

## **The News Is Bad** **Isaiah 35:1-10**

Our sermon text is Isaiah chapter 35. We'll look at the whole chapter. Before that reading we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, I do ask that you would bless your word to us this morning. I ask that you would help me as I speak. I ask, Father, you would help us all as we listen. May we indeed hear words from God, words direct from the living God. And by the power of your Spirit, we ask Father, that your word would be made effective in our lives, that we indeed would be conformed by your word into the image and the likeness of your only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is in His name that we ask these things. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 35, starting from verse 1: “<sup>1</sup>The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; <sup>2</sup>it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

“<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. <sup>4</sup>Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’

“<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; <sup>6</sup>then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; <sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

“<sup>8</sup>And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. <sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they 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; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Amen. And may God bless His word to us.

Isaiah 35 closes out a section of the book of Isaiah. From Isaiah 36 to Isaiah 39, we drop into a narrative, the narrative concerning King Hezekiah and his dealings with the king of Assyria. And then from Isaiah 40 through to the end of the book, Isaiah chapter 66, we have basically the revelation of God, the revelation of God and His servant, God's challenge to the idols and the non-gods of the world, the non-gods that people worship, to show themselves, to do something.

So as we close out this section of the book of Isaiah, it's good that we close out on a positive note. Isaiah chapter 35 does actually pick up many strands of thought that Isaiah has written already in the previous 34 chapters, and many of those same ideas, many of those same strands of thought, will appear again in Isaiah chapters 40 through to chapter 66.

Isaiah 34, if you remember the last time we looked in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 34 was a chapter that promised judgment—God's judgment upon all the nations, God's judgment upon all those who worship idols, God's judgment upon all those who are the enemies of His people. He will destroy the wicked.

Isaiah chapter 35 speaks of actually the same thing, but from a different viewpoint—God’s promise of salvation. He will save His people. In judging the nations, He will save His church. He will save His living church. He will make His people His own. And in the midst of trouble, their salvation is certain. God will accomplish the things that He wants to do.

Just notice how often it says in our text, “*shall*.” “The desert *shall* rejoice,” verse 1. Verse 2, “It *shall* blossom abundantly.” At the end of verse 2, “They *shall* see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.” Verse 5, “The eyes of the blind *shall* be opened.” Verse 6, “Then *shall* the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” “The grass *shall* become reeds and rushes,” verse 7. “A highway *shall* be there,” verse 8. “The unclean *shall* not pass over it. It *shall* belong to those who walk on the way; they *shall* not go astray.” “<sup>9</sup>No lion *shall* be there, nor *shall* any ravenous beast come up on it; they *shall* not be found there, but the redeemed *shall* walk there. <sup>10</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD *shall* return; everlasting joy *shall* be upon their heads; they *shall* obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing *shall* flee away.”

When you get something repeated like that, what you’re getting is emphasis. What you’re getting is God saying, “This is certain. This is absolutely certain. This is certain because I am going to do these things. I will accomplish it.” It *shall* be done.

Furthermore, we know from the New Testament that as far as the apostles were concerned, not only was it a case of the matter that it shall be done, but it had been done, and it was being done. Always remember, people, we have been saved; we are in the process of being saved; and we will be saved.

The days that Isaiah speaks of are already breaking into this present evil age. The new creation has already begun. The new creation has begun in and through the church of the living God, and yet we still wait for the outright change that comes when that which is old passes away, and that which is new conquers, when Christ Himself returns and basically brings to an end this present evil age.

It’s a chapter which speaks of salvation. It speaks of the joy of God’s people. It speaks of a people who worship with singing, a people who are ransomed—ransomed, redeemed. Looking at verse 9 and 10, verse 9 in the ESV finishes with the line, “but the redeemed shall walk there.” And verse 10 starts with, “and the ransomed of the LORD shall return.” What’s that picture? The picture is a people lost in slavery, a people lost in foreign lands, a people trapped, taken captive, a people who were condemned. And yet a payment is to be made. They’re going to be brought out of that captivity and out of that slavery, and they’re going to be brought back into the kingdom of God.

And yes, we can only believe that those who returned from the captivity in Babylon back to Jerusalem, those who rebuilt the temple—that which we often call the second temple, those who rebuilt Jerusalem in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah—they read prophecies like this, and they were motivated. They were encouraged. They were strengthened. They heard the call and they returned to Jerusalem. But as we’ve already seen in our earlier readings, for example verse 3: “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees,” the apostles and whoever the author of the book of Hebrews was, felt that those things were happening then, after Jesus had come, after the cross, after salvation had been purchased.

And so we can only say that the fulfillment that was seen when the nation of Israel returned from its Babylonian captivity was not the complete fulfillment. It was not the complete revelation. The complete fulfillment comes in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He took upon Himself flesh, He came into this world, He was truly a man, He was the suffering servant, He did redeem the people of God. But even then, the complete fulfillment hasn't come.

The complete fulfillment *is* the end of this evil age. The complete fulfillment *is* the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of these things point forward. We're in that "Way," we're in that highway, the Way of Holiness that leads to Mount Zion, the heavenly Mount Zion that we read about in Hebrews chapter 12. Did you notice from Hebrews chapter 12 just how much it seems that the author of the book of Hebrews was considering the book of Isaiah? He directly quoted Isaiah chapter 35. He spoke about Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. He spoke about our need to worship. He spoke about our redemption. All of those themes are to be found back here in Isaiah chapter 35.

There are three sections in here, or three main points that I want us to look at this morning. The first section is going to be verses 1 to 7, "Glory Revealed." "They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God," there at the end of verse 2. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. The second section we'll look at, or the second point we'll take, comes from verses 8 and 9, "The Way of Holiness." The Highway of Holiness. And finally, the third point we'll take comes out of verse 10, "The Rejoicing of the Ransomed," the worship of those who have been redeemed through the work of God.

So let's have a look at verses 1 to 7. "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad." If you think forward into the New Testament, and you think for example in the gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 1, verse 12, ask yourself the question, What does it say about Jesus after He was baptized? Verse 12: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."

Immediately upon Jesus being baptized, immediately upon the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus in the form of, or like a dove, and that confirming voice from heaven proclaiming, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well-pleased," the Holy Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness—out into that place where there was nothing. Nothing was to be gained.

The wilderness, in Hebrew imagery, the wilderness, that uncultivated place, it says here in the gospel of Mark, was the place of wild animals, beasts. And there Jesus does battle, with whom? The Devil himself, Satan himself. A battle of words, a battle of obedience, a battle of faith. It wasn't a battle of steel against steel, it was a battle of spirit against spirit—a spiritual battle, where He was tested with regards to what? His faithfulness to the word of God.

The very last thing He heard from His Father before being driven out into the wilderness was, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well-pleased." When Satan tested Him, how were the temptations framed? "If you are the Son of God." So God has spoken to Jesus in His baptism, "You are my beloved Son," and Satan comes and says, "Did He really speak the truth there, 'If you are the Son of God'?" You see the testing. Be faithful to the word of God. We know that Jesus was faithful. We know that not only did He survive the testing, He defeated Satan.

From that moment on, all the demons of the earth were under His power. Jesus spoke of the fact that He had bound the strong man. His public ministry commenced from that time on. His obedience to God the Father put Him in a position of power over darkness. “The wilderness,” Isaiah says, “and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with singing.” But look there at the end of verse 2 of Isaiah chapter 35: “They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.”

It’s very easy for us when we read things like the book of Exodus and we think about Moses, I don’t know about you, but it’s very easy to imagine that Moses was this great hero, this man of faith, that Moses had it better than we do, that Moses had a greater revelation of God than we do. After all, Moses had the burning bush. Moses went to the top of the mountain. Moses received the law. Moses asked to see the glory of God.

Turn in the book of Exodus to chapter 33. This is after the people have sinned—the incident with the golden calf, and Moses is interceding. Starting at verse 12. “Moses said to the LORD, ‘See, you say to me, “Bring up this people,” but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, “I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.”’<sup>13</sup> Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.’<sup>14</sup> And he said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’<sup>15</sup> And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.’<sup>16</sup> For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?’

“<sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, ‘This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.’<sup>18</sup> Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’<sup>19</sup> And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name “The LORD.” And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.’<sup>20</sup> But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.’<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,<sup>22</sup> and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.’<sup>23</sup> Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.’”

Moses asked to see the glory of God, and Moses was told, “You can’t. You see my glory, and you die. You see my face, and it’s finished. You can’t behold the glory of God. You can be close by while I pass over, but I’m going to shield you from my glory. You will see me when I’ve passed by.” As Scripture says, Moses saw the back parts of God. And yet Isaiah promises that there is a day coming when “They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.”

Just move on to Isaiah chapter 40. We’ll start reading there at verse 1: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.<sup>3</sup> A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’”

What's being spoken of there? Well, we should know from our Old Testaments that what's being spoken of there is the coming of the Lord Jesus Himself. When John the Baptist appeared preaching in the wilderness, what passage did he base his preaching on? Well, if we turned into the gospels, for example to Luke chapter 3, John the Baptist quotes the book of Isaiah and says, "He's coming. The glory of the Lord is coming. The glory of the Lord is to be revealed." In whom? In what person? In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one of whom John said, "I'm not even fit to tie up His shoe laces. I'm not fit to be His lowest slave." He's the one in whom the glory of the Lord is revealed.

In your New Testaments, turn to the gospel of John, chapter 1. We'll start reading at verse 14: "14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.") 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word. The Word who was with God, the Word who was God—He dwelt among us. We saw His glory.

Stay in the gospel of John and flip forward to John chapter 2. John chapter 2, verse 11. Jesus has just transformed water into wine, and the apostle John writes: "11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

What Moses could not see, we, the people of God through Christ, we have seen. What Moses could not have, we have. The glory of God has been revealed to us in the face of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this glory that's spoken of in Isaiah 35, that is a transforming glory that changes things, that changes deserts into gardens, that changes wildernesses into cultivated places—this glory transforms people. It's a glory that changes people.

Jesus came and revealed the glory of God, and "from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Now that's not to say the law was not either gracious or true. The law is both gracious and true. But comparatively speaking, it's like the difference between a light bulb and the sunshine. They both give light, and the only reason you know what light is, is you get light from the sunshine. But a light bulb is basically just sunshine that's been stored and released.

Think of it. Where do we get power from? Burning coal. Coal is plant matter, compressed. Plants live by sunshine. So we take the coal, we burn the coal, we generate electricity, we get light from a light bulb by plugging that light bulb into electricity. It's the same stuff—it's light. But compared to the sunshine, it's nothing—absolutely nothing.

You know, you look at the cricket stadiums with their night lighting. In the night, turn those lights on and it's amazing. You know, from the Blue Mountains, you can see the Sydney cricket ground at night when the lights are on. The sun comes up, leave those lights on, you don't even know they're on. They can't be seen. It's almost as though they don't exist. You've actually got to go to the stadium and look up at the lights to see that someone left the switch on.

This light that is the glory of God being revealed to humanity is a transforming light, and it transforms the people of God into a holy people—a people who love the Lord Jesus, a people who love God Himself. That highway that's called the Way of Holiness that leads the saints to the Lord, it says that "the unclean shall not pass over it."

Now what's Isaiah been preaching to the people, all through? We are unclean. We are undone. We are a sinful people. We've got nothing that we need before God. We don't belong in the presence of God. And yet, what's the promise there in Isaiah 35? There's going to be highway and it's going to be called the Way of Holiness, and no one who's unclean will pass over it.

Transformed by the glory of God—what Moses longed for. And Jesus said, "Moses wrote of me. The Scriptures testify of me." What Moses longed for, we get. We behold the glory of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet, though we've beheld the glory of God, this glory is still yet in the future. Just turn to the book of Romans, chapter 8. And we'll read from verse 18:

"<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

What's the whole of creation waiting for? The revelation of glory. So it's Now, Not yet. It's happening, but it's yet to happen. It's here, but it's yet to come to us. These things become real through the eyes of faith. These things become true through the blessing of light, given by God. You don't understand these things, you don't appreciate these things, you don't worship God unless you've been given life from God. You cannot see the kingdom of heaven unless you've been born again, or born from above. To understand these things, our eyes must be opened by God. And for people to understand our preaching, our eyes must be opened by God.

Just turn back into Isaiah chapter 35, verses 3 and 4. Isaiah says, "<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. <sup>4</sup>Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.'" Isaiah's speaking to the faithful people of Judah. They must have been a remnant, a faithful believing remnant, and Isaiah's saying, "Hard times are coming. Trust in the Lord. These promises are there for anyone who will take hold of them."

Once again, we know that the promises are fulfilled in Christ, and yet we, God's people in this day and age, still await the fulfillment. Just as Isaiah had to speak comfort and encouragement to God's people in the city of Judah before the Babylonian captivity, Scripture speaks comfort to us. You see, we're still in this world, aren't we? We still live in this present evil age. We're still fighting the same battles. We're still fighting against idolatry. The church still, sadly, has many false teachers and false prophets.

Looking at verses 5 and 6: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; <sup>6</sup>then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy." The references in Scripture to these things are numerous. For example, consider Matthew 11,

when John the Baptist sent his question to Jesus, “Do we wait for another? Are you the coming one, or do we wait for another?” Verse 4: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

We see a fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus didn’t just conduct those healings, or do those healings because He cared. Surely He cared. Surely He did them from compassion. He did those things because those things were pointers back into the Scripture, back into the word of God. When Jesus did those things, we’re supposed to be able to say, “You see, the promises,” for example in Isaiah 35, “they’ve been fulfilled.” They’re being fulfilled upon the earth.

God has sent His Saviour, God is answering His word, God is fulfilling His promises, God is calling His people. Verse 6 tells us that the lame man shall leap like a deer. It’s almost exactly the same phrase we get in the book of Acts, chapter 3, verse 8, when the Apostle Peter performed the healing of the lame man who was begging by the temple gate. He was healed, and it says in Acts that he leapt like a deer. He’d been healed, and he leapt like a deer.

There we see that the promises of God continue to be fulfilled in this present evil age, through what? Through the preaching of the gospel, through His church, through His obedient people. And so the church continues to fulfill the mission that Christ was the fulfillment of. Jesus did the things that had to be done. He lived that perfect and righteous life in the sight of God, and He redeemed a people for His Father; yet, there’s more to be done. We still live in this present evil age.

Back in Isaiah chapter 35, looking at verses 8 to 9—a highway. “<sup>8</sup> And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. <sup>9</sup> No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.”

Well first of all, I should tell you there is an alternate translation. I don’t know what versions of the Bible you’re reading. “Even if they are fools, they shall not go astray” could also possibly read, “If they are fools, they shall not wander in it.” So it’s either saying that a converted fool will be safe on the highway; or it’s saying that no fool will ever get on the highway. Either way, it’s the promise of God. I like the one that we’ve got. I think the New King James also agrees with it. “Even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.”

You see, you hear the promise there for those walking on this highway. Even the weakest, even the most feeble—even the weakest and most feeble, you shall get to your destination. You shall get there. Why? Because the Lord God intends you to get there. He’s going to make you get there. He’s not going to allow you to fail. You know, never forget the simple illustration of the little boy walking on the side of a busy road, holding his father’s hand. Is he safe because he’s holding his father’s hand, or is he safe because his father holds *his* hand? He’s safe because his father holds his hand. And that’s us. We’re held in the hand of God. We’re supported along the way. No matter what comes up against God’s people, we cannot be brought down. We’re maintained and we’re strengthened in this time of testing.

Let's have a look at a few more thoughts about this highway, or the Way. Turn back to Isaiah chapter 11. In Isaiah chapter 11, we get the proclamation concerning the shoot from the stump of Jesse. And we know that this is a proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one upon whom the Spirit rests. But look at verse 16. Now it names a nation there, and I'm saying that this is not necessarily to be taken literally: "And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt."

And you say, "Okay, why do you say not to take this literally?" Well, think of the book of Exodus—and there's a reference there to the book of Exodus—"as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt." Did they literally walk on a highway? No. The Scripture calls it the wanderings. They wandered through the desert. They followed a cloud. Wherever they were taken in the wilderness by the cloud, that's where they went. But it's the highway. How could it be the highway, then, as they come up from the land of Egypt? It's the highway because God would not let them be lost. It's the highway because God was with them. It's the highway because God came to them and brought them to Himself.

"There will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people"—of God's people—"as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt." So the result of the one who is the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the one upon whom the Holy Spirit abides, is that God's people will be drawn back to God by means of a highway, the same as God's people were drawn to the Promised Land from Egypt in the days of Moses.

Keep reading on into Isaiah 12. <sup>1</sup> "You will say in that day: 'I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. <sup>2</sup> 'Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.' <sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." People will be walking along a highway, and that highway is the highway that people walk along who have been called back into the presence of God.

We've already looked at Isaiah chapter 40 once. Look at it again. Notice something. This voice that cries in the wilderness, this voice that we know was John the Baptist, verse 3: "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'"

God, coming to His people in the wilderness, and He comes via what? A highway—a highway through the desert to whom? To His very own people. And His very own people are going to be called, and they're going to be made to follow a highway back into the city of God.

Stay in the book of Isaiah, and move forward two chapters to Isaiah chapter 42, and drop down to verse 16. Isaiah 42:16: "And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them." "Way" and "paths"—it's the same word that's here in the Way of Holiness, back in Isaiah chapter 35, verse 8. Not the word for "highway," but it says, "A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness."



That word “way”—“I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know. I will turn the darkness before them into light.” And where it says, “in paths,” that’s that same word “way”—God drawing His people to Him. That’s why I think that the reference back in Isaiah 35, verse 8—“even if they are fools, they shall not go astray”—I think that’s right. I think the way it’s translated is basically right. It’s saying that those who are fools will be given wisdom; those who are blind will be given sight; those who are in darkness will be given light. “The rough places become level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them,” it says in Isaiah 42.

Now just turn quickly forward in your Bible to the book of Acts, and we’ll look just at a couple of references. Acts chapter 9, starting at verse 1: “But Saul”—this is the Saul who becomes the Apostle Paul—“still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

Isn’t it interesting? Already there in the very early days of the church, what did the people call themselves? Well they weren’t at that time calling themselves the Church of Jerusalem, the Baptist Church, or whatever it might be. They weren’t using any titles like that. What were they saying they’re in? “I’m in the Way.” *The Way*. Where did they get that idea from? Go back into the book of Isaiah. They’re in the Way, the Highway of Holiness, the way that God draws His people to Himself.

Stay in the book of Acts and move on to Acts chapter 24. Now Paul is here testifying before Felix at Caesarea, one of his trials. Look at how he describes being a Christian. Verse 14: “‘But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, <sup>15</sup> having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. <sup>16</sup> So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. <sup>17</sup> Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. <sup>18</sup> While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—<sup>19</sup> they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. <sup>20</sup> Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, <sup>21</sup> other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’” <sup>22</sup> But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, ‘When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.’”

He doesn’t say he’s in the church, he doesn’t say he’s in the gathering of the saints—and I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with using words like “the church.” He doesn’t say he’s part of a sect. He doesn’t say that he’s part of the Christian Synagogue. What does Paul call this religion that he belongs to? The Way—the Way, as though that explains everything. That’s all that needs to be said.

“I am a person who is of the Way. I am a person who is in the Way.” Why? Well he says so, doesn’t he—he says, “You’ll find it laid down in the Law and written in the prophets,” a prophet being Isaiah. And Isaiah’s saying to us in Isaiah 35, verse 8, “A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.”

Now Scripture says to us that a leopard cannot change its spots. In that reference to saying a leopard cannot its spots, the context specifically tells us that God is saying to His people, “You can’t change your wickedness. You can’t cleanse yourself of your sins.” And yet here we’re told that those who walk on the Way—well, they won’t be unclean; they’ll be holy. The unclean will not pass over it.

So you ask yourself the question, “Okay. How is it then that people who are unclean become clean so that they get to walk in the Way of Holiness? How is that fools—“even if they are fools, they shall not go astray”—get to become wise enough to walk in the Way? How can this be? After all, is there not a separation between God and man. Have not our sins set us at a distance from God? Is not humanity lost and in bondage and in slavery, and lost in its sinfulness? How is it, then, that sinners get to walk in the way called the Way of Holiness?

The Apostle Paul was himself, a murderer, a false accuser. Remember he stood by as Stephen was stoned, and if we went back into the book of Acts and worked all that out, the Apostle Paul was probably the one who was accusing Stephen. Stephen was accused before the council for preaching in a certain synagogue, and if you work it out, that synagogue was most likely the synagogue that was the home synagogue of Paul himself.

So Stephen was accused for preaching the resurrection in a synagogue. He was taken before the council, there he was sentenced to be stoned to death, and the Apostle Paul oversaw his killing. Even the Apostle Paul gets to walk in the Way. How can that be?

That leads us to my third point. “The redeemed shall walk there,” the very last line of verse 9, and the very first line of verse 10, “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing.” These people who are trapped in their sins, these people who are separated from God by their wickedness, they’re redeemed and they’re ransomed. They’re drawn back from slavery, they’re purchased back by whom? By the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Scripture loves to tell us that we are the redeemed people of God, that we are the people set free from slavery.

Starting off, let’s look first of all in the gospel of Mark, in chapter 10. Now what’s happened here is that the mother of John and James has just asked that they get the places of eminence in Jesus’ kingdom. If you remember, Jesus basically says to them, “Do you really understand what you’re asking for? Do you really think you can do what I’m going to do?” And they said, “Yes, we can.” Jesus said, “Look, you are going to in a way, because you’re going to die for faithfulness to God.” But let’s read on, from Mark chapter 10, verse 42:

“<sup>42</sup> And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

“To give his life as a ransom for many.” How is it that the unclean and the fools suddenly become clean and cease to be fools? They’re ransomed. They’re purchased back out of slavery. They’re set free from their captivity. By what? By the offering of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Move on to Hebrews chapter 9. We'll start at verse 11: "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

"An eternal redemption." Redemption is another word for ransoming, for purchasing people back from captivity. How is that we get to enter into the holy place? Let's keep reading. Verse 13: "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

How is it that the unclean get to walk on the highway that God comes to His people by? How is it that the fools get to walk on the way that leads them back to the city of Zion and into the eternal kingdom of God, where they rejoice with singing? How is it? Because they've been ransomed by the blood of Christ. Their consciences have been purified from dead works to serve the living God.

The fulfillment of the things that Isaiah is speaking of can only be in and through and by the work of God Himself, in and through and by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ—that one who is truly God and truly man. For people to walk in the way of God, for people to be able to come to Zion with singing and rejoicing, they come only because they have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. Christ offered up His blood. The blood is a symbol for His life.

I'm not saying that His blood is magic, that you have to get touched by a spot of His blood. You know, the Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass is just nonsense and rubbish—the idea that wine actually somehow or other becomes blood, and then a priest consumes that blood on your behalf. Because in a Roman Catholic mass, the people don't get to participate in the whole communion meal. All they get is a wafer, representing the bread. And it's nonsense. It's evil nonsense.

The blood's not a magic thing; it's not a magic trick. This is something that God has done, and we partake of it through faith in Christ. God applies the effective work of Jesus Christ by the power of His Holy Spirit, through faith. You see, we've got nothing. We don't even have faith. Scripture tells us that faith is a gift of God. God grants faith to those whom He intends to save.

God awakens faith in the people He wants to draw to Himself. They hear the call of the gospel through the preaching of the word, and they respond with faith. Why? Because God gave them life. God made them alive. They are born again. There's a book, "How to be Born Again." I think it's "Ten Steps to Being Born Again." Rubbish. It's just nonsense.

I'll tell you how a person is born again. They're born again when the sovereign Lord of all creation grants life. Then they're born again. Then they're born into the kingdom of God. Then they're given life, their consciences are cleansed from dead works, and they serve the living God and they're set on a way—it's called a highway. They're set on a way, the Way of Holiness, and that way is guaranteed. It leads to the eternal city, the presence of God, where we behold whom? The Lord Jesus Christ.

What's the promise in the book of Revelation when it says this eternal city? And let's not bother arguing literal, figurative, whatever. It says in this eternal city, you won't need the sun, and you won't need the moon, and you won't need the stars. Why? Because you get to look upon the face of the Lamb. You get to look upon the very glory of God. You receive the image of the glory of God.

That thing that Moses longed for, we get it. That thing that Moses wished he could have, but couldn't because it would have killed him, we get it, and for us it's life. Why? Because we've been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and we've been given life in the presence of our God. We're promised eternal life in the city, the eternal Zion, in the presence of the saints, where we behold the Lamb.

What was one of the blessings in the Old Testament times? "May God be gracious to you and bless you and make His face to shine upon you." What's the fulfillment? We behold the face of the Lamb, our God, that one who is truly God and truly man. We behold the face of the Lamb. I spoke earlier of a light bulb being nothing as compared to the sunshine. And I think the book of Revelation is telling us that the sunshine is nothing as compared to the glory of God, as revealed in the Lamb—the glory of God revealed in the Lamb.

We who are in Christ are the most blessed of all people. You feel like a fool? Do you acknowledge yourself to be a fool? Don't fear. Don't trouble yourself. If God has set you in the way, you will get into that city of Zion. You will continue in the way. You will continue and you will be in the eternal city. You think you might have been blind? Don't worry. He's going to make it all light before you, and around you. You think you're lame? Don't worry. He smooths out the way before us. The world can't destroy this. This is the unbreakable faith of the saints of the living God. The world can't take this away from true saints. The world can't even touch this. We walk in the midst of trouble. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." We are the most blessed of all people.

The world is filled with people who are just drifting. They just drift from one thing to the next. Life is nothing other than working for the weekend, and on the weekend, there's nothing other than whatever they do to take their mind off reality—drunkenness, drugs, lust, you name it, whether it's some kind of sports, whatever, work, work, work, work, work—in order to dull the mind so I don't have to think about the fact that time is passing me by, and in the end, I have to face eternity.

You know, we talk about the big questions: Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? And they're the questions no one in the world wants to ask. They just blind themselves and destroy themselves with foolishness and lust; destroy themselves with computer games and nonsense entertainment; destroy themselves in any way they can, rather than face up to the reality that they so desperately need God, and they so desperately need salvation and a purpose.

My friends, here's our purpose: Walk in the Way of Holiness. Keep moving ever closer to that final eternal consummation. Along the way, we will be used, one way or another. We will be used by God for His glory. Our very presence in the world as people who are called and set apart is a testimony against the world. It's a testimony against the world.

That's why it is so important that Christians practice holiness, that Christians strive for righteousness—not in any legalistic sense. Don't come looking for a rulebook—tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. We're not Pharisees. We're people who are born again by the Spirit of God. We are people who are here in this earth to show forth the glory and the goodness of our Saviour. That's why we live a life that's set apart. That's why we're called to holiness. We're to reflect the character of our God. And we'll walk in this Way of Holiness.

My friends, the promises of God are so great and so precious. The promises of God are so incredibly wonderful. I run out of words trying to describe to you how good God is to His people. Consider what we deserve. Consider what we are, in and of ourselves. We couldn't be punished enough for our sins. We couldn't pay the price that has to be paid. There's a line in Psalm 38, "My sins like a burden have gone over my head; they are too heavy for me."

We couldn't pay the debt that we owe, and yet we're given these beautiful and glorious and precious promises in Scripture that we're going to be set in a way. And don't worry, once you're in that way, you're going to get there. I don't want to call it a conveyer belt, because that would give the impression that it's easy, but God is conveying us. He is moving us forward. He is moving us on and into His kingdom.

My friends, there's a reason that it says "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing." There's a reason God's people sing. There's a reason we sing songs of worship. We're the only people that do sing songs of worship, or I should say, we're the only people that sing songs of the one object that is worthy to be worshiped. We worship the living God. And there's something fitting in using our voices to sing songs about the goodness of God, about the goodness and the glory of God, and about His mercy to us.

My friends, as the redeemed and the ransomed of the Lord, as the people who walk in the way, we should be a rejoicing people, a people of gladness and joy. For we know that though we live in this present evil age, sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you for the goodness of your word. We thank you for the goodness of God. We thank you and praise you, Father, that you are so good to your people, that you love us with steadfast love, with covenantal love, that you love us so much that though we be blind, though we be fools, though we be unclean, those upon whom you have set your heart, you clean them. Those upon whom you have set your heart, you give the gift of life and light and sight. Those upon whom you have set your heart, you set them in the way.

Father, I pray that you would help us to be in that way. Help us to walk in the way. Help us to be obedient in all things, that we would come to that final day where we behold the Lamb in His glory, where we see His face, and in the glory of His face, the lights of the heavens seem as nothing. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.