ReFormation Highway 10am

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0:00] I'd like you to turn to Isaiah 35. And I would like you to be, I mean, as you cast your eye over it and read it and as I speak about it, you would have to concede that Isaiah was powerfully under the influence of the Spirit of God in being able to write such a chapter.

And so it's necessary that as I speak about it, that God the Holy Spirit will help me because I have very limited intelligence and I'm not very articulate with my tongue and compared to what Isaiah has said here in Isaiah 35.
But then you must pray for yourself that you have the ability to hear what God spoke through Isaiah the prophet and what we now turn our minds and hearts to in considering it and seeking that God will work in our lives through this.
It is an exquisite poem written, of course, in a language which we no longer speak and translated into our language in an attempt to try and capture it.
And it's a quite amazing book, quite an amazing chapter right in the center of an amazing book and almost incidentally in the center of your Bible.
[2:13] And the thing you have to do in preparing to hear it is to clearly identify the source of your most acute vulnerability as a person.

You must, in a sense, name the reality of your weakness and your profound weakness.
And you must, in a sense, openly acknowledge them. Now, what I mean by this, I mean, I think God gave me a wonderful illustration in an experience I had this week.
On Tuesday night, I was graciously invited to go to the hockey game. And I went to the hockey game, and we had three periods of intense hockey and masses and masses of hype surrounding it. And at the end of it, all these million-dollar hockey players took this tremendous applause from people.
[3:38] And then among them, three stars were named. And those of us who didn't make it on the three-star announcement walked out full, I mean, with stars in our eyes as we thought of the grandeur of what it must be to be one of the three stars.

Well, then I got home, and my wife had been somewhere else that evening. She'd been to a presentation, a sort of one-man presentation down in Granville Market.
And it was in support of the handicapped artists community here in Vancouver. And they had brought in a man to speak.
And because of their sponsorship, there was a great many severely handicapped people there. And the man stood up to speak to make his presentation.
And my wife says it was brilliant and humorous and full of grace. And that man, the whole side of his face had been scourged by cancer and by subsequent radiation.
[5:22] The whole of his bottom lip was missing. And he spoke brilliantly and humorously. Now, the reason I tell you this is because we live in a world where we have a star system to which we all look and think, these are the people that have arrived.

These are the great people. These are the powerful people. These are the strong people. These are the people that have arrived. These are the people that have arrived. But the thing that I think it illustrated for me was what Isaiah 35 is all about.
This man said, the difference between me and other people is my weakness.
You know, my problem is right there in front of me and in front of all of you. I can't hide it.
And the difficulty for most of us is that we can hide that thing. And that's why Isaiah says, just be careful.
[6:40] And what you want to recognize is, and he tells us this, that our hands are feeble and we can't do what we would aspire to do and even what we may long to do.

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Our hands are feeble. He says, my knees buckle. I can't rise and take a stand. He says, my eyes are blind.
You know, the hockey game was interesting because it filled your eyes with all sorts of fantasies of one kind and another, brilliantly displayed.
And yet, it all only covered up a reality which nobody wanted to acknowledge. it says, my heart is fearful in unbelief.
And New Year's Eve, when we, you can see how fear is so easy to sell.
[7:56] And our hearts are filled with fear. The same chapter goes on to say, my eyes are blind because I can see what's in front of me, but I can't see what lies behind it and what is the meaning of it.

My ears are deaf so that when people speak to me, I can't appreciate the reality of what they're saying.
And then he says, my tongue can only stammer. And I'm up here to illustrate that to you, what that means.
The inability to articulate the reality of what our hearts perhaps can conceive, but no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceive the things that God has prepared for him.
Our eyes won't take us to it and our ears can't hear it and our hearts cannot imagine it and our tongues stammer when we try to describe it.
[9:11] My legs won't take the leap of faith. And then it says, we must recognize that we live in a desert of depression and discouragement.

We are held ransom for a price we can't pay. We face ruin from which we most need to be redeemed.
We wander aimlessly through the wilderness of our days and our times are past in sorrow and sighing.
But you see, the magnificent reality of Isaiah 35 is that it portrays so eloquently our weakness.
And it tells us very clearly that in that weakness, God is able to demonstrate his power.
[10:32] If you live in the world which is governed by the star system and you aspire to be one of them, you may clearly not expect to see the hand of God at work in your life.

When you come to the place where you can acknowledge your own, the central reality of your own weakness and your own vulnerability, humility, when you can acknowledge that, then in a sense you are wide open to let God work in your life.
One of the dangers of coming to St. John's church is that we have many people and many people of great distinction and strong and powerful and influential people.
And we have wonderful music and all sorts of strong things. But it's so important that we have the children's focus because they are weak by comparison and God can bless us through them.
and God can work through them because they are among the weak. But of course there are many very vulnerable and weak people in the congregation who in the society and culture to which we belong would never under any circumstances confess to the reality of the weakness that is at the center of their lives would be would be defeated by their weakness being shown on their faiths.
[12:33] The the so you see that's that's what Isaiah does in chapter 35 he he tells us about feeble hands and deaf ears and blind eyes and fearful hearts and he said that's the situation in which God can show his splendor and in which you can see the glory of God but when you're in competition with God to do better than God could do in your own life and when we in our culture in our civilization know better how to do it then God can do it then we deny ourselves the reality of the living God at work in our world and in our lives and in our congregation because we are so totally self-sufficient and there is no place for God to demonstrate his power

Isaiah then starts to talk about he says you know Lebanon the hills of Lebanon the cedars of Lebanon the great mountains that are magnificent this desert will become like them and he said and you know you know Sharon and you know these places which are filled with the glory of God in the natural beauty of them but what they do for us is they demonstrate to us the glory and the splendor of our God infinitely more than anything we could begin to comprehend with our little lives and with our blind eyes and deaf ears and failing hearts so so Isaiah goes on and he gives these powerful pictures to us he said what you've got to do is go into the middle of a desert the burning sand the heat coming down absolutely without water and without growth and without the possibility of survival if you stay there too long and in the midst of that desert there will bloom a rose and burst

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into bloom all the flowers of the desert because God in his grace will move into that desert place and give water and water will create the miracle by which the blooms break forth and this will become a land which for all its absolute destitution will greatly rejoice and shout for joy and and here fearful hearts will become strong and God will bring into the midst of the situation his justice which is made up of vengeance which is made up of revenge and which is retribution and is made up of salvation and in the midst of our lives we discover the glory and the splendor of our God in the midst of that apparent destitution you see and then it says through the tangled wilderness of our lives within a culture that has lost its way and at a time when we are without vision and we don't know where we are or where we're going into that tangled wilderness of scorching desert surrounded by the abandoned wreckage of a thousand civilizations as we are when we come into that place we find in the midst of it that there is a highway which carries us right through all of that to the destination to which we aspire and to which
God has called us and that's what it talks about in Isaiah 35 this this highway and it is a highway in which sorrow and sighing will flee away sorrow and sighing are the very well they're the warp and woof of our lives that we live in sorrow and sighing and you see what will happen is that there may be occasion for sorrow and sighing but in that very occasion of sorrow and sighing there will be that activity of God's grace and mercy which will be as a rose blooming in the desert as a great spring of water coming up in the most desolate of places when you meet when you come to the most desolate place in your life you find the resources which God makes available to you in order to demonstrate his will and his love and his grace and his power and so sorrow and sighing flee away as you are caught up in the reality and the necessity of worshipping
God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and we live in this tangled wilderness and in and through this tangled wilderness there is a highway and the title of this sermon is the reformation highway we now reform our lives not build around our aspirations to be one of the three stars but built around the reality of our weakness which allows our God in his grace and mercy to work amongst us and to accomplish in us that which is his purpose he takes the layer of jackals that's what it says jackals moved in wherever a city was deserted a project was and and
God God moves into that place the place of jackals and and and he makes it he may he brings redemption and he brings the ransom because we are caught up we are prisoners of the culture we belong to and we are blinded by it and we are made deaf by it and we are enfeebled to try and cope with it and God moves in on that and and asks us to allow him to work in our weakness to fulfill his purpose and to demand and so that we may see his glory and that we may be as it says on this highway we may be overtaken by gladness and joy you see the human aspiration to which we are committed to live our lives in the pursuit of happiness the good news of
[21:00] Isaiah 35 is to tell you that happiness is in pursuit of you and wants to overtake you as you flee away from God's purpose and God's design and God's order for your life he wants to create a highway and on into which you come and on that highway you are to be overtaken by gladness and joy and that's that's what this this chapter is about I I want to leave it with you but I I I think that this chapter is I mean I I can't speak too highly about it because I think it's like it's like a gospel atomic bomb if you know what I mean the the the the atomic bomb reigned death and destruction but this this gospel atomic bomb which is contained in Isaiah 35 the the the outpouring of that in countless civilizations in history in countless lives has brought enormous blessing and a demonstration of the of the power and purpose and majesty and splendor of God into a hundred into a into every civilization and every culture it's this chapter which in part was the inspiration for

Handel's Messiah for Brahms Requiem for it because it gives us such an immense vision of the meaning of our lives as God works in the areas of our weakness to accomplish his purpose you know that Jesus Christ came in weakness among us the catechism tells you that Jesus Christ came in weakness in order that God might demonstrate his power in raising him from the dead and you and I who are the disciples of Jesus Christ are to glory in our weakness in order that God might demonstrate his power in our lives but we're so often ensnared by trying to prove our great strength and understanding and wisdom and power and all that we can do and in a sense we cripple
God from doing what it is his purpose to do in our lives so that that that comes in there and if you go if you go through the chapter again in the light of of Jesus Christ and you say a highway will be there do you know what it says about the highway this is a great encouragement to me that even fools can't lose their way on this highway that you'll never get trapped in the exit lane that that that this highway will take you to the destination for which for which you long but it's it's reforming it's a

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reforming highway in the sense that your life is to be built not around your strengths and your achievements and your star performances but your life is to be built around your weakness freely confessed so that
God is able to prove his splendor and his glory and his strength in the circumstances of your life and in the circumstances of our life as a congregation what a challenge that is that just let me give one last picture the ransomed of the Lord he ransomed us will return and they will enter Zion with singing and everlasting joy will crown their heads the joy that God will and must inevitably conquer and God's purpose in in in our hearts and in our world is to be fulfilled there is in the chapter one strong statement with which
I conclude be strong in your weakness do not fear your God will come Amen of.
[27:07] you you you you

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