

Good News of Great Joy

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Isaiah 35.1-10

Prepared by James Wilson
jim@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x112

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

What, if anything, causes you to have doubts about your faith? Why do you think people feel they should never doubt their faith?

II. Introduction

Waiting is difficult. John the Baptist prepared the way before the Messiah by calling people to turn from everything that would prevent them from turning to the Kingdom of God. But, when put into prison by Herod Antipas, he began to do more than wait. He began to doubt that the One he was waiting for had actually shown up. As we live in the “in-between” time of the Messiah’s first arrival and his return to establish a new earth over which he reigns, we can’t avoid doubt, discouragement, and disappointment. How can we live, and wait, and experience true joy as we do?

III. Study the Text –Read Matthew 11.2-11

1) John the Baptist is in prison, his expectations seem to be going unmet, and he begins to doubt whether Jesus is really the Messiah. Look at verses 4 through 6. How does Jesus respond to John’s question “are you the one?” Compare his words to those of Isaiah 35:6.

2) Jesus invites John to see beyond his circumstances (imprisonment and threat of death) to the vision of Isaiah regarding the future reign of the Messiah. Jesus also refers to the things he has been doing such as healing the blind, lame, lepers, etc. Do you think John would be able to put these together and formulate a clearer picture of Jesus as the promised Messiah? If so, how would this help him to 1) deal with his doubts, and 2) gain a sense of hope, gladness, and joy?

IV. Study the Text –Read Isaiah 35.1-10

1) Look over verses 1 and 2. How far reaching is the transformation of creation that is envisioned here?

Note: Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon are all very fertile regions known for their natural fertility, ordered cultivation, and innate beauty. This lushness (glory of Lebanon) will be given to the parched desert land.

2) Verse 1 begins with the vision of the parched land being transformed. Verse 2 ends with the transformed creation (and people living in it) “seeing” the glory of the Lord and splendor of God. How would you define “glory” and “splendor” as they are used here?

Note: The idea of God’s glory has to do with the Hebrew word that translates as “weight” or “weightiness.” It refers to inherent worth, influence, power, resource, and ability. God’s glory is

God's inherent value and weightiness of worth. God's splendor is the outward dimension of God's majesty and dignity.

- 3) Verses 3 and 4 continue to describe God's activity. How is God's "coming with vengeance and divine retribution" critical to the transformation of the world envisioned in this passage?
- 4) How do verses 5 through 7 further the description of the new, transformed world that is to come?
- 5) Verses 8 through 10 envision a highway called the Way of Holiness. How do the rest of verse 8 through the beginning of verse 10 define what "holiness" means? Who will be on that "Way?"
- 6) What does it mean to be "redeemed" and "ransomed" of the Lord?
- 7) When the redeemed/ransomed people enter into Zion (here it represents the dwelling place of God) in this re-created world, what will they experience? Define "joy."

Note: In the Hebrew language, the phrase "gladness and joy will overtake them" can also be translated "they will overtake gladness and joy." Do you ever feel as though your experience of joy and gladness is slightly illusive? That is, do you experience feelings of gladness and joy that are marred by the experience of sorrow and "sighing" and just beyond full realization? If so, this idea that one day God's redeemed and ransomed will overtake gladness and joy should resonate with you. Our gladness and joy are – in this world – tainted by sorrow and sighing. When the Messiah arrives to transform this world, we will overtake that which was always just out of reach. Gladness and joy will be caught and possessed.

V. Pray It – Reflection and Responding in Prayer

- 1) Re-visit the question about your doubts: What things cause you to have doubts about your faith? What steps can you take to work through those doubts? To take a closer look at Jesus? To see beyond the causes of doubt to the hope of God's ultimate triumphant kingdom?
- 2) When doubts occur it is important to remember that God is the one who continues to act toward us – God is your redeemer, God has ransomed you, God's joy will overtake you. In other words, God does not give up on you when you doubt.

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duck wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy (perhaps the desire for true gladness and joy in the context of Isaiah 35), the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world... Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing... I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country which I shall not find till after death (or when the Messiah arrives again)... I must make the main objective of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same.

C. S. Lewis in Mere Christianity Book III, Chapter 10