

# ReFormation Highway 8am

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The title, I should tell you that in the middle of the week, one of the secretaries in the office phones and says, what's the title for your sermon?

And, you know, I mean, it hasn't emerged for as far as I do, so you have to pull it out quick. So I was deeply involved in the information highway, and then in this passage there's a strong reference to a highway, so I wanted to call it the not information highway and not reformation highway, but the reformation highway.

And I want to talk to you about that. And I thought what I want to suggest to you, I mean, I think this passage is, this passage of Isaiah 35, the whole of it, is the equivalent in strength to an atomic bomb.

And the fallout from it has spread right across every culture in the world, every civilization since it was written, and it's had an enormous impact.

One among other things, it had an enormous impact on the Messiah. The, who wrote the Messiah?

[ 1 : 33 ] Tell me quickly. Anyway, it's had an enormous impact, and I would like it to have on our lives and on this parish an enormous impact in terms of reforming our lives, because our lives constantly need to be reformed.

That's the necessity which we need to do. Now, basically what I think the passage says is this, that you are to go to the place of the most profound weakness in your life and openly acknowledge it.

That's the secret of reformation, to go to the place of profound weakness in your life and acknowledge it before God.

And the great privilege that is yours and mine in coming to this service this morning is that we are invited to not boast our strengths, but to acknowledge our weakness.

Now, an event took place in my life this week which helped me to understand this enormously. Fran and I went out to dinner, and then after dinner, the two men who were myself and one other, we went to the hockey game and saw the Canucks nobly tie the, whatever it is, the Tampa, Florida, Lightnings.

[ 3 : 21 ] And, I mean, it was full of glitz and glamour and hype and noise and great excitement, and three stars were appointed at the end, and it was a magnificent sort of panorama of these great and mighty millionaires who play hockey for us.

And they, it was a wonderful thing. Fran went to a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a, a reading that was being given as a kind of, a demonstration.

Well, it was a, it was a performance really by a, a, a single person. And it was on behalf of the handicapped artists of Vancouver.

And, uh, she went in Granville market area to this room, and this man stood up to speak.

And because of who it was for, there was a great many very seriously disabled people in the congregation. And, uh, the, the dramatic thing about the whole presentation, which was for Fran very moving, and for me very moving to hear about it, was that the, the man's whole face had been attacked by cancer and then by radiation, so that he was terribly distorted, and his whole lower lip was, was gone.

[ 5 : 02 ] And he stood and talked to those people in the most humorous and wonderful way imaginable. And he said, the great advantage I have is that my weakness is not hidden. It's right in front of me and right in front of you. Now, uh, we learn in our society to hide our weakness in whatever way we can.

you know, the, uh, we, uh, so that we, we may appear to be one of the three stars, one of the, one of the able and capable and dominant ones.

But, uh, this man said something that, that was just, that made, made you almost envious of his situation because he had to so clearly acknowledge the thing that was the sort of weak point of his life and that was the terrible disfiguring of his face as he stood before people.

His weakness was very apparent. Well, the reason I, I mention this in connection with Isaiah chapter 35 is because chapter 35 talks about feeble hands, knees that buckle, hearts that are fearful, eyes that are blind, ears that are deaf, tongues that can only stammer, and legs that won't take any leap of faith.

[ 6 : 42 ] Uh, it goes on figuratively, I think, to present the reality of depression and discouragement in our lives.

It acknowledges that we are held captive and need to be ransomed. Um, and the, the, the kind of, the ruination of our life needs to be redeemed and that our life generally is marked by sorrow and sighing.

Now, you may think that that's, uh, that's the kind of weakness that you don't want to acknowledge, but is wonderfully acknowledged in Isaiah 35.

Those are the signs of weakness. And I might say to you because, uh, that, uh, if you look through it carefully, you will discover something that, uh, I mean, I was looking at it and thinking, feeble hands, uh, buckled knees, fearful heart, blind eyes, deaf ears, tongues that stammer, legs that won't, won't leap, depression, discouragement.

Um, if you haven't experienced those in your life so far, you will. Because, uh, those are, for the most part, signs of our age, aging.

[ 8 : 29 ] You know, when your eyes no longer see and your ears no longer hear and your hands can no longer do what once they did and your legs no longer give you the support they once did and this whole process goes on so that there is available to all of us in the course of this life, uh, the reality of experiencing this weakness.

But what is it that you're to do with it? Well, that's, that's the, the key of, of Isaiah chapter 35, uh, when it tells us that, that our life is to be a celebration in a sense of our weakness.

Now, the reason that it's the celebration of our weakness is this. Isaiah is the man of his times as well as the man of all time and speaks as clearly to us here this morning as he did in his own time and as he has done in all the centuries in between.

Uh, he's spoken because what was happening was that the king of, of Judah had two enemies that were allied against him and were in preparation for attacking him and, uh, he was badly frightened by them so in order to, uh, not be subject to them, he went and made a covenant or contract or alliance with, uh, with the Assyrians, Tiglath-Pileser, the great Assyrian emperor, and in order to do that, he emptied the treasuries of his kingdom, he emptied the treasuries of his, of the temple, uh, and he, he, in a sense, put himself in the place of dependence upon Assyria to defend him from his enemies.

He would find his strength in it, and Isaiah was saying to him, your strength is in the Lord in whom you believe, it is not in the emperor of Assyria.

[ 10 : 50 ] And, uh, that's where we are, that's why I think this chapter is so helpful, because it tells us where our strength is. We try and find our strength in the wrong place, and if we will acknowledge our weakness, then God is able to operate in our circumstances and to bring about his purposes in our lives.

What I, what I, uh, uh, want you to, to, to see is this, what, that, you know, that, that we try and create the image of strength all the time.

Our world demands that we create the image of strength. We try and do it in every, in every circumstance of our life to create this, as the king did. He said, well, I'm safe.

I have the king of Assyria on my side. But, the result of having the king of Assyria on his side was that he brought the idols and the gods of Assyria into the temple in Jerusalem.

And he allowed his people to be, uh, in sort of invaded by the Assyrians and their friendship and the strength that they gave to him was at terrible cost.

[ 12 : 23 ] He bankrupted the whole of his country in order to have this strength, as he supposed. and we go to find the wrong sources of strength.

And so, it's with that in mind that you read Isaiah 35. And, uh, and when you read it, uh, you, you'll, you'll, you'll have, you'll see this.

And I just want to put it for you. Um, the, uh, it's, it says that when you acknowledge that your hands are feeble, you put yourself in the hands of Jesus Christ.

When you acknowledge that your knees buckle, he lifts you up and enables you to stand and to take a stand.

When you acknowledge your heart is fearful, he is able to replace that fear with faith.

[ 13 : 34 ] When you acknowledge that your eyes are blind and you can't see it or understand it, he opens your eyes to see his glory. When you acknowledge that your ears are deaf and you can't hear what's going on, uh, I mean, I, I experience deafness every morning when I read The Vancouver Sun.

I can't for the life of me hear what's going on as I read those pages. It's too confusing. When I, when I acknowledge that my tongue can only stammer, and I'm demonstrating that to you now, because the, the subject that I want to talk about and the capacity I have to talk about it are miles apart, I, I, I, I sense what it is to stammer that, and yet he puts into the clear, if you, if you can grasp the clear understanding of the word of God, then, then, uh, he, Christ enables you to do that.

Uh, he helps you to take the leap of faith which your own strength can't do. he helps you to live in the desert of depression and to find there the blooming of the rose.

You know, I mean, uh, that's, that's what it, what it says. He, he, he pays the ransom for you that is held against you.

He, he redeems you and he allows that, that, that your days will be, uh, not passed in sorrow and sighing, that that, that will itself be gone.

[ 15 : 25 ] So that you have this powerful picture of your weakness on the one hand acknowledged and God's power on the other hand saying, a desert bursting into bloom, a land rejoicing with shouts for joy, fearful hearts becoming strong, God bringing justice and vengeance and retribution and salvation.

Uh, in the midst of our lives we discover the glory of the Lord and the, and the splendor of our God and, uh, the, because he is the way.

And then you see the final great picture in the passage is the picture of the highway. And what it means I think is that, that we who are, are, are, in a sense caught in the wilderness, in the, in the jungle of the stress and strain of our lives, caught in the position where we can't seem to make any headway, we come to, we suddenly come to a highway and the highway opens before us and the highway carries us certainly towards the destination that we want to go to.

And it says about that highway that, uh, there won't, it won't be a matter of living in dread, but you will live in confidence and joy and as you travel on that highway you join with a great company of people and that great company of people that are traveling with you along that highway are singing and praising and giving thanks to God with great rejoicing and it says that sorrow and sighing will be no more and he said you will each be crowned with a crown of gladness and joy.

So, it's, it's such a, a, a profound picture of acknowledging before the Lord our terrible weakness and finding in the Lord our awesome strength.

[ 17 : 41 ] Finding, as it were, our way is, is through, uh, an undergrowth, a massive undergrowth, a wilderness that is impenetrable and finding that that is broken through by God who opens up for us a highway because of our dependence upon him.

You see, King Ahaz of Judah didn't depend upon him and came to a very unhappy end. And we are called upon by Isaiah to learn to depend upon him and to depend upon him in the particular way of, of, of, acknowledging our weakness.

Um, you, you see, the, the whole of our Christian life comes out of that. It's, um, it's the place where God can demonstrate his presence and his activity.

When you are brought into a place of weakness and you acknowledge that weakness, then God can act and demonstrate his power. And we don't, I mean, when the catechism talks about Jesus coming to this earth, talks about him coming in weakness and experiencing all the weakness of our humanity, even to the point of giving his life up to the political and, and, tyrannical powers of his time, he was weak before them and many people are disdainful of Jesus because of his weakness.

But what we're taught is in the acknowledgement of our weakness, God is able to demonstrate his strength. And if we, like King Ahaz, must project an image of strength all the time, must seek to be one of the three stars, others, then God's power is not and cannot work in our lives.

[ 19 : 52 ] It's only when we acknowledge our weakness that God can bring the rose to the desert, bring the water to the dry places and to the parched land, create a highway for us, and leave us with the words which he gives in order that we might obey them.

The words which say, be strong, do not fear, your God will come and he will come with vengeance, with divine retribution, he will come to save you.

We are told in the confession and admission of our weakness that we are to be strong and we are in faith in acknowledging that weakness and hearing that call to be strong in our faith in God.

We are asked to reform the whole of our lives and to take our place on the, our life, to take it, take our place on the reformation highway.

Amen. Amen.