools, those who lose their way, easily, will not get lost, on this road.

Now, I don't know about you, but that's an added comfort, for me.

[21:45] It means, it's not dependent, on you, and me, to figure out, the directions. It's not dependent, on us, to clear the path, on this way. Jesus, holds you fast, as he leads you, through the way.

He, he lights, your path, with his word. His spirit, comforts, and guides you. He places you, in his family, the church, that you may not, journey alone, on this way.

And he feeds you, with his body, and blood, to sustain, and replenish you. Even if you're prone, to lose your way, on this way, of holiness, you can be sure, that you will reach, your destination.

Just stay on the way. This is a comfort. And I think there are, there are, as we see Isaiah, prophesy, this, word of salvation, of our God, there are three horizons, that we ought to see.

What I mean by that, is three ways, in which this is fulfilled. We know that Isaiah, is prophesying, that God will come, in judgment, to judge Israel. They haven't gone yet, to exile, but they will, he will judge them.

[23:10] But God also promises, through his prophet, that he will deliver them, from that judgment, that their own sin, and failure, and faithlessness, is brought upon them. And so it's a return, from exile, that Isaiah is promising here.

God saving his people, and restoring them. And that's the first horizon, that we see. But it's, there's more in here, than just, restoration, back to Israel.

Do you see, that there is more in here? It speaks of something, that is everlasting, that is sure, that is unshakable. And I think, the second horizon, it speaks of, God's, own messenger, God himself, coming.

It speaks of, the first advent, moment, where Christ, Jesus, the second person, of the Trinity, comes, and accomplishes, the work of redemption, that is spoken of here, by which we are, then invited, and ushered on, to the way of holiness.

Jesus himself, shows us this, in Matthew 11, that we read, our gospel reading, this morning.

Matthew 11, verse 4 to 5. Jesus says, that Isaiah 35, speaks of him, when he says, because in that, in that gospel reading, John the Baptist, was imprisoned, and he sent his disciples, to Jesus, and he says, ask Jesus, if he indeed, is the Messiah, that we've been waiting for, or should we wait for another?

[24 : 42] And Jesus says to, John's disciple, go back, and tell John, what you hear, and see. And what do they hear, and see? The blind, receive their sight, 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.

This is the fulfillment, of Isaiah 35. God, has come, to save. And he has come, to bring life, where there is death, to bring fruitfulness, where there is, a barrenness.

It's living waters, flowing, as he comes, into his kingdom. So, we see the hope, of Isaiah fulfilled, in Christ's first coming.

But there is even more, in Isaiah's prophecy. There's a third horizon, that we're to see. It is the second advent, of God.

It's the completion, of that which he has come, to start, in his first coming. When the great reversal, will be accomplished, you see desert, and harried, and desolation, all around you.

[25 : 57] Look, to the third horizon. God, is coming. the second coming, too, will fulfill Isaiah 35.

But it will be, in a more complete, and final, and universal way. Let's look at the last verse.

And the ransom, 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. The ransomed, of the Lord. Those are the people, that are found, on the highway.

And those are the one, that will, God will take, without fail, all the way, to the destination. They will return, back to the garden, of the Lord.

[27 : 04] The exiled people of God, will return to God's garden. They will do so, with shouts of joy. Everlasting joy. I love how Isaiah bookends, the joy spoken of there, in verse one, and then in the last verse.

Everlasting joy, will crown the head, of the redeemed. That is, unbroken, unbreakable joy, shall be the portion, of the redeemed.

As they marvel, in God's work, in redeeming, and recreating the world. This, is our destination.

This, is our horizon, brothers and sisters, in Christ. trust. And if you feel like, you're in a garden now. If you feel like, there's nothing else, to long for.

Might it be because, you've placed your trust, in the here and now. Maybe it's because, you're content, with world, what this world, has to offer.

[28 : 08] And you're not looking forward, to the salvation, of the Lord. Lord. Now, if that's you, I, I ask you, I beg of you, this morning, to turn to Christ.

To realize, that the offerings, of this world, will fill you. It's a dead end. No pun intended. But it is a dead, end. And I invite you, to come to him, and let him lead you, on the way of holiness.

There only, will you find, joy everlasting. There only, will you find peace. There, can only be, everlasting hope.

There you can dwell, secure in the love of God. And if you are here, this morning, you're already on the way, for you longing, to come at last, to Manzion, to the new Jerusalem.

But you find yourself, weary, by the desolation, of the world. Even as you go, in this way. And you find yourself, distracted. And maybe, weirdly, by the thorns, and thistles, of the desert world.

[29 : 31] And then, let Isaiah 35, encourage you. And I think, most of us, will find ourselves, in one of these, two places. If you're not in Christ, come.

But if you're already in there, you might find yourself, weary. I should go on this way. You might find yourself, weakened. But let Isaiah 35, encourage you.

God, who by grace, has placed you, on his highway of holiness, will keep you on it. That's his promise. He will bring you, to his glorious city.

That's his promise. He will bring you, into his beautiful garden. That is his sure word. So do not grow weary. Stand on God's promises.

Stand. And may God, strengthen your end, to action. May he, stabilize, your knees, to stay rooted, on Christ, who is your firm foundation.

[30 : 31] May he give you, conviction of heart, and purpose, so that you will not, give in to fear, and anxiety. We pray, in the name of our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. If you will rise, and, you turn your page to, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, n