

Splendour Of The Lord 10am

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 June 1998

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Our God grant us eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to believe as we turn to your word. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Amen. The gospel preached to them. So Jesus identified himself in terms of the action that's at the core of Isaiah 35.

when people came out to John the Baptist and said, Who are you? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.

[1 : 36] Again, the picture from Isaiah 35. So if you want to know who you are and where you are in history and the whole reason for your faith, then look at Isaiah 35, but you will find it very disturbing.

It was the best example I can think of at the moment is that I was on the B.C. ferries this week along with 100 schoolchildren who were off on a bicycle hike.

And they considerably improved the quality of life on board the ferry just by their sheer enthusiasm. But in due course, the ominous voice came across the loudspeaker, Okay, you kids, settle down or somebody's going to get hurt.

And because of Isaiah 35, I realized instantly what he should have said. Okay, you adults, get up and run around and one of you may be healed.

And that's the kind of transforming reality which I think is in Isaiah 35.

[2 : 50] And if you look at the text, there it is. The wilderness and the dry land, the desert, shall rejoice and blossom. Humanity has consistently been able to make the gardens which rejoice and blossom become deserts and wilderness.

We're good at that. And so if somebody can reverse that, you know that something quite unusual is happening. If you look at the curse in Genesis chapter 3, you recognize that what man does with the earth is brings upon it a curse so that he eats his bread by the sweat of his brow.

He labors with the dust through all his days. And dust he is, and to dust he returns. And that's the entanglement of our life under the curse because the land has, in a sense, taken us and broken us. And for centuries and generations, peasants and laborers and farmers have worked with the land trying to make it go and have given their life to it.

And the land has always won and buried them. So you see that something dramatic is happening when John the Baptist announces, and Isaiah foresees, that the desert shall blossom like a rose, and the wilderness will cry out in rejoicing.

[4 : 30] So that's the picture that you start with, that tremendous reversal. And then if you look further down, you see the glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord and the majesty of our God.

The very pinnacle of all the fertile, arable, productive land that belonged in Israel, Lebanon, Carmel, Sharon, they were going to infect the whole area and make it into a fertile, fruitful, beautiful, lovely place to be.

That's what was going to happen, reversing and transforming the whole cause of nature so that man, instead of going from dust to dust, would move from dust to glory.

And that's the picture that you have here. And he goes on and says this very clearly when he says that in the transformed nature, you will see the glory and the majesty of the Lord.

That's where Christians and environmentalists get into trouble. And environmentalists tell you that we've got to change the course of nature.

[5 : 50] And Christians say, you've got to change the course of humanity. And the other will follow. But God transforms nature and then he goes along and transforms people.

And you need to be willing to be transformed if in terms of the environment you want to be a transformer. So then you get this splendor of the natural beauty being that presentation of the glory and sovereignty and majesty of God.

And you can't escape from it. I don't care who you are. When you see the magnificence of nature and you see the blossoms breaking forth in the springtime in Vancouver, you can't help, you can't stop there and say, wasn't that clever of us to plant those apple trees there?

You are those cherry blots. The reality is that you see way beyond them. To something you catch a glimpse of the glory of God. So this promise, this promise of a transformed nature is to give encouragement to people.

People like you and me. People whose hands are weak with quiet despair. People who in this world of sorrow and sighing are weighed down and burdened so that their knees are ready to buckle under them.

[7 : 25] People whose hearts are full of panic and fear and they don't know which way it's going to come from next, but they're sure somebody's going to get hurt.

They're aware of that. And it's going to happen. And so their hearts are fearful. And that needs to change, it says. And so Isaiah has the vision in which all this has changed.

And then in the midst of this, there is a very powerful picture that I want you to see. Right in the midst of this transforming activity of God, it says, God will come and will bring vengeance, divine retribution, deep, unmistakable justice, and he'll bring it to your doorstep.

Each one of us will face the vengeance and the divine retribution of our God. There is no escape from that.

That's why it says later you've got to get on this way which is called the way of holiness. You've got to confront the righteous justice of a transcendent and holy God.

[8 : 47] There is no escape from that. And that's the thing that makes you aware. You see, the vision of God is what makes you aware of that thing that we've seen in Isaiah again and again, that when you see God, you say, I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

I am a proud man and I live among proud people. I am an arrogant man and I live among arrogant people. That's the thing that breaks us down when we face the reality of the vengeance and divine retribution of God.

But God's purpose in bringing it to us is in order that we might see his salvation. That he brings to us not just vengeance and divine retribution, but salvation.

And you see, the strange thing, when you think about the picture in your mind, vengeance, divine retribution, salvation, what do you have as the picture of God's visitation upon us?

God comes before us in the person of Jesus Christ who stood under our judgment, who accepted our condemnation, who died for us.

[10 : 09] It was he that was condemned. It was he on whom the justice of God fell. You see, it's such a strange picture because people are so aware that God is unfair in passing judgment on us.

But how did he do it? By coming before us in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, and being subjected to death on the cross.

So remember, when you're thinking of justice and divine retribution and vengeance, that that's the way God brought it about.

And then you see, that having happened, chapter 35 goes on and talks about the reality of a transformed people.

You have transformed nature where the desert blossoms. You now have a transformed people.

And the transformed people, as Jesus quotes when he says, the eyes of the blind will be open as we begin to catch a glimpse of the reality beyond anything we have ever seen.

[11 : 25] Most of us are jaded and cynical and depressed and discouraged and downhearted and have the sense that we know it all. The reply of Isaiah to that is that you're blind to the reality of God's grace and glory and sovereign power.

And your eyes need to be open to it. And your ears are stopped to the message of the good news which is preached in the gospel.

The intellectual arrogance that we suffer from, the sense of human competence and achievement, the realization of goals and capabilities never dreamed of before, give us an exalted sense of our own importance and our own place.

But we are deaf to the reality of a message which carries us far beyond the realm of our human experience. He goes on to say, the lame will leap like deer, not the painful, drudging journey that carries on step by painful step through life.

But now, people will leap like deer and the muted tongue will shout for joy.

[13:04] And I'd like to put myself as one of the great illustrations of this. You know, when you come across a chapter like Isaiah 35 and you try and explain it to people, it feels like your tongue is tied in a knot because you can't, all your words are totally inadequate.

And in a sense, all you can do is mumble in trying to say something which is beyond the realms of human experience.

And so you feel like someone who is mute and unable to speak and then suddenly it breaks out and we are able to put into words to one another the reality of the kingdom, the reality of God's great purpose.

So that's what's happening here in this world. And then he talks about what it is that brings about this transformation.

And if you look there, you see two very powerful pictures. It says, Water shall break forth in the wilderness, streams in the desert, the burning sand will become a pool, and thirsty ground springs of water.

[14:26] You see that the burning sand would just absorb and absorb absorb and absorb and absorb and absorb. And the thirsty ground would drink in and drink in and drink in and drink in.

But now it's turned around and the burning sand becomes a pool of water available to those who need it. And the thirsty ground, instead of absorbing, springs forth with water.

Water gushes forth from it. The desert is crisscrossed with streams. And out of the rock, as in Moses, the water gushes forth.

Water transforms nature. Water transforms the desert. Water transforms the wilderness. And water transforms our lives.

Because the great picture that you have is of people who, like the children of Israel, going through the water of the Red Sea, like them later on, going through the waters of the Jordan, going through the waters of baptism, going through the waters of affliction.

[15:45] It's water that God pours on us and by which he transforms us and makes us, as he renews the land, so he renews people by this water.

Remember the beautiful illustration of that in the New Testament, when Jesus is talking to the woman of Samaria at the well of Jacob. And there, he says to her, about the water that she most desperately needs, and he says, if you drink this water, it will prove to you to be a well of water springing up onto eternal life.

You see this transforming reality of water as it's poured into our lives. And Jesus saying that he is that water. It's a powerful picture.

You see, now, it's interesting that the woman says, give me that water. And Jesus wants to deal with a pastoral problem first, so he says, go and get your husband.

But you see, those things tend to be tied together. Then you go on and see the transforming that's brought about by the water.

[17:12] And then the next huge picture you see in Isaiah 35 is a highway shall be there. And it will be called the way of holiness.

Yes. You know, they, I think in Judges chapter 5, verse 6, there's a kind of interesting statement which provides some background to that.

It says that, in that day, caravans ceased and travelers kept to the byways. that the whole, the whole of the desert, you see, was crisscrossed by paths that led nowhere.

And the desert was the place where people wandered and wandered and wandered and wandered and never arrived. And they just got lost in the wilderness.

Lost in the desert. So you see, the powerful picture is that of, if you want, a highway running straight through, with direction and purpose and goals, and, and you get on that highway and then your life begins to go somewhere.

[18:27] And that's what, what Isaiah says, that a highway will be there in the desert and it shall be called the holy way. The unclean shall not pass over it.

And, you see this, there's, there's, the water is there again. You've got to be cleansed. Cleansed by the waters of repentance.

Cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. You've got to be made clean in order to pass over this highway. And so, we're probably reluctant to say that that needs doing.

Like a small child objecting to a Saturday night bath. We just, we think maybe that's an unreasonable request. But, if you have to live with somebody, you recognize the need, even if they don't.

The, the, the thing that, this way of holiness is the way of people who now know where they're going, know to whom they are going.

[19 : 37] and, they, they are the people who want to make their, to make their way back. You see, that's, that's the, always the picture of the people of God.

In slavery in Egypt, coming back through the wilderness, through the water, back to the promised land. The children of Israel in exile in Babylon and their longing is to come back to where they belong, where they know they belong, where they know who they are.

And the, I mean, the prodigal son is a wonderful picture of somebody who wants to come back. And so, there's this longing in people's hearts. May God grant that there is such a longing, that you want to come back.

You want to come back through the transforming experience and through making contact with the highway that leads you to where it is God's purpose you should go.

Well, I want, that was, that's what, what happens when these, these people want to come back.

Can I take just a few, a minute or two to tell you about my remarkable week this week past?

[20 : 52] It, they're just, these things happen. The basic pattern of our life is we try to make a garden out of the rocky knoll we possess on Main Island which puts you in touch with trying to transform the desert.

Wednesday morning, there's a breakfast for men in the congregation and there's a lot of sharing of real human suffering as we pray for one another.

this, this, this week we got news about a child as I remember her standing in, in the children's focus not here but in Toronto and she was just a child and I got news this week, we got news this week that, that she's now grown up with three children and through a tragic accident she was widowed on Wednesday of this week.

The, the, the, I was, I went to a Wednesday night gathering this week and it was, it's strange, you know, because the story of Isaiah is written against the background of the Assyrian Empire and the Babylonian Empire and the Egyptian Empire and armies marching back and forth endlessly and proud, arrogant city states that defy God and defy one another and spend their life in battle with one another so that that's the background against which Isaiah's picture is drawn.

Wednesday night we had just a small gathering here of people and it was amazing as we heard from one another that all the major events of our century were personal experiences to one or other of these people.

[22 : 55] War, Holocaust, Marxism, giant corporations, super technology, the process of emigration and the religion of passionate secularism.

Their lives had been all mixed up with this and so all these this was an amazing thing to hear it and then this week this church was filled with people here for the funeral of Chaocephala who was a quiet and godly man in our midst these many years and he's been part of this congregation for so long and it was amazing to see the church fill up with friends and those who admired and respected this quiet man who's fought such a long battle against human afflictions of one kind and another and you see the interesting thing about it was that when they came they were they were to join in a song and they because he was the Finnish consul they sang Finlandia but then they sang the hymn praise my soul the king of heaven and guide me O thou great Jehovah you see in the midst of all these circumstances on the one hand there is the reality of a faith in which the desert blooms the water comes forth the blind see the deaf hear the mute shout for joy feeble hands are made strong and weak knees are strengthened and panicky hearts are confirmed and encouraged that's the process of faith our world thinks it doesn't need that kind of faith anymore that it doesn't need the vision of Isaiah it doesn't need the vision of Isaiah fulfilled as it was in the person of Jesus Christ because again you can go over this chapter and look at the life of Christ who spent 40 days in the wilderness figuring out what it was all about and recognizing the temptations and trials of life and you can see

Jesus is the one who opens the eyes of the blind and Jesus is the one who casts the net so that they can't carry all the fish they caught and Jesus is the one who makes the lame leap and who

unstops the ears of the deaf Jesus is the one who does all these things Jesus says he is the water Jesus is the one who says of the Christian community as it goes on its exodus through the wilderness of this world and he says I am the water and drink of me and you will never thirst I am the bread that will provide for you day after day on the journey to which you are called Jesus is the one who does all that for us and then you see the whole thing comes to a wonderful climax in the end of chapter 35 when it says that these people will arrive they will not be violence will not deter them no lion shall be there but the redeemed of the Lord shall walk there the ransomed and redeemed people of God will walk on this highway to the place which God has called them to be and that's the thing by which we are to live that's how we are to be motivated in our lives that's the place to which we come and we may think of of of the mountain as being a dreadful and difficult place but it's not a dreadful and difficult place it's the place where we come into into the presence of God himself let me just read to you from from

Hebrews when he says what it means to come to this place he says you have come to Mount Zion to the city of the living God to the heavenly Jerusalem to innumerable angels in festal gathering to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven to a judge who is God of all and to us to the spirits of just men made perfect and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the condemning blood of Abel you see that's what we're being drawn to that's what it means to catch Isaiah's vision about what life is all about and you see the picture that comes at the end of Isaiah is a picture of tremendous joy listen to it again the ransom of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing everlasting joy shall be upon their heads this life at best is a time of momentary joy from time to time but this is everlasting joy and it says of this everlasting joy if you look at it in the text that it's something that overtakes you in the journey as you are traveling through the world of sorrow and sighing you are overtaken by joy the strange and magnificent words in the

New Testament which speak of the Lord Jesus who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross this is the joy that will ultimately triumph and take possession of our lives the ransom to the Lord shall return come to Zion with singing everlasting joy shall be upon their heads they shall obtain joy and gladness that's the ultimate reality it's not a quiet surrender to death and despair and despondency it's a triumphant entry into that which fills us with joy and brings to an end the last verse says sorrow and sighing all the evidence of the curse the reality of the separating part the separating effect of death in our lives you know a world in which we are constantly having to say goodbye goodbye goodbye with tears in our eyes as we have to see this parting going on and on and the sorrowing and sighing that grips our hearts and lives that comes to an end and we are overtaken by the joy of the fulfillment of God's purpose which Isaiah saw in a vision which

[30 : 19] Jesus demonstrated by his life and death and resurrection and of which you are called to invest yourself and find yourself in faith that's why you see Isaiah 35 is the place you gotta find yourself you gotta find yourself if you're in the wilderness you gotta find yourself if you're blind if you're deaf if you can't utter the words if you can't articulate you gotta find yourself when your hands are feeble and your knees are weak you gotta find yourself you gotta find yourself if you have all your life been like the burning sand that absorbs and absorbs and absorbs and absorbs and needs to be transformed into a well springing up to a pool of water that's where you've got to find yourself and that's where God intends you should find yourself Isaiah lays out the landscape of our lives and says alright now find yourself and determine where it is you're going get on the highway and move is the invitation that

Isaiah gives us and the pattern that the Lord Jesus establishes for us Amen Amen