

Isaiah 35:1-10. The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, 2 it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. 3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; 4 say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." 5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. 7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. 8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, 10 and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

God's Coming Kingdom Gives Us Strength and Courage

Hope in Christ gives us life and joy

Rescued from despair we live in the confidence that He brings.

It has been cold and snowy the last few weeks and so Isaiah's picture of an oasis in the middle of a hot desert may be a tough picture to relate to, right now. Therefore, in order to get the idea of a sudden hope appearing in the midst of desolate place, picture with me troublesome drifts of snow instead of hot desert sands. Replace the scorching sun with the bitter sting of a piercing north wind. As a deserted traveler trudges through this blinding and barren landscape, his legs are aching with each step. He fights his way through the waist-high drifts. His face is numb from being pelted by stinging snow and burned by the bitter wind and just before he collapses out of sheer exhaustion he sees something on the horizon. Hope and joy are refreshed and uncovered. An inner fire of strength and courage is stoked as he sees a house with smoke coming from the chimney. He just knows that a warm fireplace and cozy blanket lie ahead of him, and with a sudden rush, his exhausted limbs are strengthened, he surges through the snow; pumping his arms. His legs once tired,

feeble and weak, are now making great strides busting through the frozen dunes towards his destination.

Whether the illustration consists of a wintry wasteland that gives way to a warm home or a desolate desert that suddenly is overwhelmed by bubbling springs, this is the spiritual truth we will consider today: God's coming kingdom gives us strength and courage. Hope in Christ gives us abundant life and joy that overwhelms our weariness; for the Lord rescues us from the ditches of despair so that we may live in the confidence and assurance that he brings.

With these words, Isaiah is presenting in a vivid way the contrast between the hopelessness of life wrecked by sin and the hope and life and joy that God would bring to this earth through Christ. God's Old Testament people would be dragged off into a desert because of their unbelief but hope in the LORD would not dry up. Our LORD promised a Savior to bring life and joy to all those who suffer under sins consequences. That promise remains a source of unending hope for us today.

God promised that the splendor of his grace would shine forth from this barren land, and we are getting excited again to celebrate just how he would fulfill that promise. He would bring about the life-giving, life-changing, events that would lead to the birth of Jesus in the little town of Bethlehem. The splendor of God himself would come to this earth to save mankind from its wretched state. Hope and joy would be born with Jesus. And through Christ Jesus, God's grace would bloom forth for all to see. Grace in Christ would bloom in a desperate place and his glory would be made known to the nations. Isaiah describes it this way, ***The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus,² it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.***

This promise of God's splendor among his people, this promise of God's Savior is a sight for sore eyes. Isaiah speaks these words of comfort to God's people which are lasting words of promise for Christians still today. As those who travel through this life of sin, any one of us can easily be made weary by the troubles and snares that we face. Daily frustrations and troubles can make us feel weary and worn. We are daily in conflict with sin, Satan, and the very world in which we live. At this time of year especially, added pressures may make things even more difficult. The journey to and from Christmas may not always be guaranteed to be all cheery and bright as we deal with expectations that are not met, or added responsibilities, or we miss those who used to share this time with us. Because of the troubles of sin and death we might feel alone and weary as we bear the weight of loss or grief, guilt or shame. This parched and dry place wears on us as things are not always easy or how we think they ought to be. Made weary by it all our weak knees easily bow to stress, anger, frustration, and temptation. Our feeble hands let go of God's promises as hope fades. Our fearful hearts are troubled by doubt and pain.

But through these words of Isaiah, the Lord assures us he has not forgotten his promise to save us. The promise of Jesus remains to be that oasis that appears on the horizon of each new day. The Lord in his goodness renews our strength as he renews our hope. God has not forgotten his people. He has not forgotten his promise to you. He will not leave you. He loves you so much that he sent his Son. This is a most wonderful time of the year even if we are journeying through pain or grief because God's Word leads us to recall how our God loves us so much that he took on flesh and became one of us. And through the living water of his Word, the LORD creates life in our hearts troubled and made weary by sin. Hope and joy are renewed and recovered are reborn. Strength and courage bubble forth like a natural spring. The message of the gospel, of free and complete forgiveness, of eternal joy and peace, produces ongoing fuel to live for God.

This is no mirage. This is no false hope. For the Lord has given specific and unique signs to show to us that this is indeed true; it is indeed trustworthy. 700 years before it happened, God told us, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. As promised, he would be born in Bethlehem. A star placed in the heavens would mark his birth and direct people to him. The splendor of God placed in the manger for the sake of the lowly and the unrighteous. The kind of miracles and signs and wonders that were so apparent at his birth, would not stop. During his earthly life, the Son of God would bring sight to the blind, he would cause the lame to leap like a deer, and he would unstop the ears of the deaf. Most importantly, he would bring salvation for the sinner. Isaiah tells us that this Prince of Peace would also be our Servant who suffered in our place, and by his wounds, he would provide eternal healing and peace for all those who believe.

These are all signs that give us a certain confidence even as we have our bouts with doubt and trouble and distress. Remember how John the Baptist languishing in prison sent for words of reassurance from Jesus and these words from Isaiah were referenced to give John hope and joy even in his darkest hour. This is the good news (the oasis on the horizon) that God daily places before us and gives us confidence to live for him. Jesus came to redeem us from the scorching power of sin, and not only does he set us free *from* sin, death, and hell, but he sets us free so that we may walk and live and breathe in the refreshing abundance of hope and joy that he gives to those who hear his Word and believe. In the joy that Christ brings, strength and courage are stoked and knees that easily bow to temptation are suddenly made strong to stand up against the devil's attacks. Hands once made feeble and weak by the pains of this life now cling tightly to God's promises as hope is renewed. Hearts once easily troubled by hardship are devoted to God in even the toughest of circumstances because they know that God is completely devoted to them.

Through the living water of the gospel, not only are we made alive in Christ. but we are strengthened to live for God. He gives us joy even in our sadness, to the point where He turns our sighing into singing. Set free from the burden of sin and guilt we

are set free to rejoice. We are redeemed, set free, so that we may live in his peace. We set apart to be his own so that we might together encourage one another with our songs of praise as we walk the way to our heavenly home. Through the power of the gospel our good and gracious Lord pulls out of the ditch of guilt and despair and we are put safely back on his highway of peace. For those redeemed by the blood of Christ will walk on this holy highway and the ransomed of the Lord “will enter Zion with singing.”

In the days of Isaiah, the roads were certainly not the paved roads of our day. In those days, they had more to complain about than a few potholes. Their roads were winding uneven paths that cut through narrow and jagged corridors making the traveler easy prey to thieves, robbers, and wild animals. Isaiah, therefore, used the ancient picture of a well-built, raised, and smooth highway raised above that which threatens to illustrate the assurance and support that Christ, the Messiah, provides to his church. As those who believe in Christ Jesus, we can travel through this life happy and joyful as we walk in the security and confidence that our God provides. He raises us out of the ditches of despair, he lifts us up out of troubles and the worries of this life as he gives us hope and he promises to be with us and deliver us we gladly sing the praises of our God who has redeemed us to be his own. He has rescued us from death and has given us life. God has smoothed out the way to heaven for his people. As we walk through the trials of this life, he even promises that everything will work out for the good of those who love him. He has set us apart and promises to watch over us and keep us safe and rescue us from trouble and keep us from despair until the day when no bad thing can ever touch us again so that when we finally reach our heavenly home we will have uninterrupted joy.

Amid the difficulty and frustration and the pains that just come with living in this world, we have reason to rejoice. The good news of Jesus is a well that does not dry up. It is an unfailing source of comfort. It is a veritable source of new life and power. It brings life to our lifeless hearts and it strengthens us to live for God. And that good news of Jesus has the power to pull us out of the ditch of despair and place us safely in his peace and protection until that day when he will bring us to our home in heaven.

God’s coming kingdom gives us strength and courage and peace. He turns our sighing into singing, for this is God’s promise to us. ***Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*** This is God’s promise to you through Christ Jesus your Redeemer who came for you as a child and who will come again to take you to heaven. Amen.