

### Isaiah 35:1-10 (NKJV)

- 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.**

Have you ever had a time in your life where you lost hope? Have you focused so much on how things are **now** that you could not see any way that they would ever **get better**? Have you looked at the current conditions and concluded that they were beyond repair. Maybe you looked at your own life and the mess you made of it and could not imagine how such a thing could ever be repaired, how the damage could be undone? If so, this is a sermon for you this morning. And if not, we are all surrounded by people in this same circumstance. If we will focus on what this passage says we can gain some fuel to fire the hope in those around us.

Remember how in our last study that the land was made desolate. All that it was fit for was wild animals. This was the result of God's anger against the people's sins.

Guess what. That is what we always produce. That is what we have to offer to God. Spiritually, when **we follow our hearts** and **live a life devoid of God** we always end up with a **wasteland**. It is interesting to look at the governments that have sought out to eradicate Christianity. They always end up as wastelands of hopelessness.

If we were to look at our lives when we came to Christ, whether we understood it at the time or not, they were not thriving croplands. They were more like barren wastelands fit for nothing but beasts.

But we will see what happens when God intrudes into time and space. We see what God does when he encounters a wasteland. We will see **the expert at restoration** in action. We will encounter the miracle of change that only He can do in the arid wasteland of people's lives.

### **Isaiah 35:1-10 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;**

**<sup>2</sup> 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.**

Chapter 34 ended with a wasteland. But in verse 1 hope springs forth. This land that has no water, no potential, no use, will rejoice. In Hebrew the word rejoice is the primary focus. Gladness is the topic.

How can this be? The situation is dismal. All is lost. No good can come of it can it? That may be true **apart from** God. But that is never true **when God is in it**. We go from wasteland to rejoicing in one verse.

As believers we are free to tell the truth about our surroundings. We can tell the truth about our situations. But we are never allowed to **allow our surroundings** to tell us **about our future**. Our surroundings are not **prophetic**. They have no power to speak to our futures, only our present. **If your present makes you fear your future, you have lost your perspective on who our God really is.**

The wilderness and wasteland in our text are in for a **rude awakening**. That is often the same thing that God does in the wilderness and wasteland of our lives.

Rejoicing and fruitfulness is just around the corner in our text. And often it is just around the corner in our lives. We often cannot see how **this can possibly work out well**. But somehow God works it out. Our stories at Ferndale are full of this. We have all seen God pull a rabbit out of his hat for us, one that we never saw coming. **The present told us one tale. The future told us a completely different tale.** I think it is common knowledge so I think it is safe to use as an example. Jarrod had been looking for different work to prepare for the arrival of Katrina. He kept applying to the opportunities available, but for one reason or another he was passed by. His present was not saying promising things. But just when he most needed it, God came through with the best job he had applied for and it is job he loves. I had the same thing happen to me. I had applied for all kinds of jobs after YFC. I didn't get any of them. My present told me ominous things. But I ended up getting the best job of all the jobs I had applied for in the end.

**Don't listen to the circumstances of your present to tell you what your future will be. God is the God of the future.** And His intentions for our future is **rejoicing**. Sometimes we have to wait longer than others. But rejoicing is where it will end up.

Verse 2 portrays the wonderful change that God will make to the land.

**<sup>2</sup> 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.**

This is poetic language. At least I think it is. I don't think the ground is going to break out in singing "Holy Holy Holy". But the land will be in such a positive state that its very existence will be like music to God, portraying the wonder of God.

Now look where it says the glory of Lebanon will be given to it. This glory does not **come to it** through **its own effort**. It will not **earn** glory. It is a dessert, after all. No, God will intervene and give it what it could never gain on its own. Doesn't that sound familiar? That is exactly what God does for us. We are **given** salvation. We never **earn** it. We too, if we are believers, will be **glorified** one day. But we will not glorify ourselves. We are the dessert that God turns into a garden. And that is simply wonderful.

Now who is the “they” in verse 2. We don’t know for sure. It looks to me like it will be the animals. But we are soon to move into the world of people. So it could be either one.

And notice what they will see. Will they see the glory of the natural process of a desert fixing itself? No. They will see **the glory of the LORD, The excellency of our God.**

Have you ever heard yourself speaking about your own virtues and got the feeling like “I really need to shut up now?” Has your pride ever busted out in a conversation where you talked about what you deserve and what you have earned and the wonderful virtue you have displayed? Do you know the feeling I am talking about where you know instinctively you have just started barking up the wrong tree? Don’t we all know by now that if we are going to extol anything good in our lives, the **trail has to lead directly to Jesus?** If we are going to represent our lives accurately to those around us, if we are to let our light shine, we must always make much of Jesus, not ourselves. Because, after all, that is the truth. We don’t need to exaggerate at all. There is nothing **worthy of praise** in ourselves. And there is nothing that is **not worthy of praise** in our Lord. To the King, to God who alone is wise be all honor and glory forever amen.

**<sup>3</sup> Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees.**

Don’t we all need encouragement from time to time? We must, because it is commanded in the followers of Christ continually. And the Holy Spirit is the great comforter and the one who most perfectly comes alongside.

We can never expect our fellow believers **to make it on their own.** In fact our efforts to seclude others from our struggles is often the most destructive trait they we display. We **need help** strengthening the weak hands and making firm the feeble knees.

Now, why are these the items chosen? Why hands and knees? Someone like Mark might figure this out quicker than some of us. Mark would know that if his hands are hurt he would not be able to work. And if his knees don’t work he won’t be able to stand.

Now at some times, when we have given in to despair, we might think, what difference does any of this make? Why do I need to be prepared to work and to walk? Nothing matters anyway. But that is the devil speaking. That is not God. The **time to prepare** is **before** you can see **the need to prepare.** We

need to take God's word that He is going to have something wonderful for us to do and somewhere wonderful for us to go. So, often, we are preparing ourselves, even before we can see the point of it all. That is the point here. These people need to be ready even before they can see the need for it. They need to be prepared to work before there is work to do. They need to be prepared to walk before there is a road to walk on.

They need to **prepare by faith in what God** is going to do.

We need to remember again the situation these Judeans were in. They were surrounded by an undefeatable army. What point was it to strengthen hands or legs? What good would it do anyway? **Fear** will rob you **of obedience**.

**Fear** will rob you of **preparation**. **Fear** will rob you of **incentive**. **Fear** would have you **do nothing** instead of **doing something**. But that will not do. Not when you are a servant of God's. He is going to do a great work and we need to be prepared for it.

Let's move to verse 4

**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."**

Fearful hearted- The word used here is interesting. The word for fearful means to make haste. When combined with the word for heart it means an agitated heart full of anxiety. And it may be that **this agitation is caused by impatience**. We determine that God is not acting quickly enough for our satisfaction. God needs to get on the ball. He needs to hurry up and do what **He ought to be able to see that I need right now**. When we start telling God we need something and we **need it now**, we are placing ourselves in a bad spot. We have no idea what we need. We only know what **we feel** that we need, or what **we think** we need. We often have no idea of what we really need. So we do well not to limit God to moving **when and how** we think He should. Otherwise it just gives us a reason to disobey God and to be bitter toward Him.

Now there are a number of sources for anxiety. And some are chemical interactions in our bodies that have little to do with what we think. I don't think the remedy suggested will have much success to people whose anxiety is not produced by their own thinking.

But if **our thinking makes us anxious, thinking differently is the cure for it**. This isn't rocket science. When you are anxious simply ask, what caused

this? What was I last thinking about before this feeling overcame me? What experience have I just had that inspired fear? What situation was I just in that I am responding to? If our anxiety is completely out of the blue, then a chemical cure might be necessary. But most of our fear does not come that way. Most of our anxiety comes from what we think. And often the people around us can help us discern the source if we are having trouble discerning it for ourselves. Our brothers and sisters who know us the best can often tell if anxiety is **thought produced** or **chemically induced**.

God's antidote is shared in verse 4. Say this content to the ears of the fearful.

**"Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come *with vengeance*, *With the recompense of God*; He will come and save you."**

Notice here that Isaiah does not say to tell them just "Don't fear." That would not be overly helpful. My brother used to tell me to "grow up". And he did not speak it in an endearing nurturing tone. It probably made him feel a little better but it didn't do much for me. Because he did not tell me **how** I was supposed to accomplish this **little task** of becoming an adult.

That is much like telling someone who is fearful that they should stop being fearful. There has to be more information. And Isaiah gives it.

**Behold, your God will come *with vengeance*, *With the recompense of God*; He will come and save you."**

Isaiah speaks to the people who are probably afraid of the Assyrians, who thought there was **no reason to do anything** since they were soon to be invaded and probably killed. And He tells them why **not** to be afraid.

God will come. First we see that **God is involved**. He is **taking noticed**. He is not distant. He will involve Himself with their plight.

Second God will come with vengeance upon the enemies of His people. We often want to focus on the **positive attention of God to do good in our lives**. But his power against our enemies is **equally necessary**. If God only did good for us but could not bring Himself to be unkind to our enemies, we would be in a bad spot. His goodness would not deliver us. But we know that our enemies will be destroyed. And in the life of a Christian death and sickness and sin will all be destroyed one day. So will all those people who simply will not submit to King Jesus, people who will not surrender their lives to His control. God is good at ending bad things and rescuing His people.

And third, God's intention in all of this is to save His people. At the end of the day that is what God always promises to His people. He will rescue them. He will save them. They are the apple of God's eye.

Now let's look back at the beginning of the verse.

**"Be strong, do not fear!"**

I have a quote here from a different commentary.

**The combination of verbs found in this verse also appears in the command to Joshua as he takes up his work of leading the Israelites into the land of promise. For the great work that God had for him to perform, he was charged by means of these two verbs, *be strong and of good courage*. In a time when it seems that that work is to fail and the land of promise will be taken from the people, the same command comes. The attitude of Joshua is the only one that will suffice at such a time, and one can have only this attitude when he realizes that the God who had been with Joshua is also at all times with His people.**

*Book of Isaiah, The - The Book of Isaiah - Volume 2: Chapters 19 to 39.*

When God tells us to be strong and don't fear, that is a command we **can** obey. And it is a command we **must** obey. And by obeying it we glorify our God who we believe **will deliver** on His promises. And His ultimate promise is always salvation for His people.

**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.***

If someone saw everything you did this week, and if they heard everything you said, and if they saw everything you think, would someone get the idea that you are expecting great things from God? Or would they get the idea that you are God's victim? Are you looking forward to better things with God? Do you expect that He is going to reward all faithfulness a hundred times over? Would they get that idea from how you lived this week?

That is what Isaiah is pointing to in our passage. Eyes that have not seen will see. Ears that could not hear will hear. Carla probably likes that passage.

Some day she will wake up to find she is hearing sound from two directions. No more spinning in circles to locate a sound.

The lame won't just walk. They will leap. Then the speechless will speak. All the broken stuff will be fixed. All the useless stuff will be made useful. All the dead stuff will be made alive. All the ugly stuff will be made beautiful. That is what God says. That is how it will be. Every effort in Christ's service is worthwhile. Mr. Ortland has some wonderful things to say here.

**If what we've experienced thus far is all we can expect, that would be demoralizing. But God's great goodness is what puts the thrill into life. There is more for us in Christ than we have yet apprehended—always. Following Christ, we are never at a dead end, but always at a threshold. Isaiah is calling us to create that atmosphere of expectancy, because God is coming to us with fullness of salvation**

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

I love that truth he points out. Following Christ, we are never at a dead end, but always at a threshold. How much would our lives change if we trained ourselves to believe this? What would happen if we woke up every day and asked, what new thing does God have in store for me today? Sometimes we look at our pain and loss and struggle and that is all we can see. Sometimes we see the enemy knocking at our door and we lose perspective. What would happen if we really believed that God loves us? What would happen if we believed that He has a plan to use the hardships of today to create something of value? What if we believed that **the end He has for us is really as incredible** as what He says? Would we not shine as beacons for Christ in this dark world. We have all these great and precious promises but we have accepted in our normal day to day living that these things really are not true. We are always on the threshold of the next good thing that God will do in our lives, no matter how much we hurt, no matter how difficult the circumstances are, no matter how much we are processing at the moment. Our God is the God of new beginnings. After all, **His mercies are new every single morning.**

**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.***

There is a quote that says "The way of man is to make the inhabited



uninhabitable; the way of God is to take the barren and make it abundant." We need to see this as it is. We have an amazing ability to ruin things. Our God has an amazing ability to turn the things we have ruined into useful opportunities. Mr. Ortland says In other words, what we spoil, God renews. He does it through the Holy Spirit, *breaking forth* into our hearts with saving, satisfying fullness. In fact, God will restore nature itself.

**<sup>8</sup> 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.**

What this describes is a highway. This is literally a **high way**. The path through the dessert is often hard to follow. But an elevated path would be impossible to miss and easy to walk. When my brother and I were hiking in Dolly Sods wilderness in February, which I don't recommend to anyone, we would often lose the trail because the markings would be buried by snow. Then we would have to waste a lot of time looking for the next dot of paint that told us which direction the path went. Many people talk of finding God like this, like He is so hard to find and that He is eluding humans unless they are very astute. But that is not how the Bible portrays salvation. It is easy to find. But it is hard **to want it**. This highway in Isaiah is obvious. You can't miss it. And if you choose to walk on it, it is not difficult to know where it goes. You may have difficulty wanting to stay on the path, but there is no difficulty in following it if that is what you want to do. Discerning **where** and **what it is** is not so much our problem. Wanting to **not take the side roads** is where our issues lay.

This highway is the Jesus highway. It is only for those who Christ has saved. No one whose sins are not covered by the blood of Christ can walk it. But everyone whose sins are covered **can and must** walk this highway. And we cannot fool ourselves. If we miss it, it is not because the **highway** is no good. The problem is that **we** are no good. Even the most ignorant person can see that it is the highway. But we tend to only see what we want to see.

Now what will this highway be like?

**<sup>9</sup> 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,**

**<sup>10</sup> 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.**

Vs 9/10

The NKJV reads, "they shall obtain joy and gladness." But the niv may be closer to Isaiah's intent with "gladness and joy will overtake them."

Here is another excellent quote about these verses.

**All our lives we've just wanted to be happy. But all our lives something has always spoiled it. God is saying, "Trust me enough to follow me, and I will bring you home with singing. I will overwhelm you with a joy unbroken and unbreakable, and your sorrow and sighing will run for it!" Some people are content with the self-importance and pettiness and materialism of this present evil age. They fill their bellies, their bank accounts, and their egos with the salvations of this world. They will go on forever discovering how empty such fullness really is. There are others whose hearts yearn for something more. They long for God's salvation. And they will receive it, not because they deserve it but because Jesus lived and died for them. And though the pursuit of their joy in Christ may cost them everything here in this world, they don't mind. They gladly leave it behind and press on toward a joy that can never end.**

**Two kinds of people, two destinations. Who are you? What are you *becoming*?**

God holds out to us, week after week, a wonderful destination. We see here that the lions cannot attack the people on this path. There is no destruction for those on the King's highway. And only the redeemed walk there. These are people for whom a tremendous price has been paid. And look at the great joy Christ's work has provided for these people. The picture is one of wide eyed wonder and overflowing happiness. That is what is promised. That is what we have in store. That is our destiny if we are in Christ. Joy and gladness and singing. Is the price you are paying today heavy? Is your path hard? Is the weight difficult to carry? Keep this in mind. Don't allow your circumstance to prophesy your destiny. They are not related. Look only to the promises of God to know what your future will be. Could it get worse before it gets better? Certainly. Will it never get better? That is impossible. God has promised this Joy and Gladness. God would have to cease to exist for this thing that He has promised to fail to happen. Our future is as bright as the promises of God.