

# He Will Change Your Wilderness

sermonaudio.com

*Isaiah*

By Scott T. Brown

**Bible Text:** Isaiah 35:1-7

**Preached on:** Sunday, October 19, 2014

## **Hope Baptist Church**

3721 Quarry Road

Wake Forest, NC 27587

**Website:** [www.hopebaptistchurch.info](http://www.hopebaptistchurch.info)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/hopebaptistnc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/hopebaptistnc)

Good morning. Our text for this morning is Isaiah 35, we'll read through the entire chapter.

1 The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; 2 It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, Even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, The excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, The excellency of our God. 3 Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. 4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. 7 The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, There shall be grass with reeds and rushes. 8 A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. 9 No lion shall be there, Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, 10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you for these glorious words that you have given unto your people and to us today. Oh, may we have hearts to hear it. May we hold onto the hope of this precious text to remind us of the glory of the highway of holiness that you have made for us. While we rejoice in you today, Lord, speak through your servant Scott as he speaks unto us your word, your instruction. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Isaiah 35 teaches us how it is that God transforms his people and turns their wasteland into a garden and, of course, it's a picture of God's redeeming his people in the ways that he displays the glories of his grace. Isaiah has spoken to us about the beauty of the Lord and how his people are transformed by his beauty. That behold the beauty of the Lord and as a result they are healed and this whole discussion continues, Isaiah can't quit talking about it. He'll speak about the judgment of God and how devastating it is to not behold the beauty of the Lord and then he always has to turn back again to the glory and the beauty of salvation.

In this section here in chapter 35 which we're only going to go up to verse 7 today, we'll finish up verses 8 through 10 next week, but in this passage, there is a picture of God redeeming his people and really showing the usefulness of his church. The church really becomes a spectacle in the world, an aberration, something totally different with streams in the desert, with blossoming in places where you just don't expect it to happen at all. You know, when you're in a desert and you see an oasis, it catches your eye and that's the idea that the people of God are like an oasis. They are a spectacle, a demonstration like the spotlight is on them and look at what is happening to them in the midst of this desert. The Apostle Paul makes this point really clear in the book of Ephesians when he said that the salvation of the Gentiles was for that very purpose, to show, just to show to the powers and the principalities how good God is. He says that this all happened, this rescuing of these despicable, profane Gentiles, it happened for a really great reason and that is to make a scene to the intent, this is Ephesians 3:10, to the intent that now "the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Jesus Christ our Lord." What Paul is saying is that God saves a people because he wants to demonstrate how good he is to the powers and the principalities. Picture them now, they are gnashing their teeth. They see the love of the brethren. Oh yeah, they saw you today. They saw you greeting your brothers and sisters kindly. They saw that. They are gnashing their teeth because the church is on display to the powers and the principalities that are there. Not only that, of course, to the whole world as well.

But here you have this scene of streams in the desert, of blossoming, it's a picture of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and how he has divided his people and he is come and he has saved the Gentiles. He has marked out his own territory and his territory is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what is he doing in his church? He is beautifying them. He is watering them. He is making them glad and it takes time to make them glad. It's true, we'll see this in the text and it's really a progressive part of salvation. But here are the beautifying effects of the love of God and what God is doing in his church. You know, when you joined the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, you probably didn't know exactly what you were getting into. You just wanted to follow Jesus, didn't you? But there is a lot more to it than that and one of those things is mentioned here and this whole beautification process, this happifying work of God among his people.

I have identified 4 things here that happen to God's people. If you're a new Christian here today, what can you expect? Here's what you can expect right here. First of all, he'll turn your wilderness into a garden and the first element here in verses 1 and 2 speak of that,

that as you behold the glory of the Lord, he takes the desert of your life that was always your life and he changes it.

Secondly, he'll put you to work to help the weak. That's in verses 3 and 4. God's people will strengthen one another. God commands his people to do something with one another and that is to speak to one another about probably the most prominent problem in their lives: their fears. You know, it's interesting, I have talked to a lot of people in our church who have had fears just over the last couple of weeks and I think all of us are grappling with fear at one level or another, but it seems like there is kind of a rash of fear going on. I have had rashes of fear in my own life, waking up in cold sweats in the night, but here God is telling us that one of the elements of life in the church, this spectacle before the powers and principalities, is that there are people out there and they are saying to one another, "Don't fear." That's what they do. This is what the church is supposed to do to each other, to help one another. It must really rankle the evil powers and principalities that the people of God are running around encouraging one another not to fear. What a great thing.

Thirdly, there is the power of God at work that God is healing your life. He's restoring your senses. The lame, the blind, the deaf, he is making you alive like never before and I think this is a progressive thing that happens. It is finally fulfilled in heaven.

Then finally he pours out his Spirit with these streams in the desert in verses 6 and 7.

So this chapter is in sharp contrast to the previous chapter where it was just nothing but desert so Isaiah is speaking of these 2 states: he's speaking of light and darkness. He is talking about desert and garden. He's talking about sheep and goats, what God does with his people, and he is making this great, great contrast.

Now, we're about half way through Isaiah now, right? We just crossed the halfway point last week and I just want to remind us of where we are in Isaiah. There is an outline on the back of your outline here that gives you the flow of Isaiah. I'd just like for us to quickly sort of get our wits about us about what Isaiah is saying. It's easy to get lost in the moment in a tiny 7 verses like we're in right now but we want to see the whole flow here for just a few minutes about what Isaiah is doing.

Isaiah begins with the church. It's about God's judgment in the church. The first 12 chapters really say judgment begins in the house of the Lord and chapter 12 speaks about just the beneficial quality of that judgment. When God judges his people, they repent, they turn to him and marvelous things happen. That's chapter 12.

Then in chapters 13 through 23 after Isaiah speaks of God's judgment toward his people because judgment does begin in the house of the Lord, he speaks of his judgment against the nations and how in chapters 13 through 23, he speaks about how God judges the nations the same way that he judges his people. He doesn't use a different law code for the nations than he does for his people. There is only one law code and there is only one legitimate one.

Then thirdly, in chapters 24 through 27, there is judgment against the whole world. You get the progression: the house of God, the nations and then the whole world. So Isaiah is just continuing to explain in greater detail, adding layer upon layer upon how God is dealing with his own people and how he is dealing with the world.

Then he further expands upon this in chapters 28 through 33 where he delivers various woes. There are 6 woes, 5 of them toward his people and then another one toward Edom, but he just goes one after another to explain the different ways that the people of the nations have departed from the Lord and if you read those chapters, you will see what God is pleased with and what he is against and you can learn very much about your own sins and how to flee from the various sins that are listed there because you see what God loves and what he actually hates. It's a very valuable section.

Then in chapters 34 and 35, our summary statements of God's destruction of the wicked and his salvation of the repentant. Last week we were in chapter 34 which spoke about the desert that God will make out of those who reject his ways and you reject God's ways and here's what you get: you get a desert; you get ruins. Instead of a beautiful home, you get a broken down place that has jackals and snakes and pelicans and all kinds of things in it because there is really no vestige of blessing left. You depart from God, you depart from blessing. That was chapter 34.

Now we get the flip side. You turn to God, if you're like those in chapter 34 who come near in chapter 34, verse 1, who hear and who heed in chapter 34, verse 2, if you're like that, then this is what you get. You don't get the desert, you get streams in a desert and a whole different experience. This is a disclosure really of the love of God. It's such a marvelous section here.

So let's begin in verses 1 and 2 where we see this picture of the glory of God that transforms the wilderness. Here we have the secret of all transformation. Isaiah has already talked about it in different ways earlier on but in verse 1 we read, "The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." Now, these first 2 verses actually set forth the heart of the message and that is gladness. You see the word "glad," you see the word "rejoice," you see the word "rejoicing," in verse 2, the word "joy," all these words come from a single Hebrew root word which means, it's something that shows you an image to tell you about what this thing is and it's an image of circling around. Circling around with enthusiasm. You know, when someone gets really good news, people circle around them and they say, "Yes! That was so great! We're so happy for you!" That's the picture here. It's a picture of people circling around and glorying in what has happened.

When does this happen? It happens here and now. This joy, this gladness, it is fulfilled in shadows and types and figures and it happens in Judah as God does things to save his people like as he did when he destroyed the Assyrian army, 185,000 of them in that one night. It is prefigured in the return of the captives in the Babylonian captivity and also in the church, the Lord Jesus Christ; it is fulfilled progressively in the life of the believer.

The members of the true church who are being healed, who are being made happy, who are being delivered from all of their fears, progressively as they turn to God, they find one thing in their lives that needs to be removed and they get happier. They find another one and they get happier again. And they keep multiplying that.

So I think Isaiah is talking about something that happens to Judah figuratively in terms of typology. It happens in the church and then it finally happens in its perfect form in heaven. It will be completely, absolutely, and in an absolute pure form in heaven and I think that's what the Apostle John was talking about in 1 John 3:2. He expresses this whole matter that on earth we see through a glass darkly. Yes, we do receive the blessings of God from heaven but because of our earthly frame and because of the season that we live in, we don't have them in their complete way. We do know that walking with God is true joy. We do have his presence but it's not perfected yet to the degree that it will be and that's why John said in 1 John 3:2, he said, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." This is really a disclosure of the truth that we don't have it all now. We do have enough now, but we will have absolutely all of it in heaven and we will see him as he is. Right now we don't exactly see him as he is. We want to. We wish we could see him more clearly but our sin and our background and all kinds of things get in the way. But here as God is speaking to his people in the days of Isaiah, I think he's speaking to us as well. This is his message to us. This is a picture of us as a people and I think it should work in our hearts sort of as something that is germinating and growing, that we would be saying, "O Lord, give me more of this. Make me more like this."

So here is this prophecy of this renewed creation and the creation has become a wilderness because of sin. Why does life become like the wilderness? Well, the last chapter really tells us about it but the land dries up because of sin. That's exactly what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 23:10, he said, "The land is full of adulterers; For because of a curse the land mourns. The pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up. Their course of life is evil." If you want to dry up your life, turn away from God.

Here you have this picture of beauty and fruit bearing. You know, God didn't create the world just so that the history of the world would end up as the history of a desert, but that it would be a history of fruit bearing, fruit bearing of the Christian life. John spoke of this. He said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." God has designed the life of his people to be a life of fruit bearing. If there is no fruit bearing, there is no life there and that's the normal experience of the Christian. That's why this was the normal expectation of the Apostle Paul and it should be the normal expectation of church shepherds to see fruit. Romans 1:13 says this. Paul says to the Romans that he had often planned to go to Rome. He said, "That I might have some fruit among you also just as among the other Gentiles." So fruit bearing is really the big focus of these first 2 verses here and there is gladness in it.

Now, he gives 6 analogies of this beauty and this fruitfulness in these first 2 verses. There is the blossoming, the singing, Lebanon, Carmel, Sharon and the glory of the Lord and the excellency of God. Those are sort of the images that he gives. Let's take them one by one. First of all, you have this blossoming in verse 2 and there is this abundance of life that Jesus spoke about. "I came that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." It says, "It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, Even with joy and singing," and that's the second image is singing. The blossoming, by the way, is something that continues to blossom. Imagine a flower that just keeps on blossoming, well, that's the kind of flower he's talking about. It's not like the flower in your garden; it's a supernaturally fed flower that continues to blossom over time.

Then there is singing, "Even with joy and singing." This is a picture of a happy people. You know, happy people are a singing people.

Then you have this third image of mighty trees. This is in verse 2, "The glory of Lebanon." He brings us to this image of this stately cedar tree that was characteristic of Lebanon. A strength and majesty were really what these trees represented. They were magnificent cedars. They were symbols of power. I don't know if you've ever been to the redwoods and seeing these gigantic trees in California, just imagine this kind of majesty. It's really a picture of the glory and the strength of God.

Then there is the excellence of Carmel. Carmel, what's Carmel? Carmel and Sharon were known for their fruitfulness but Carmel was known for its beauty and one commentator says that Carmel was known for its well ordered cultivation. Then he speaks of the excellence of Sharon, the beauty in her fertile fields. These 3 metaphors are metaphors of strength and beauty and fruitfulness altogether. The cedars of Lebanon, the mountains of Carmel and the excellence of Sharon.

Then there is the glory of the Lord. This is probably the most significant of them all. Isaiah comes down, after he mentions these shadows and types, then he speaks of something that makes all the difference in the world, the glory of the Lord. "They shall see the glory of the LORD, The excellency of our God." Now Isaiah has gotten down to the chief transforming power in the heart of any Christian and that is the beholding of the glory of the Lord. There isn't anything better you can do for your soul than to behold the glory of the Lord. It's a wonder why we don't do it far, far more, because the glory of the Lord causes so much fruitfulness. And here Isaiah is presenting the glory of the Lord as the chief transforming agent in the life of his people and people behold the glory of the Lord and they are beautified by that glory. Isaiah used this word previously in the last chapter and it's the word "kavod." It means "heavy; heavy with riches." A rich man was heavy with gold and jewels. He was heavy. He was heavy in his possessions, that's the idea and it's the same word in Isaiah 6, "Holy, holy, holy, kavod, kavod, kavod. Holy is the Lord of hosts." He is heavy. He is rich and it is the riches of God, the riches of his glory that when the believer gazes upon it, he is changed and these things happen. He becomes glad. He is being transformed by the glory of God.

He speaks of the excellency of our God. The excellency of our God. You know, if you're a young child, spend the rest of the day going around saying, "Excellency. Excellency." The excellency of our God. He is so excellent. He is so marvelous and this is the picture that he is giving here. Now, this idea of the excellency is the same idea that John spoke of when he said, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten Son of God." And this is the glory of God that makes all these things happen.

Here's an application for us right here. You know, what is the most important occupation of this church? It's the glory of Jesus Christ. Do you know what? There is really no hope for this church unless the glory of Jesus Christ is at the very center of everything. Oh, by the way, there is no hope for your family either unless the glory of Jesus Christ, his beauty, his truth, his love, if that's not the center of your family or your own heart, there is really no hope of what he is speaking of here. In fact, you can't have it. You cannot have the joy that you see here in this desert rejoicing and blossoming without the glory of God. You know, as we gather together, there is really no more important subject than the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every single doctrine runs down a river that is connected to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and there is nothing better that we can do than to fix our eyes on the head of the church. Jesus Christ is the head of the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead and that in all things he may have the preeminence. That's Colossians 1:18, that he would have the preeminence among us. That really should be our prayer. What's your prayer for our church? Well, here's what our prayer ought to be: that Jesus Christ and his glory would be the center of everything we do and say and hope for in this church. All other hopes really don't get it.

So we are the people of God. We are on display rejoicing and blossoming with joy and singing and then we also see in verses 3 and 4 that the people of God also are not just singing, they are not just happy, they're also talking. They are saying stuff. That's verses 3 and 5, and the people of God are strengthening one another. He says, "Strengthen the weak hands." These are commands. These are imperatives. "Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.'" So these are commands for the people of God, for those glad. You're not just glad for yourself, you want to spread it out; you want to spread it through the church. This passage is quoted in Hebrews 12. We know it absolutely connects with the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the work that exists in the New Testament church and so these are imperatives without subjects just like in Isaiah 4:1, "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!"

This is a picture of God's design for the church and the kind of relationships that we should have with one another and he is directing his church to do something with one another when you have trials and sorrows. We have sorrows. We have sadness and God has given us one another to speak to one another in the midst of our sorrows. That means that when we have sorrows, we probably should tell our brothers about it so that our brothers can talk to us because a lot of time we need a talking to when we are fearful hearted. I don't know how many times that's happened in your life when you've been fearful hearted and somebody has talked to you about it, well, it should be common. God

assumes here in this passage that in his church people would become fearful hearted. There are going to be like the people of Judah. They are going to see Sennacherib coming over the hill with 185,000 troops and they are going to be shaking in their boots just like everybody was when that happened. There is always somebody coming over the hill, pretty much. If you don't see them coming over the hill, they are on the back side of the hill and they're coming and so you're going to face times of fear. This is an assumption that the people of God are going to be afraid sometimes.

So he says that we should strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Hebrews 12:12 quotes this where the author of Hebrews is talking about that you have not resisted unto death and that it's right to persevere and it is applied to the New Testament believer. But there are 2 specific members of the body that Isaiah mentions: their hands and their knees. These are both figurative. The physical part of the body here is affected by the spiritual part, that's the idea. That what's going on on the inside regarding fear actually affects your outward life and everybody knows that, but it is said here very clearly. He says, first of all, strengthen the weak hands. He's speaking to a people who are feeling their weakness. Their hands and their knees had been impacted by their fear and the strength has drained out of them and the condition of having hands that sink down implies that there is something going on in them that is making their hands go still. You know, when you're full of fear, you're sort of paralyzed. You are either paralyzed or you're just so discouraged that you don't want to lift up your hands and that's the picture that we have here. That's going to happen in the church of Jesus Christ because as God is sanctifying his people, he is delivering them from all of their fears over time and we have so many fears, but we lose strength and we become overwhelmed and that's why he says strengthen the weak hands and he means to repair them through support and through encouragement because the hands droop down when you are disheartened. You let them drop. Proverbs 18:9 uses the same word, "For he who is slack in his work, is brother to him who destroys." Do you see how bad fear is? It makes you slack in your work or at least that's the basic idea. Of course, in Proverbs it's about a wicked person. Here the person's hands droop because of fear. In Proverbs 24:10, he speaks of getting disheartened in the day of adversity. He says, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small."

So I really love what Matthew Henry said about this. He said, "Among true Christians, there may be many that have weak hands and feeble knees that are yet but babes in Christ but it is our duty to strengthen our brethren. Not only to bear with the weak but to do what we can to confirm them. It is our duty to strengthen ourselves, to lift up the hands which hang down, improving the strength God has given us and exerting it." Here, I think you see another of the many, many pictures of the kindness of the Lord, of what a tender shepherd he is, how he helps the weak. How Jesus Christ comes to the weak and the fearful in his church and he instructs his people to pay attention to them and to have mercy and to strengthen their hands.

Then then he says to make them firm, to make firm. This word is used for courage and courageous and heartening. Sort of harden one another, not in a negative way, but make

one another harder against the impulses to fear. You know, hard in the sense of not being so easily penetrated by fear.

Then he speaks of the feeble knees and he's talking about tottering and staggering and being weak and stumbling and easily overthrown. You know, when you're fearful, you're easily overthrown. We saw that with Peter. He became fearful and what did he do? He sank. That's what happens. But he uses the imagery of feeble knees here.

Then in verse 4 are some of the most remarkable words I think for the church of Jesus Christ. He says, "Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.'" So you should memorize that because this is what you're supposed to say to the fearful hearted. You know, you're always going to bump into fearful hearted people in the church. It's going to happen and he's saying, "You should say to the fearful hearted."

I've been thinking about this verse over and over again all week long and I've had many moments where I realized that I was going to stand up on Sunday morning and I was going to say this very thing to the church, I was going to say to the fearful hearted, "Don't be afraid." That's my job today. Right now. So I'm going to say to the fearful hearted. Anybody fearful hearted? I'm going to say it right now, "Do not be afraid." What a blessing God is to bring his word and my prayer has been that the Lord by his Spirit would light up those words and that he would penetrate every fearful heart like a laser beam and he would go in and do surgery and deliver from fears. That's been my prayer all week long, that God would send this congregation out totally fearless if it would be his will to do that. To exit these doors without any fears, with your heads lifted up, happy that God reigns, that you are beholding your God just like we are commanded to say. When somebody is fearful, how do you help them? You say, "Behold your God." That's the big issue. Their vision of God has been clouded. That's why we become fearful, pretty much. Now, it's a little bit more new nuanced than that, we'll get to that in a minute, but we are supposed to say something to our brothers.

Fearful hearted, what's that all about? It's the Hebrew word for hasty and he's using a word for the condition of our hearts that change quickly. We quickly move to fear. We hear something, we see something and we quickly move to fear rather than be patient and we're just too quick to move to fear. We're terrified too easily. Just like in Pilgrim's Progress, remember there were these lions that were threatening along the pathway and a lot of people were afraid but they were chained. They were chained up. We're too quickly moving out of the roadway because we hear or see something. This is the whole idea of hasty. John Gill says it like this, "Hasty in drawing black conclusions upon their selves and their state." You might be hasty and drawing black conclusions even about your own life as the devil is your accuser who hates your soul, who would love nothing more than you to be in the black depths of darkness. That's where he wants to keep you forever, but that's not where the Lord wants to keep you. He wants you here. He wants you here in this garden of Isaiah 35. But that's why you say, "Behold your God," because that is normally the heart of the matter. You have forgotten about God. You have forgotten about his sovereignty.

Remember that story of Katy Luther. She came to breakfast one morning to serve her husband breakfast and she came in a funeral gown and she had a black veil over herself and he said, "Who died?" She said, "God must have died. The way you're acting, God must have died. Is God dead? Don't you believe in God anymore?" because he was so depressed and discouraged because of the troubles that he was in. He had such a good sweet wife to dress in a funeral garment in order to teach him that God was not dead. How stupid was that? Now, every once in a while, you need your wife to tell you how stupid you are and I've been very grateful for a wife like that because something happens and you get so hasty to go to the black conclusion. No! No, God is in control. No, God is going to sum up everything in Christ. No, God is putting to death the works of the devil. No, God has destroyed your greatest enemy, death.

People everywhere are so afraid of some virus. They are afraid of Ebola or something like that which, really, it only has like a 70% death rate, give or take, depending on what strain you have. But guess what? Original sin has a 100% death rate for all of its victims. There is something far, far worse. Everyone is running around talking about Ebola, well, I'll be grateful if it stops but let me tell you this: there is something far, far, far worse a foot in the world and that is sin and the heart that does not behold its God and see the beauty of the Lord that is spoken of here.

There are 4 things that we say. We say, "Be strong." You're counseling someone who is in fear. Here's what you do, you tell them to be strong. In other words, do the things that make you strong. Stop doing the things that make you weak. Stop thinking the things that make you weak and be strong. Start doing the things that make you strong because you become weakened. Secondly, do not fear. In other words, don't nurse your fears. Quit obsessing about those things that I've made you fearful. Thirdly, behold your God will come with a vengeance. In other words, remember who is in control. God will come with a vengeance, with the recompense of God. God is absolutely going to vanquish everything that is not good that is related to your life. That's the truth and he will bring you through trials in order to deliver you from this world. But recognize that your God will come with vengeance. He will absolutely destroyed every bad thing impinging upon your life. That's a promise. The fourth thing is, the fourth thing you should say is, "He will come and save you." He will come and save you. The one who is in control is the one who is going to come and save you. So you should be happy. Say to those who are fearful hearted: be strong; do not fear; behold your God; and he will come and save you.

So that's how you minister to the fearful hearted. That's one way. Do you know what the number 1 command in the Bible is? The command that is spoken more? It's not about sexual immorality. No, the highest number of times that a command is issued is on this matter: do not fear. How about that? It kind of makes sense, doesn't it, for a church like ours. Fear weakens and it makes you unproductive. Is there a lack of productivity in your life because of fear in your heart? Maybe your employer doesn't know what's really restraining your productivity because your hands are hanging down because of your fears and in one way you might even be defrauding your employer because you're letting your fears overcome you. Or what about, maybe you're a father and you just don't have the

energy, you lack the joy because of fear and you're not discipling your children, you're not inspiring your wife, you're not helping your wife with her troubles and her fears and her sorrows because your hands are down there because maybe you haven't heard these things that you are supposed to hear: be strong, do the things that make you strong; don't fear, don't nurse your fears; and behold your God.

Is it always sinful to fear? No, it's not always sinful to fear. Most of our fears come from a sinful meditation on our troubles but the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father have spoken that we should fear him. We should fear God. It's not a servile fear but the Lord Jesus Christ did also say, "Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me." The Apostle Paul said that you should cast your cares upon him for he cares for you. Jesus Christ said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." There are so many reasons not to fear but we find people, our greatest heroes, had fears. Joshua and Abraham and David and Elijah, Jeremiah, had fears.

It was recommended to me to read Richard Baxter's "Directions Against Sinful Fear," so I did. I recommend it to you. "Directions Against Sinful Fear." Richard Baxter says that, first of all, fear is a necessary passion in man which is planted in nature for the restraining of us from sin and driving us on to duty and preventing misery. So he says there is a kind of fear that is helpful. It moves, because sometimes things are about us that we need to do something about. We need to change direction and often fear comes up in your heart and you need to do something different. Has that ever happened to you? Of course it has happened to you. You know, the wise man sees danger and delivers himself. There is a certain kind of fear that really is legitimate. I don't think we should say it's always sinful to fear but when it comes from unbelief or distrust or when it comes from exalting the powers of men or creatures without remembering that they are dependent on God, then it is simple fear. That's what Richard Baxter says.

Then Richard Baxter, of course, would give a long list. Now, my daughter asked me this morning if I was going to give a long list about anything. She said like maybe 6 or 7. I said no. I said I have 15 things from Richard Baxter. Are you ready? Okay. Richard Baxter's counsel for those who struggle with fear. I'm going to go fast. I'll email them to you later if you want me to but you can read this, it's not very long, by Richard Baxter.

First, remember the freeness of the Gospel. Remember how free the Gospel is when you're afraid. Remember that God is abundantly pouring out his grace toward sinners. Remember that when you're afraid.

Secondly, involve yourself in the praise of God. He says, "For love expelleth tormenting fear." Love expels tormenting fear. Meditate on the love of God.

Number 3, know the goodness of God, his mercy. It will banish sinful fears is what he says.

Number 4, he says it again, concentrate on the love of God. He says, "Employ yourselves as much as possible in love and praise."

Fifth, remember that the devil is not free. Remember that the devil is not free. He is chained.

Number 6, remember your conversion. He saved you from 1000 calamities.

Number 7, remember how dishonorable it is to distrust God.

Number 8, renounce your fear of man. I love this, he says, "For he is a bubble raised by Providence to toss about the world and for God to honor himself by or upon." The fear of man, he says, he's just a bubble. He's a bubble raised up by God and God is going to pop his bubble. That's the idea.

Ninth, remember that the Lord has overcome the world. Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," that is John 16:33.

Number 10, sufferings, remember this, sufferings are ordinary for all who are on their way to heaven.

Number 11, remember how small the suffering is compared to the glory. There he says it is short suffering. It doesn't last very long but how long and great and glorious is your reward in heaven. He says, "It is but a little while and the pain and shame will all be passed, but the glory will never be passed." How about that? You know, you might have shame or trouble, but it will go away because God is going to take care of it for all of eternity.

Number 12, remember how little your suffering is compared to the greatness of your sin. Remember how little your suffering is compared to the greatness of your sin. He said, "Should a man grudge at the opening of a vein for his health who deserved to have lost his life?" You know, we deserve to have lost everything by our sin but we didn't receive the punishment from that. God was so merciful so he says, "Remember how little your suffering is compared to the greatness of your sin."

Number 13, remember how disastrous it is to fear. You can think of some of the disastrous things that have taken place because of fear. Remember, Peter denied the Lord 3 times. Fear is often the way of apostasy.

Number 14, remember the dangers you have been saved from already.

Did I say 15? I only gave you 14. There are way more than 15 in Richard Baxter's work, I just picked out a few.

So what do we do? I think here in this passage is a wonderful help for all of us so that we can counsel one another properly when we are in our fears because we're going to have fears. Here's what we shouldn't say. "If you're fearful you're not a Christian." We don't

want to say that. "If you're totally obsessed with your fears and you never let God relieve you of your fears, you might not be a Christian." How about that?

But fears are normal, but here I think there are 3 words here in this text that are so helpful: he will come. He will come, those three words. He will come and save you. I think those are some of the most encouraging words in the English language for fearful hearts and that means that the sun will come out again; that God does desire to deliver from fear. Behold your God and he will come and save you. This is the sovereignty of God. I was with our interns a couple of days ago at a conference and one of the speakers there, I think it was Stephen Lawson, I think he said, "No matter how sovereign you believe God to be, he's more sovereign than that." He was talking about just the authority of Jesus Christ. He said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." All authority. However sovereign you think God is, he is way, way more sovereign than that. In fact, you're going to get to heaven and you're going to find out he was far, far more sovereign than you thought he was at the pinnacle of your maturity in your Christian life. I think we are going to discover we had no idea just how sovereign he is and was in everything. So we often so underestimate God in his power and it's so much easier to wallow than it is to wait on him. It's so much easier to languish than to look into his word for help. It's so much easier to regret and let your hands just hang dong rather than to read and do the things that make you strong.

But here we have, again, it's another picture of the beauty of the people of God and one of the reasons why God has gathered us together as a people is so that there would be this display, this spectacle, that the powers and the principalities would be looking down into this church and there would be a fearful hearted person there and they are and there and someone is speaking to them. Someone is comforting them, rather than allowing them just to sink into the depths of despair that the devil is throwing them into. But there are people who are lifting one another up. That's such a beneficial aspect of the people of God. You know, I love the church of Jesus Christ. It's so beneficial because you have people like that who will bring things that are true like this in this passage.

Then you have here, the third section here, you see the power of God at work in verses 5 and 6. You not only see the glory of God transforming the people and they are glad and not only do you have people strengthening one another by talking to each other, but you also have the power of God at work in verses 5 and 6. Verse 5, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing." Here is a reality of the Christian life. Your former weaknesses are disappearing. God is going to do something to you: to your eyes, to your ears, to your tongue and to your feet. He's going to transform your senses and he's going to heal the functioning of your body so that your body is doing something differently and your senses are activated in a whole new way so that you are hearing and seeing and saying things that you never were able before and your feet are doing something and your lameness is getting taken care of.

So your eyes, your ears and your tongue and your feet, everything about you will be changed. These things will be progressively experienced and then they will be perfectly

experienced in heaven. They are imperfectly experienced here and I think Isaiah is speaking of the beginning of the work of God in your life all the way to the very end. From the time that he redeems you and he begins to heal your eyes and your ears and everything and then finally when he completely gives you a new body. I think he's speaking about all those things. The blind will see, God opens their eyes. By the way, you look at the miracles of Jesus. How many blind people did Jesus heal? A lot. John devotes an entire chapter to the healing of a blind man in John 9 and one of the things that is said in John chapter 9 is that this never happened before. This had never happened. Nobody ever saw anything like this happen where somebody who was blind and then they saw. Jesus Christ does that. He does things that nobody else can do. That is really a shadow, a picture of Jesus Christ and his ability to open up blind eyes.

Then the deaf will hear. You'll be more attentive to truth. You'll be able to hear more truth as you go on in your Christian life.

Then the lame will leap like a deer. I like that. Like a deer. You know, sometimes going home there are deer running around on our property and when they get near the fence, I kind of want to go near them so they'll jump over. I want to see them jump over the fence. It's so beautiful to see a deer. Isn't it beautiful to see a deer leap over a fence? It's astonishing. But that's the picture here. The lame will leap like a deer. Leaping over obstacles. I mean, I don't think this is connected to like Superman who can leap tall buildings in a single bound that it's kind of like that. You're able to do more. You're able to go more places. You're leaping.

Then the dumb sing. The tongue of the dumb shall sing. Your tongue begins to be used for beautiful purposes.

And, of course, this is quoted in Matthew 11 and in Luke 4. In Matthew 11, John the Baptist is wondering if Jesus Christ is the Messiah and the Lord says, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see. The blind see and the lame walk and the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear. The dead are raised and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." The similar thing is said in Luke 4:16 through 21. But there it is. The people of God are on display before the powers and principalities and what does that mean? They hear more. They say more. They sing more. It's a marvelous thing.

Then they will be streams in the desert. Streams flowing in the desert. Verses 6 and 7, "There will be streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, There shall be grass with reeds and rushes." So there are streams in the desert. Now, the dispensationalists have said that this was fulfilled in 1948 when the Jews made an independent state in Palestine and the cultivation of the land, of the Negev, the blossoming of the desert, that's the fulfillment of this. I don't think that's the fulfillment of this. This is the creation of new creatures and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The waters of life being poured out into the heart of the believer that cleanses and refreshes and makes alive that creates the beauty of the Lord. John spoke of this in John 7:38 where he says on the last day of the great feast, Jesus stood and he cried out right out there in

the middle of the crowd and he said, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink and out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water." Then he says, "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." Verses 6 and 7 are about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is the beautification of the church by the Holy Spirit that people filled with the Holy Spirit, they speak to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. They are filled with the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is the work of the Spirit in the church. Jesus spoke of the same thing in John 4 when he was talking to the woman at the well. He said, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." And the woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water." That's such good water.

So here you have this beautiful scene in Isaiah 35. The people of God are on display. They are rejoicing. They are blossoming. They are singing. They are talking to one another. They are strengthening the weak hands. They know that they have a distinctive responsibility to be strong so that they can make strong the weak and to say very specific things to them. Then they have their senses restored and the blind see and the lame walk and they leap like a deer and they are refreshed by the streams in the desert. This is a picture of Jesus Christ as the head of his church, blessing his church. He is such a kind Shepherd. He is such a beneficial Savior. There is nothing, no one like Jesus Christ and there is nothing like a church where Jesus Christ is exalted and glorified. Nothing like. There is nothing in the world like it. Nothing so beautiful than that.

You know, there is the song, "The Sands of Time are Sinking." I'm going to close with just reading 2 of the verses in this song because I think it really draws together everything we've read in Isaiah 35.

"O Christ, He is the fountain,  
The deep, sweet well of love!  
The streams on earth I've tasted  
More deep I'll drink above:  
There to an ocean fullness  
His mercy doth expand,  
And glory, glory dwelleth  
In Immanuel's land.

"The bride eyes not her garment,  
But her dear bridegroom's face;  
I will not gaze at glory  
But on my King of grace.  
Not at the crown He giveth  
But on His pierced hand;  
The Lamb is all the glory  
Of Immanuel's land."

You know, as we make our way as a church, as we serve, one of our great purposes in the world to be a spectacle, to be demonstrations of the manifold wisdom of God to the powers and the principalities in the heavenly places according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, as we're about all of that, that we would find ourselves like this here in Isaiah 35: a happy people, making one another happy through the glory of God.

Let's pray.

*Lord, we are so amazed at these words of Scripture which are beyond our ability to even explain well. They are far more precious than silver or rubies or gold. They are heavier and more wonderful than anything. I pray, Lord, that you would help us to know them deep within our hearts, that you would make us a church like this, those streams flowing in the desert, making us alive again and again and again and again. Amen.*