

## The King and the Way Home

Isaiah 34.1–35.10

### Sermon

One of most challenging qs for Xians to ans: if G is love, why would he send anyone to hell? Scr describes hell as a place of “eternal, conscious punishment”—very words in our [conf of faith](#) (Art 13). Why would we bel that? How does that square w what we say in 1st Art: “rules all things in holiness, wisdom, & love”? Today’s psg addresses this q head on: Isa 34–35 (p. 496). Two chaps, one unit. A 30,000-foot look back over everything we’ve considered so far. & it’s hard. Ch 34 as bleak & threatening as any psg of Scr. But as dark as ch 34 is, ch 35 is to that same degree bright w hope. Isa’s masterful contrast as graphic literarily as Caravaggio’s use of chiaroscuro is graphic visually. [Read text.]

As I said ch 34 quite dark. In 1st 4 vss G summons nations to his bar of justice, declares judgment on them all. Rest of chap focuses on one nat: Edom. History of Edom goes back to their forefather Esau, older bro of Isr/Judah’s forefather Jacob. G chose younger over older, Jacob then swindled Esau out of his birthright & then his blessing. A rivalry that would materialize into a feud when Esau’s descendants refused to let peo of Isr pass through their land during wilderness wanderings. Isr’s 1st king eventually went to war w Edom, 2nd king David successfully conquered. But victory not long lasting, Edom an ongoing enemy. When Jeru fell to Babylon 100+ yrs after Isa, prophet Obadiah said Edom stood by, watched, gloated over their destruction. Long history of hostility bet Edom & Judah. & that’s why G brings Edom up here. Not bc Edom’s sin is worse than the sin of the nats, but bc Edom’s sin is representative of the sins of the nats. Psg not really about nats 1st & Edom 2nd, but nats of the world generally as typified by Edom.

& what G said he would do to Edom—& by imp all peos—is turn their land into a **desert**/wilderness/uninhabitable pile of trash. Removes all

human life (5), turns streams & soil into pitch & burning sulfur (9), makes land suitable only for desert animals (11–15, *owls, jackals, hyenas, goats*), uses their best places (*citadels*, 13) as homes for *thorns & nettles & brambles*. **G turns our treasure into a desert.**

Q we ask: why? Why such ferocity? What did Edom do to deserve this? What have the nats done to merit this kind of punishment? Clue in v. 11: *chaos & desolation*. Doesn't come through in Eng trans, but same words used at very beg of B: *the earth was formless & empty* (Gen 1.2). Speak of a void, nothingness, emptiness—the state of the universe before creation. Into that chaos G spoke life, created all there is, filled the void w beauty, replaced chaos w order, removed emptiness & in its place gave joy. & to our 1st parents G gave a single command: “trust me about the tree, don't eat from it, don't fall for the allure of knowing evil. Evil will mar the beauty, reintroduce chaos, create emptiness, 1st w/in your own heart then in all creation. Trust me about the tree.” But our 1st parents refused, wanted to know what evil was & what evil could do. & as all human history since that time has testified, our evil mars the beauty of G's good world, our sin creates chaos for us & others, our brokenness creates emptiness. See what sin does? **Sin turns Eden into a desert.** Not just that G turns our garden into a desert, we started it by our own sin—we've turned Eden into a desert. Doesn't say anywhere in ch 34 that G would bring this judgment directly. That's the way we think of G's judgment normally, right? Like Sodom & Gom? But from our study we know that there's another way he judges peo: by letting them go their own way. **Oswalt** on vv. 9–10: “For those of us who live in the nuclear age, these pics are all too vivid. We have it in our power to reduce a beautiful world to a radioactive desert. Should that occur, it will not be bc a vicious G decided to wreak punishment upon us, but bc we have become so insistent upon dominating the world that, if we think we must reduce it to an ashheap to do so, we will” (p. 614). & then on that ashheap we raise our *fortresses*, our *strongholds*, our best places. We step on others to get ahead, overlook the poor &

marginalized, we build our monuments to ourselves from the rubble of those around us. **Garrels**: “Oh great mammon of form and function/  
Careless consumerist consumption/Dangerous dysfunction/Described as expensive taste/I’m a people disgraced/By what I claim I need/And what I want to waste/I take no account for nothing/If it’s not mine/It’s a misappropriation of funds/Protect my ninety percent with my guns/  
Whose side am I on?/Well who’s winning?/My kingdom’s built with the blood of slaves/Orphans, widows, & homeless graves/I sold their souls just to build my private mansion.”

G says: “I brought beauty out of brokenness, order out of chaos, joy out of emptiness. But by your sin you’ve made a mess of the good world I made for you. You’ve turned beauty to ashes, replaced order w chaos, reduced joy to emptiness. & as your punishment I will give you what you want: chaos & desolation. You took Eden & made it a desert, So I’ll take what you’ve made & (in the words of **Brian Beyer**) I’ll ‘uncreate Eden’” (p. 136). Ergo sacrificial language (7–8): sin demands sacrifice bc sin a matter of life & death. Ill of Boston Marathon bomber. **Oswalt**: “All sin must end in a sacrifice” (p. 612). & if Edom or the nats or we will not turn from our sin, in the end we will become the sacrifice.

Ergo the solemnity of these chaps. You see in the handout how I’ve entitled each chap: ch 33 (justice is coming), ch 34 (rescue is coming). In reality both points collapse into one: justice is coming & rescue is coming bc G is coming—and he is coming to bring both justice & rescue. Only q: which will he bring you? “Surely he’ll bring me rescue. After all, he is a G of love, he’ll overlook my mistakes, he has to accept me.” Yes, he is a G of love—and loves those you’ve mistreated, those you’ve failed to love, those you’ve stolen from, those you’ve lusted after, those you’ve lied about, those you’ve envied. He loves them too. & how could he best display his love for them? By bringing justice to you. If you think about it & are honest w yourself, big q not how could a loving G judge anyone? but how could a loving G *not* judge everyone?

Bc he is love he didn't just leave the world to destroy itself. **Carson**: "W despicable self-love & rage we rebelled & fell under the curse/Yet G did not rip out the page or destroy all who love the perverse." Tho we turned Eden into a desert, yet G promised to turn our desert into a **garden** again (1–2, 7). No specific wilderness mentioned, just a reversal of all effects of our evil. New world promised where *blind see, deaf hear, lame leap, & mute shout for joy* (5–6). Precisely what happened **when J came to earth**. In fact when J was asked if he was the M, he replied: *Go back & report to John what you have seen & heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, & the good news is proclaimed to the poor* (Lk 7.22). See, when Isa wrote this prophecy, he was looking ahead & telling peo: "G is coming!" That was 2700 yrs ago. But a day finally arrived when G did come to Judah in the pers of JX. & the reversal began. We turned Eden into a desert but J came to begin the renewal of all things—to turn the desert into Eden again.

But what about justice? How can G's coming be good news & not bad? a msg of rescue & not judgment? Only one way: **by taking judgment on himself**. & he brought judgment & rescue w him. But the amazing thing is that the two merged into one in the person of J. J brought rescue predicted in ch 35 by bearing judgment promised in ch 34. On the cross the L was angry w J (34.2). [Read vv. 2, 3, 5, 6 wrt X.] Precisely by J taking judgment on himself that those who were destined for judgment could instead be *redeemed* (35.9). Redemption: ref to slavery, buying a slave his freedom, manumission. Everyone under slavery to sin, bound for judgment. But J paid price to buy sinners like you out of slavery; to release broken peo like you from bondage of self-centeredness, hatred, theft, injustice, immorality, murder, pride; to turn you from desert of building monuments to your own glory—sand castles really—& to bring you into garden of love, service, selflessness, mercy, justice, hope, peace. But you can't go in the way you are: *unclean* cannot enter (8). Hope of gos: J will cleanse you if you come.

“But doesn’t look like a garden yet. Still a lot of brokenness, much injustice, & professing Xians contribute far too much of it.” True enough. Just like all predictions of judgment in ch 34 haven’t yet come true, neither have all predictions of blessing in ch 35. & just like those who heard Isa 1st time had to wait for a day when G would come, so we who hear Isa now have to wait for J to come back: *if I go away, I will come again & receive you to myself* (Jn 14.3). & so we wait. Broken & yet healed. Sinful & yet forgiven. Marred & yet being renewed. & we wait in hope that all will be made new. & what’s beautiful about the way story of B ends, doesn’t end in a garden. Oh, there’s a garden there (Rev 22). But story of B ends in a **city**. We turned Eden into a desert, G turns desert into a garden, but in the end we end up in a city (Rev 21), **a city w a garden** (Rev 22). “The church will be presented faultless before God by the redemptive work of Christ, all sin will be purged and its wretched effects will forever be banished” (Art 13).

Until then G is **growing his garden**. Slowly but surely spreading hope & life across globe. “He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.” So for now we live in between desert & garden, between ashes & beauty, emptiness & joy. We’ve tasted what that new world will be like, but we long to be at the feast. Until then we’re on the way (8). Xianity cannot be reduced to a mere point-in-time decision back there. It’s a way, a path, a course of life. Not a path for the clean/perfect/got-it-together, but a path for redeemed/rescued/ransomed. & so more & more we who are redeemed learn to walk along this path, learn to follow J who is himself the Way of Holiness. **Owen**: “[Jesus] is the medium of all communication bet God & us. In him we meet, in him we walk. All influences of love, kindness, mercy, from God to us, are through him; all our returns of love, delight, faith, obedience to God, are all through him; he being that one way God so often promises his people: and it is a glorious way (Isa. 35:8)—a high way, a way of holiness, a way that none can err in that once enter it.” (p. 177). “At redemption bells enter the k of G & delight in the blessings of the new cov. Since X calls us to

be salt & light in the world, but should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it. Rather, we are to do good to the city & to love our neighbors as ourselves. Through our witness G plunders Satan's dark kingdom, & regenerates & renovates the lives of individuals rescued through repentance & faith."

We have a mission between now & X's return. A mission to be G's instruments of making beauty rise out of ashes. A mission to bring hope to hopeless, justice to oppressed, joy to broken, gospel to lost. A mission to love G with all that we are & our neighbor as ourselves. A mission to go after those with feeble hands or knees that are giving way & inspiring them to persevere for the glory of X. The kingdom won't come until J brings it with him. But until then it's our privilege to be a sign alongside the highway, pointing ahead to a world the way it could be, the world the way it will be. Until then it's our joy to tell the world J is coming—and that's the very best news you could imagine.