

The Everlasting Joy of the Lord

*35 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 Yahweh,
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 Yahweh 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.*

Today brings us to the Second Sunday of Advent. I mentioned during our first week of Advent that the Old Testament readings for Advent this year were from the Book of Isaiah. During the first week of Advent we were in Isaiah 2 where Isaiah wrote about what was for him the future reign of the Messiah. He spoke of what would happen in the latter days. In our discussion of that

chapter we saw that the Messiah was presented as the King, as the savior and as the One who makes reconciliation between God and man. As we read through the Book of Isaiah one of the things we learn about is the extent of the Messiah's reign.

A common theme that we often hear today from well meaning but misinformed Christians is that the extent and reign of the Messiah is that He reigns in the heart of believers only. "If Christ is King", they reason, "why is not everything currently ordered as it should be in the world"?

They misunderstand that the Kingdom of God is characterized by growth and process. In the 11th chapter of Isaiah, we are told that the knowledge of the word of Yahweh would fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. I flew to Hawaii a few years ago. Mind you, Hawaii is only about half-way across the Pacific, but one of the very interesting things about that flight is when you look out of the plane there is a lot of water covering the sea. It is all you can see for hours. This is the picture that Isaiah uses to describe the knowledge of the Word of Yahweh.

Many of the prophecies in the 11th chapter are incredible promises. When I say they are incredible promises I want to remind us that the word incredible means difficult to believe. But this is the Word of God and thus we must believe them. Just because something is incredible should not dissuade our trust in God's Word.

Hear some of these prophecies:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.

Remember Isaiah was serving the Lord in a tough time, and yet he was telling people to trust in the incredible.

We as Christians are in many ways in somewhat the same situation.

- The people of Israel have turned their backs on the Lord. I don't have to tell us, but in our nation today we have possess many of the characteristics of a people who have turned their back on God.
- They are facing chastisement because of their sins. We can look at chastisement in numerous ways, but many of us fret because of our wicked leaders. The axiom is true that we get the leaders that we deserve. Our economic woes, and our pandemics can all be said to be directly linked to our lack of trusting in God.
- The people are terrified and obviously concerned about their future. One of the characteristics I have noticed in the modern church is there tends to be a lack of hope. A lot of this is because many in the church have placed their hope in the wrong things, creating false hope, or illusion.

It is in the midst of these difficult circumstances that Isaiah stands before them as a prophet of hope and comfort. He writes to tell the people that a better day is coming.

Isaiah is seeking to comfort them by speaking about their coming King.

This chapter is part of that prophecy of hope and comfort. Remember, Isaiah is looking ahead to the Reign of Messiah. He sees there a time of peace, joy and prosperity. We can spend a lot of time on these passage but I want to look briefly at the first 7 verses.

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.” There are many today who want to read this passage as finding its fulfillment in the return of the Jews to the land of Israel in 1948. It is true that the land was a barren waste land and today the land of Israel is a lush green oasis of prosperity and abundant agriculture. However, to see these verses as merely a promise of agricultural blessing to the Land of Israel misses the point. I say this primarily because it is not merely to Jerusalem that the ransomed return, they are returning to the Mountain of the Lord, to Zion.

V 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 Yahweh, The excellency of our God.* This flourishing desert shall have all *the glory of Lebanon* given to it, which consisted in the strength and stateliness of its cedars, together with *the excellency of Carmel and Sharon*. These places were some of the most beautiful places in all of Israel, the fact that these were the most beautiful places in Israel is telling us that all of the beauties of the, as Matthew Henry puts it, the Jewish church, all of these beauties were admitted into the Christian church, and appeared in its perfection. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews gives us these descriptions. The idea is that whatever was excellent and desirable in the Mosaic economy will be translated into the evangelical institutes.

V 3-4 – 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.”

These verses are words of comfort of the promise of this coming kingdom and deliverance from all of their tormentors. The weak are strengthened, the feeble are made firm. Those who are fearful and told to Behold their God. The reason being is that He will save them.

V 5-6 - 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.

The first part of these verses is so accurate a description of what the Lord Jesus did in His ministry, that it doubtless refers to the miracles which he would perform. In not a few instances did he in fact restore the blind to sight, giving thus the most unequivocal proof that he was the Messiah sent from God. Micah 4 tell us that Messiah would come with healing in His wings. Yes, Physical infirmities and deformities will be healed; and the people will praise the Lord for His blessings and grace.

The last part of verse 6 speaks of streams in the desert rushing forth and in verse 7 we read:

*⁷ The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water;
In the habitation of jackals, where each lay,*

The idea is the same here as in the previous verse, that under the Messiah there would be blessings as great as if the parched ground' should become a lake of pure and refreshing water. The Water is of course flowing from its source, and it will reach even the most distant places of the earth.

The translation 'parched ground,' probably does not convey the sense which Isaiah intended. The image which he had in his eye is much more beautiful than that which is denoted by the 'parched ground.' Robert Lowth, a 16th century Anglican Bishop translates this phrase as 'The glowing sand.' In the Hebrew, it is the word (שָׂרָב *shârâb*), which denotes the heat of the sun. This should make us think of Isaiah 49:10 where we read:

*¹⁰ They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
Neither heat nor sun shall strike them;
For He who has mercy on them will lead them,
Even by the springs of water He will guide them.*

What we see is the deserts and dry places will be transformed into lush pools of water.

The last three verses of this passage speak a great deal about who it is and what the characteristics are of those who are a part of this Kingdom.

*V 8-10 – 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 Yahweh 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.*

At the time Isaiah wrote this passage, because of the Assyrian invasion, it was not safe to travel the roads. But here Isaiah is writing about a new road, a restored road, and He is calling it the "Highway of Holiness". He is telling them that there is a day coming when safety and will be restored to the land, and that the people will be able to return to Jerusalem, to Zion, to worship.

The image is of if you will a super-highway which will pass through the land during the reign of Christ. If we look at this road as something that only future we will miss the meaning of this passage, this super-highway is speaking of the world-wide blessing of the Gospel. Which we have today. A statement that many of us hear often and yet we often miss the full import of it is found in Acts 2 and in Romans 10. In Romans 10, probably one of the most quoted passages in the Bible beginning in verse 9 we read: *⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto*

salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” This verse is often used as a soul winning verse and that is fine, but the import of this verse is that the world that was once lost now has access to this super highway of faith, People from every tongue, tribe and nation are flowing into these waters of life.

Acts 2:21 says the same thing. This passage is right in the middle of Peter’s explanation of the Holy Spirit falling on the Church. The cataclysmic change that took place at Pentecost was that the Gospel is now going throughout the whole world. The message of the Kingdom is now flowing to every nation from Zion. The New Jerusalem from above.

I am not stretching too much to point out that in verse 1 and 2 the dead, desolate, desert of our hearts come to new life because Jesus has moved in and filled our souls with His divine fragrance. But it is more than just a personal application. All of creation is being restored to its original purpose. In being restored

Just as Christ is King as was discussed in Acts 2 this highway in the wilderness is also a “royal road.” In ancient times powerful kings would build roadways through their kingdoms. When we read about “The way of holiness” it can be translated as “The way of the Holy One.” It speaks of the Holy One leading the redeemed back to Jerusalem, both in the terrestrial and celestial sense. Christ, the Holy One, is the leader on this highway and this is what it is called, “The way of the Lord.”

This path is also the path of life. Ephesians 2:1-3 reads **2** *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*

To those who are lost the Gospel is the only light. To those who are dead in trespasses in sin, to those who are held captive by the prince of the power of the air, to those trapped by that spirit that works in the sons of disobedience, this highway of life is the only thing that will bring true joy.

Note in verse 10 the redeemed of the Lord are coming into Zion and they are singing. According to the text they are singing with everlasting joy on their heads. The joy is not from themselves but it is joy that is obtained.

*They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

We know from verse 8 that the way is the way of holiness. We are told that the unclean shall not pass over it; but we are also told that it is a path for those who are wayfaring. There are many

who are hurting and struggling, but the joy that comes from this path is not from ourselves, but from our King. This road represents “a path; a course of life.” This road is a clean, well maintained road reserved for those who have become “new creatures” in Christ Jesus according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. Probably one of the biggest problems of our day is there are many who claim to be walking the way of the Lord but they are on a different path.

- According to 2 Corinthians 6:17 we are called to be separate people:

*17 Therefore “Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you.”*

- According to 1 Thessalonians 5:22 we are to refrain from even the appearance of evil:

22 Abstain from every form of evil.

I have a genuine concern for those who refuse to live a holy life. There are many who claim to walk the path of the Lord and yet they ignore His commands.

1 John 2:3-4; 15³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. ¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

The only true safety we have as believers is found in walking with the Lord. I find it interesting that in verse 9 we read . *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,*

As long as the follower of Christ stays on the highway, he is safe from the attacks of those who would seek to destroy him. We are stalked by a violent enemy, but we are commanded according to 1 Peter 5:8: *⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* He cannot touch those who are walking the King’s highway

This road is reserved for the redeemed. Those who have been rescued from sin and Satan can walk this road in absolute safety.

The promise at the end of this passage is that the ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: and they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

The King’s Highway leads to Glory! But the Kings Highways is also glorious. The result of all of this is, that the redeemed of the Lord shall have joy and rejoicing; that all their enemies shall

be subdued, and that they shall be rescued from all their foes. This passage is in a way a summary of the entirety of Isaiah's prophecy.

Earlier in our service we sang my favorite all time Christmas Carol. Joy to the World. In the third verse of that song we read these lyrics:

No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground, He comes to make his blessings flow Far as the curse is found.

It is commonly said in evangelical circles that this song is a song about the second coming of Christ. Isaac Watt, who wrote it based on the 98th Psalm would have strongly disagreed.

Interestingly enough, the Mormons actually recognized the true nature of the song, so they decided to change the lyrics. I guess you have to give them credit for being consistent. Instead of "The Lord *is* come" they changed the words to "The Lord *will* come". Instead of "Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!" they insert "Rejoice! Rejoice! *When* Jesus reigns". Most odiously, they changed the treasured lyric "He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found" to "*He'll* come (future tense) and make the blessings flow, far as the curse *was* (future-past tense) found.

But first, simply notice the tense of the song is not future. Watts could have easily written, "Joy to the world the Lord **will** come" or "the Savior **will** reign" or "He **will** rule the world", but he didn't. The fact that he chose not to, fits perfectly with his inaugurated postmillennial eschatology. The song is intentionally written to highlight and celebrate the **present**, earth redeeming imperatives of Christ's first advent. The Old Testament picture we are given by the prophets of Christ's first appearing is that it was a cosmic event, forever altering the course of history.

It also speaks of a day when all of the nations will gloriously flow into the Kingdom of Christ in fulfillment of verse 10:

*¹⁰ And the ransomed of Yahweh 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 us rejoice that we are on the highway of the great king, and let us remember that His world conquering mission is greater than we can imagine.

May we all walk in that everlasting joy of the Lord.