

SERMON SERIES: AN ADVENT SONG OF ASCENTS

SERMON TOPIC: THE LORD'S HIGHWAY

SERMON TEXT: ISAIAH 35:1-10

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY

¹The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, ²it 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. ³Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴say 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." ⁵Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶Then 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. ⁷The 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. ⁸And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. ⁹No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, ¹⁰and those the Lord has rescued 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.

PROLOGUE

- Advent is about waiting on the coming of the Christ, and the theme for Aldersgate as we make the ascent on the mountain of God together.
- Last week, we are encouraged to stand as signals to guide people around us on this journey of Ascent towards God.
- This week, we learn about 'The Way' that God is leading us on – it is:
 - A way of holiness, and the Lord's Highway.
 - A path where the redeemed people walk with the Lord to Zion, a place where God dwells with His people.
- We will explore in Isaiah 35:
 - When was this text written?
 - What was happening at that time?
 - Who are the characters involved?
 - Where is the Lord's Highway, and where will it bring us to?
 - How will Isaiah's prophecy be fulfilled?
- With all these questions answered, we will then see how it can be applied in our lives.

A. ISAIAH 35 – SOCIAL SETTING

- Prophecies of promise will be fulfilled, it is only a matter how it will be fulfilled.
 - What did the Jews understand about this prophecy in Isaiah 35 when Isaiah said it to them?
 - Isaiah is inviting the people of God on a journey, on the Lord's Highway,:
 - Heading from the desert to Zion, and

- Ascends from the dry plains, up on the mountain of God.
- Zion is a place where God is worshipped and a hope that His people will dwell there.
 - Where there will be a complete restoration of weakness to strength, bareness to splendour, sickness to life.
- A desert is hot, dry and inhospitable – example of Death Valley example.
 - Even in harshest of conditions, the Death Valley experiences a Super Bloom once a decade, where it will be covered by wildflowers.
 - Deserts can burst forth with flowers, and blossom when the conditions are right – a great illustration of life coming forth from seeming death.
- Isaiah was written during a time when the people of God were facing spiritual dryness and wilderness.



- At that time, the Assyrian army defeated and conquered northern Israel, and could have easily overrun Judah.
 - However, Judah was spared from the fate of captivity (Isaiah 37:36-39)
 - King Hezekiah made a terrible mistake and tried to form an alliance with the Babylonians, another rising power, seemingly capable of opposing the Assyrian forces (Isaiah 39:3-4).
 - Isaiah reprimanded and reminded King Hezekiah that it was the wrong thing to do (Isaiah 39:5-7)
 - King Hezekiah replied selfishly that It was for a temporary peace only during his lifetime (Isaiah 39:8) – he did not consider the future of Israel.
 - Subsequently, the consequences fell on the whole of Israel, as the Babylonians continued their rise in power, and exiled the Jews.

B. ISAIAH 35 – STRUCTURE

- The book of Isaiah was written in two parts:

<u>Isaiah</u>		
Chapters	1 – 39	40 – 66
Date	8 th cen. BC	6 th cen. BC
Audience	A people about to face judgment of Assyria	A people already in exile in Babylon

- Part 1: Chapters 1-39.
 - Written during the time when the northern Israel had fallen to the Assyrian forces, and Judah was battling still, and ultimately delivered by God.
 - Written to a people who were about to face the judgement of God because they had turned away from God.
 - The prophecies recorded here were about the people about to be captured by Assyria and Babylon.
- After King Hezekiah brokered the temporary peace with Babylon, the prophecies spoke of the people already being captured and in exile.
- Part 2: Chapters 40-66.
 - Written for Jews that were in exile in Babylon, when the people had already received judgement.
 - Scholars called it the Second Isaiah, and the author unknown.
 - God could have given the prophet Isaiah a word for the people, to be spoken 200 years later.
 - The followers of Isaiah, who had survived the exile, upon being inspired by the Holy Spirit, could have continued in the Isaiah prophesy.

C. ISAIAH 35 – THE LORD’S HIGHWAY

- Judah had thought that they were on the Lord’s Highway when they found temporary peace in Isaiah 39, but it is not the same Highway as mentioned in Isaiah 35.
- In Isaiah 43:19, in the time of exile (6th century B.C.), there was a repeat of the Lord’s Highway as described in Isaiah 35:6 (8th century B.C.).
- The Lord’s Highway is:
 - More than the victory of Judah,
 - Beyond the hope of the exiled Jews,
 - About the coming of a true of righteous King.
 - Isaiah 35 is a Messianic prophecy.
 - The prophecy in Isaiah 35 is partly fulfilled in the advent – the birth of Jesus Christ.
- In the Old Testament, the people of God is always on a journey.
 - From Egypt to the Promised Land → Into exile → Back into the Promised Land.
 - Despite being led back into the Promised Land, the people still hungered for a Messiah.

- o There was a long period of silence from God between the Old and New Testament, but the people waited, until Jesus came and fulfilled the prophecy.
- Similarly, we are invited on a journey.
 - o In the Advent season, we anticipate the arrival of Jesus into our dry and barren deserts, to turn them into field of flowers.
- In Matthew 11:4-5, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 35:5-6.
 - o There is a restoration of all people, not just for the Jews
 - o Jesus made some alterations to Isaiah 35 in His quote
 - He excluded the mute, but included the lepers and the dead.
 - Miraculous healings are promised in both texts, but the raising of the dead is far exceeding what Isaiah prophesied.
 - Raising of the dead = blooming of the wasteland, Jesus wants to offer us true life, and that is Eternal Life.
- In Matthew 25:31-33, 46,
 - o Jesus talked about His Second Coming.
 - o It is the final consummation of the Isaiah 35 prophesy.
 - o V46 is the end of the Lord's Highway.
 - o Those who walked in the way of the Lord will enter Zion.
 - o Isaiah 35 points beyond its own time, to the true Advent – the Second Coming of Christ.
- This Advent, as we celebrate the Lord's First Coming, let us be reminded that the First Advent points to the Second Advent = His Second Coming, when Jesus returns as a glorious King.
- Isaiah 35 also reveals to us about who can enter/walk on the Lord's Highway.
 - o People who walk with God and with other pilgrims (v8).
 - o Only the redeemed, those whom God has rescued (v9-10)
 - o Those who anchor and abide in Him will enter Zion.

D. SUPER BLOOM IN DEATH VALLEY – SEEDS OF OUR HEARTS

- Seeds of the desert plants can survive years, buried deep in the ground, in dormancy.
- They are encapsulated by a protective coating, to ensure sprouting only when the conditions are optimal for the survival of the plants.
- The continuous falling of rain not just brings water to the seeds, it soaks and softens the coating of the seeds, enabling them to sprout from within the protective coating.
- The continuous and prolonged drenching of the desert grounds by the rain, also means that the plants can sprout safely and not be scorched to death by the heat of the desert.
- Those who continually walk with God, are like these seeds.
- The walk with God will continually condition the hearts, so that the seeds of the hearts sprouts and bloom in abundance and surety, experiencing the joy of the Lord's Highway.
- You must accept the rescue and redemption found in Jesus, in order to walk on the Lord's Highway.
- The Way is a journey:
 - o Of continued abiding in God's word and presence.
 - o An ascent to the mountain of the Lord.
 - o Of life in Jesus.

E. ISAIAH 35 - APPLICATION**1. GOD IS NOT DONE YET (until Jesus' second coming)**

- If you think you have it all in life, the Scripture prompts you to look to the Lord's Highway (a Christian life) for:
 - A greater joy,
 - A complete restoration of everything.
- Let us not look to and settling on the temporary comforts and peace of this life.
 - Even though Hezekiah had the privilege of hearing from God, but he settled on the temporary goods of this life.
- Travelling on God's Highway promises better returns and rewards beyond our possible imagination.
- This does not mean we should stop aspiring for betterment in this world, *but it should not crowd out our desire to walk on the Lord's Highway.*
- We should subordinate the good of this life, for the ultimate good:
 - To find the favour of God, by doing what He wants and walking where He wants us to go.
- The down and out are promised redemption if they trust in God and continue to walk with Him on the Way.

2. BE STRONG. DO NOT FEAR. GOD WILL COME! (V4)

- In the prophecy, we are assured that Jesus will come and meet all our needs. He promises:
 - True redemption.
 - Songs of joy in our hearts.
 - To wipe away our sorrows and sighs.
- Is there anything in your life that you feel is heading to a dead end, experiencing an estranged relationship, or facing an oppression?

3. THE LORD'S HIGHWAY IS A JOURNEY

- God invites all of us to be on this journey, which is made better when travelling with a companion.
- The Lord's Highway = the way of holiness.
- Let us be intentional and purposeful, in our commitment to walking with companions, and mentors.
- Observing the journey of other pilgrim can be an encouragement for our journey.
- Have you had a mentor?
- Would you help someone you see in need in your walk on the Lord's Highway?

F. IN CLOSING

- In this season of advent, as we wait for Jesus' First Coming on Christmas day, let us remember that we are on this journey on the Lord's Highway, as a community.
- The Lord's Highway is the way:
 - For the redeemed and the rescued people of Jesus.
 - Is where the people of God, commit to walk with Him, to be anchored in His word and to abide in His presence
- Our destination is in the eternity:
 - God is not done with our lives.
 - There's much to give Him and to contribute.

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- o Take time and ask God about where is this highway leading us to, in our lives.
 - o There is still a long road ahead, regardless of our age.
 - As the Lord's Highway is a journey for all of God's people:
 - o Let us commit to journey with other people, and
 - o Reach out to other people who needs help and encouragement on the way.