

# "THE COMING JOY"

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Preacher: Jim McAlpine

[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading this morning from Isaiah chapter 35 is one of many in the book of Isaiah that's often read during Advent.!

The prophet Isaiah is proclaiming a promise to the people.

He urges his listeners to hope, to hope when they despair, to react to God with awe instead of complacency, to have courage instead of fear, to have joy in their hearts.

However, the people in Isaiah's day didn't really have much reason for joy. Their land was devastated by the Assyrians. The people were deported and foreigners lived in Israel's cities and walked on its streets.

The local economy was in a shambles. Every family had lost someone in battle. The conquering armies rendered the land infertile. People faced hunger and even starvation.

[ 1 : 24 ] So there wasn't much reason for joy. And we would expect Isaiah to echo similar sentiments here. However, that's not what he says.

He starts and ends chapter 35 on the keynote of joy. He speaks of the coming joy. Isaiah says joy for the earth and joy for the redeemed.

Firstly, let's think about this joy for the earth. The earth is home to around 9 million species of animals and plants.

One million of those species could be extinct within a few decades. More than 25% of the world's prescription drugs originate from genetic material that grows in the world's rainforests.

And in the next few years, we could lose many of the plants from which tomorrow's life-saving drugs could come. Conversationists also point to a whole host of other things.

[ 2 : 32 ] Over-harvesting of rainforests, which are being leveled at the rate of 50 million acres a year. Air pollution that creates acid rain.

The greenhouse effect which melts the polar ice caps. Increased radiation caused by the disappearance of the ozone layer. Toxic waste that enter the food chain.

The saturation of the oceans so they no longer have the capacity to safely handle any more waste. However, in contrast to all these things, we hear Isaiah talking of joy for the earth.

He says in verses 1 and 2, The desert and the parched land will be glad. The wilderness will rejoice. It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

The earth will be full of joy. In the Garden of Eden, mankind was blessed with an environment which allowed its inhabitants to serve the Lord.

[ 3 : 33 ] They were free to walk, to walk with the Lord in the cool of the evening. And this beautiful environment sadly was lost due to the sin of Adam and Eve.

And yet to the children of Abraham, a new Eden was promised. A land flowing with milk and honey. This land had withered before their eyes and was now inhabited by rebellious and greedy people.

A people soon to lose everything. God's word to Isaiah was a promise of a future blessed environment. The land of Judah will become lush and fertile like the best land in Palestine.

Judea will house forests like Lebanon, as well as beautiful farming and pasture land. The earth will be full of joy. But what is the reason for that joy?

The prophet says here, the wilderness will be turned into a garden. The desert will team with all kinds of life. Deserts as we know them on this earth can be sometimes beautiful places.

[ 4 : 48 ] This is not the kind of desert the prophet has in mind here. He means an utterly barren, sandy place without any water, any vegetation, or any animal life.

But then he tells us in verse 7, the desert will be transformed. It will be filled with springs and pools of water.

Where that desert creature, the jackal, once lay grass and reeds, papyrus, will all grow.

The desert will bloom like the crocus. If you watch some of the wildlife documentaries, you'll see that few places on this earth are as beautiful as a desert after rainfall.

Overnight, the most beautiful crocuses, poppies, spring up and cover the ground as like a blanket. The desert and the wilderness will be given the glory of Lebanon and splendor of Carmel and Sharon.

[ 5 : 55 ] And these three places are known for their rich, luxurious growth. Seemingly the cedars of Lebanon, for instance, can grow to a height of 120 feet or sometimes more.

And of 30 to 40 feet in diameter. They're a hardy tree with some today being over 2,000 years old. So the earth that Isaiah sees is so full of joy because it's been restored.

It's been restored to perfection. It's a land of hope and glory. It's the place of our hopes and dreams. It's a paradise regained, heaven on earth.

Secondly, the joy of the redeemed. In Isaiah, the practical meaning of redeemed and ransomed is the same.

They are the people whom God has saved and delivered from the guilt and power of sin. The death of Jesus on the cross was the ultimate ransom and the ultimate sacrifice to free humanity from sin.

[ 7 : 04 ] The ransomed of the Lord will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them.

And sorrow and sighing will flee away. The redeemed will be full of joy. What's the reason for that joy? Well, Isaiah says a time when we don't have to worry about the health service, disability, surgery, doctors and hospitals.

He says back in verses 5 and 6, Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. Just as the desert's transformed, so will mankind.

All diseases will be removed. Revelation 21 verse 4, There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

[ 8 : 16 ] Our bodies will be made perfect and glorious. Isaiah says much reason for hope, for peace, for joy.

He sees the redeemed with new and perfect bodies, living in a new and perfect earth. Yet it's easy, far too easy, to be pessimistic, to grumble, complain, to be depressed about what's going on in the world and in our own lives.

So Isaiah urges us to keep our hope, to keep the faith, to keep our dreams alive. Verses 3 and 4, Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way.

Say to those with fearful hearts, Be strong, do not fear. He's telling us to encourage one another. Encourage one another with talk about our glorious future.

However, something has to happen before this vision becomes a reality. Isaiah tells us the secret to paradise regained in verse 4.

[ 9 : 29 ] He says, Your God will come. He will come with vengeance, with divine retribution. He will come to save you. When Jesus comes, then will our joy be complete.

As Christians, we know and believe that over 2,000 years ago, God and Jesus has come. Unknown to the prophet, though, is the knowledge that Jesus must return again.

He must return again before all is accomplished and the redeemed have the joy and the new life that he brings. Jesus has come in salvation, born in a stable at Bethlehem.

Jesus has to come again or else we can forget about our hopes, our dreams for the future. We can't emphasize enough that he has to come in judgment and with salvation.

This reminds us the renewed earth and the glorified bodies are not the goal. Rather, they are the result. They are but a sign, mere evidence of salvation and redemption.

[ 10 : 44 ] They're a sign of liberation, liberation from the bondage and decay of sin. They're a sign of freedom, freedom from corruption, freedom from evil.

people. Friends, we often think and talk of salvation and redemption as concerning only mankind. However, Isaiah reminds us that creation participates in the glorious results of God's work as well.

Creation, too, is liberated from sin and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. God, we might say there isn't much reason for joy.

Do you know what Isaiah would say to this? He would say, nonsense. You know the secret of paradise. Your God has come. Your God is coming. He has come with salvation.

He's coming with judgment. So, yours is every reason for joy, the joy of salvation and redemption. To make that joy ours, all that we have to do is walk the way of holiness.

[ 11 : 59 ] And the road is clearly marked out, says Isaiah, verses 8 and 9. And the highway will be there. It will be called the way of holiness.

The unclean will not journey on it. It will be for those who walk in that way. Wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there.

Nor will any ferocious beast get up on it. They will not be found there, but only the redeemed will walk there. What is this road?

This highway, this way of holiness that leads to salvation. According to these verses, God has redeemed us.

God has restored us and placed our feet on a new road. As Isaiah speaks to the Jews about that highway, we can see something about the spiritual road we are walking today.

[ 13 : 03 ] This highway he mentions in verse 8 refers to a royal road. In ancient times, powerful kings would build roadways through their kingdoms.

These roads were built high above the surrounding land and this prevented the king's progress from being deterred by passing flocks, wild animals, or other hindrances.

These roads were easy to recognize, they were well maintained, and kept open at all times. It was a safe, quick way for the king to travel from one place to another because no one knew when the king might come.

There was a time in our life when we could not walk this heavenly highway. Our feet were firmly planted on the low road of life.

Ephesians 2 tells us we were forced to wander across the burning sands and treacherous byways of this world. Or as the Christmas carol, a little town of Bethlehem says, and those whose journey now is hard, whose hope is burning low, who tread the rocky path of life with painful steps and slow.

[ 14 : 28 ] Before we knew Jesus, we were stumbling along, picking our way blindly towards destruction and darkness. Each step caused us to be deeper in our sins.

But when we trusted Jesus, we were lifted from the low road and our feet were placed on the high road of salvation. It's a highway and only those who know the king can walk on it.

Also, it is a holy way. This road is called a way. This word means a path, a course of life.

It's also called a way of holiness. This road is clean. A holy way is there for those who have been redeemed and delivered from their sins.

It is for those who have been made new creatures in Jesus. The Lord expects His people to be a separate people. He expects us to refrain from even the appearance of evil.

[ 15 : 37 ] Those who refuse to live a life of holiness will not be permitted to walk the heavenly way. A clean life is a mark of salvation.

Friends, we are pilgrims on this road and do not always know what lies ahead. I do not know what lies ahead the way I cannot see.

But one stands near to be my guide. He'll show the way to me. we will not go astray.

We'll not stagger. We'll not stumble. We stumble and we step out of His path and go our own way. If we walk in His will, we will never stumble.

The way is found by taking Jesus into our heart, reading His Word and serving Him. And verse 9 shows us also, it's a harmless way.

[ 16 : 41 ] This way is a safe way. The lion and any ferocious beast are not permitted on this road. And as long as the pilgrim stays on the highway, they are safe from the attacks of those who would destroy them.

Friends, we're all stopped by a violent enemy. Satan would love nothing better than for us to fall into his clutches. But he cannot touch those.

He cannot touch those who are walking the king's highway. His road is reserved for the redeemed. Those who have been rescued from sin can walk the road in absolute safety.

But when we come down from the highway, we become vulnerable to attack. Verse 10 goes on to tell us it's a heavenly way.

This highway terminates in Zion. The road we travel leads to glory. Sometimes the road is level and easy to navigate.

[ 17 : 47 ] At other times it's rough and steep. Regardless of the path, we are called to walk through this life, the king's highway, leads his pilgrims home.

There is joy and gladness at the end of the way. Sorrow and sighing will flee away when the pilgrims reach the end of the road.

Scripture tells us in many places there's a mansion at the end of the way. There's a glorious city at the end of the way.

There's a place of peace, joy and blessing at the end of the road. We'll meet the king. We'll meet the king face to face at the end of the way.

Friends, we need to keep walking this path and do not look for an exit. Stay the course because the road leads to heaven. Verse 10 also tells us it's a happy way.

[ 18 : 55 ] We're told that the pilgrims on this road come singing and everlasting joy will crown their heads. The road can become difficult, the strength of the pilgrim can fade away, but they travel on with joy in their souls because they anticipate what awaits them at the end of the journey.

They know the highway is the best way. They rejoice because they're allowed to travel that path. The Lord's highway is the best possible way.

Those who walk the king's highway experience his peace, his joy, his presence, and his blessings along the way. The way may go hard, our strength may fade away, but there's no better path through the wilderness of this world than the king's highway.

If we walk in his ways, we'll find true happiness and peace and joy for our soul. What road are we walking? Are we on the king's highway?

Has he lifted us up out of the miry clay of this world and set our feet on his path? Are we walking the way of holiness? Remember the words of Jesus in John 14, I am the way and the truth and the life.

[ 20 : 24 ] No one comes to the Father except through me. It's no accident that in Acts chapter 9, the Christian religion is called the way.

In Jesus, we have the way, the only way, the only way to redemption, to salvation. If we believe in Jesus, we have salvation.

If we believe in Jesus, we are redeemed. There's a joy in serving Jesus, joy amidst the darkest night, for I've learned the wondrous secret, and I'm walking in the light.

So yes, there is reason for joy, a joy that can never be diminished. Remember the words of the Christmas carol we sang earlier, joy to the world.

The Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing. At this time of Advent, we look forward to Christmas.

[ 21 : 33 ] We certainly have much to rejoice about, much to celebrate, much to be joyful about. We may not rejoice about the circumstances of our life right now.

We may not rejoice about what's happening in the world or in the environment. We may not rejoice with what's going on in our land of Scotland, in our church, in our family.

Yet, we have reason for joy. Why? Because the Lord Jesus, our Emmanuel, is come in salvation.

And someday, he'll come again. And the whole earth will be full of joy. Friends, the best days are ahead of us.

Hallelujah. What a Savior. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we have so often, like lost sheep, have strayed from your path, confident that we knew the way.

[ 22 : 35 ] Forgive us that sometimes we are tempted to leave your path, because we're afraid of the cost of the journey. We thank you that at these times you gather us in and show us the way.

Lord, we thank you for the joy you give us, for the joy that we can call you Father, for the coming joy of the celebration of Jesus' birth and the joy of knowing that Jesus lives in the hearts of those who believe in him.

Hear our prayer. In the greatest name of all, in Jesus' name, Amen.