

Isaiah 35:4-7a 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.

Be Strong, Do Not Fear...Your God has come.

The last few nights have brought with them some beautiful sunsets. Shades of violet, orange, pink and gold gently run into each other like watercolors as the fading hues of blue give way to the black of night. And after dark in the crispness of a clear evening you can gaze up to see another one of the great wonders of God's creation. The stars all hung in their place, too numerous to count, kept in their brilliant arrangements by the only true God. *The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the works of his hands.* The God of creation is the God of order and beauty, wisdom and power. In such breathtaking moments, the wisdom and goodness of God is very much apparent. There is much evidence of the existence and goodness of God that it overwhelms the senses, and leaves at a loss for words.

But there are certainly moments when that which is happening under the stars is so disturbing and ugly that those living here might question the goodness of God. When confronted by the harsh realities of this world some have even questioned the very *existence* of God. If there is a God why is there such chaos and corruption and crime; why would he allow sexual abuse, human trafficking, kidnapping, murder, terrorism, and the like? Violence and horrible acts surround us in the news, illness and cancer touch our communities and disturb and disrupt our family life. Add to that our personal concerns that vary from pain and stress, sickness and worry, physical ailments and handicaps, grief and death; it all comes and it threatens to overwhelm and shake us and leave our minds searching for answers. In such a place our hearts may regularly be filled to overflowing with fear and anxiety.

Thus, these words of Isaiah chapter 35 are welcome, in this age and on this day today, just as they were welcome words of assurance in the days of the Isaiah. Your God exists. Your God will come. He will make things right. He will come to save you.

For the people of Judah, these words were exactly what they needed. Their hearts were, no doubt, filled with fear, for it was as if a dark cloud was descending

around them. Judgment and exile were coming. A foreign nation would conquer their land and carry them away from their homes. The first half of the book of Isaiah speaks in length of this coming judgment. Had God turned his back on the people? Would he forsake them forever? Did God even care? All hope seemed lost!

The people were surrounded by the fear of death and the coming devastation of exile and captivity. They were staring down the reality of losing their homes and everything else, of being separated from family and friends, and the prophet says, ***“Be strong, Don’t be afraid.”*** Now, with such a dreadful outcome approaching what good would it do to speak to the people in such a generic message, **“Be strong. Don’t be afraid.”**? Indeed, that would be the stuff of empty cliché if it weren’t for the promises of God so tightly packed into these words of encouragement. **“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come.**

This was not merely Isaiah grasping for the standard message that everyone reaches for in a time of crisis. Instead Isaiah brings a message that is profoundly powerful, a message of real comfort for he proclaims, **your God will come.** The God who created the heavens and the earth, who rescued the people from the slavery of Egypt, and who blessed them with the promised land, who gave them victory, who was their rock and shield and strength, their God would come. Even in their years of captivity, the LORD would not forget them, he would not forsake them, he would continue to open his hand and provide good gifts to his people even in their time of exile.

Pain and suffering, exile and judgment were not something that God had wanted or intended to give. God called out to his people to repent, he had given them second chance after second chance. He had warned them and had been patient with them. And even when the time of judgment came, he promised that he would send unprecedented restoration to his people. Even though they had been so unfaithful to him, God would remain faithful. He would generously meet their needs and in his great love he even points them to the one who gives them an eternal reason to be at peace.

It was because of their sin that the people would be taken away into dreadful captivity; it was because of our gracious God they would return. They would be sent out into a situation that seemed hopeless and he would give them unparalleled hope. In events that are unprecedented in all of history, God would bring his people back to the promised land. God would come and make things right. He would come with divine retribution, he would overthrow those who took God’s people captive. He would restore his chosen people to the chosen land, and the Savior would come just as promised, in that place, from his people, for our salvation. **“Be strong, do**

not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”

There is more here than just a physical restoration. The prophet foretells of the coming Savior, he envisions the coming miracles that the Messiah would perform, while pointing us to the spiritual significance of the Savior’s work. 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.** How can we not think of the many wonderful miracles that are recorded for us in the Gospel? As we read from the Mark chapter 7 and see how the blind mute man was able to see and able to speak at the Lord Jesus’ command we are wowed not only by our Savior’s power, but what it means for our eternity. This grand physical reversal helps us consider just how significant the spiritual blessings that our LORD Jesus would bring for us. **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.** Not just physical but also spiritual sight is a gift from the hand of our God and Savior. There is grand spiritual reversal that our Savior powerfully gives to us. Dead in sin, blind to salvation, we are born again and called to faith. Through the eyes of faith, made clear through the revelation of Holy Scriptures, we know who our God is. We know and believe that our God is abounding in goodness and love. By faith in Christ we have heard who our God is and now we may plainly proclaim the goodness of God in every circumstance of life.

To hearts and lives troubled by living in world overflowing with sin and its consequences God speaks words of overwhelming reassurance to us. We live in a world that is wrought full of sin and the stains and twisted pains that sin leaves behind. Mankind broke God’s perfect creation and day after day we get poked and slashed by the dry broken shards, including our own personal wickedness, disobedience, and sins. We deserve nothing more than to live in constant fear of his wrath, his anger, his judgment, but in his boundless mercy he reassures and comforts. God is not to be blamed as the source of the ills of this world, or discredited because of the existence of human evil, instead he is to be praised as the holy God who in his undeserved love for us continues to be the everlasting source of hope and peace for all those who believe in him. He is our Father who speaks those word of comfort to his children frightened by the darkness of this world; and because it comes from him it makes all the difference. *“Be strong, do not fear, for your God has come, and he will come again”*. Now through the eyes and ears of faith we know that we have been made right with God through Christ. We no longer belong to the darkness, but we belong to him who is goodness and light. And one day he will come again to make all things new and to bring us to peace of heaven.

One day the wrongs of this world will be made right. Pain will be no more. The injustice, the ugly realities of life in this sinful world will cease as Jesus will come again, and the beauty of Paradise will be restored by our crucified, risen, and ascended Savior.

And this abounding hope and peace we have in Jesus refreshes and gives us the reprieve and relief that we need as we tread life's daily path. The hope given in Christ is no mirage or myth, but it is real and wide and deep and eternal. For your God has indeed come. In his abundant love God promised a Savior who would take away our sin and rescue us from a life destined for death and hell and our God and Savior came. Through his perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection we have been given an abundance of hope and joy and eternal peace. And by faith in his holy Word we believe and profess that our ascended Savior will come again to put an end to this wicked world and bring us to a new heaven and new earth. Our God comes to us through his living and abiding Word, and tells us to fear not, to be strong for Jesus will be with us always. He promises that he will be with us, through all the toils and troubles of this life, until that day when we will know the joy and abundant life he gives to us in full.

As his dear children through faith, our God and Father, has filled us with hope and chases away our fears so that we can live out our lives of faith in a way that is uncommon in this world thirsty for hope and peace. Like water gushing forth in *the wilderness* our faith and confidence in Christ will stand out. Even in the midst of difficulty, even as we daily face the horrible curse of sin, we have been gifted lives of hope and joy in Christ Jesus. Overflowing with hope and confidence in Christ we live as light in this world so filled with darkness. We have hope that abounds, joy and peace to spare and to share with others. With the confidence that comes from faith in Christ we can encourage one another in earnest sincerity, ***“Be strong, do not fear, your God has come”***, Christ has come and done marvelous things for us. Hear the good news and speak of his unfailing love to those whose hearts are still filled with fear. This is the hope and peace that overwhelms our fears and overflows into our daily life: *your God has come, and he will come again.*

The most amazing sight, the most breathtaking natural scene, can never fully express the abundant peace that God gives to us through his word... but it's a pretty good start. Let us rejoice in the comforting message that Jesus the Messiah brings that is so vividly displayed in the prophets, beautiful picture language, **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.** Rejoice and be at peace, dear children of God, your Savior has come, and he has done wonderful things. Be strong, do not fear, for your Savior will come again. Amen.