Isaiah 35:4 Tell those with fearful heart: Be strong. Do not be afraid. Look! Your God will come with vengeance. With God’s own retribution, he will come to save you.

Prophecies are always so interesting to contemplate and deal with. I say that because it is important, when you wrestle with a prophecy, to make sure you’ve got the components of the prophecy in the right place. What do I mean?

The first thing of importance is to grasp the types of prophecy there are in the Scriptures. The most helpful thing I remember being taught at the Seminary was to consider prophecy like the peaks of a mountain range. You are standing on the peak of a mountain and you are looking out across the mountain range at the other peaks. The valleys and distance you are overlooking represent time and the peaks represent a particular time, obviously important because the prophecy points it out. With that in mind then know that the types of prophecy are: Rectilinear, Typical and Intermdiate.

Rectilinear prophecy is where a specific thing is mentioned and that thing has its only fulfillment in Jesus. Examples of this type of prophecy can be found in Psalm 22. Psalm 22 starts: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”** Just hearing those words and knowing the history of Jesus takes you right to the cross of Jesus where those words were uttered by Jesus. Or in verse 18 Psalm 22 speaks of the dividing of clothes by the casting of lots. Again, we see that fulfillment in the cross of Jesus as the Roman soldiers do exactly what was foreseen some one thousand years beforehand. Needless to say there are hundreds of other examples of rectilinear prophecy found in Scripture.

Typical prophecy is where an event or a person refers to or points out the life of Jesus. The key here is to realize that the Messiah is being referred to by a type, a circumstance or situation that points to Jesus. For instance Deuteronomy speaks of Moses as a prophet and then proclaims **“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brother Israelites. Listen to him.”** Jesus was being pointed out as the great prophet yet to come. Or you can talk of Ahithophel betraying David and how that foreshadowed Judas betraying Jesus. How about the High Priest being the intercessor of the people and Jesus interceding for our sins. The people freed from Egyptian slavery and Jesus freeing us from the slavery of sin. The Passover lamb slain and the blood saving, fulfilled in Jesus dying and his blood shed for your sins. These things are typical prophecies and again there are hundreds of them to be found.

The final type is what is called intermediate prophecy. That’s where something is foretold and it has a partial fulfillment in a portion of history and a complete fulfillment in and through Jesus. What is most interesting in this kind of prophecy is that in Jesus you can have an initial spiritual fulfillment in Jesus and then a real physical fulfillment later on. Instances of that would be Solomon building the Temple of the Lord, Jesus establishing the Holy Christian Church, and the New Jerusalem of heaven for eternity. Or the glory of the Lord reflected in the face of Moses, the glory of the transfigured Jesus, and certainly the glory of the returning Jesus to end this world. How about our words today that speak of waters in the desert, or springs and pools of water, Jesus coming and being the water of life to souls in the desert of unbelief and finally the new and perfect world given by God when Jesus returns again and purges all the evil and the bad from this world.

Now here is the kicker. You can actually have a prophecy that contains all three types! That’s what makes understanding prophecy so challenging and why the Jews had such a hard time grasping what the Messiah they were promised, was going to be like. They were not able to distinguish the prophecies because of their unbelief and it clearly distorted their faith. Let’s jump in and contemplate our words for today. Our theme will be: **YOUR GOD WILL SAVE!**

What truthful words to start. **“Tell those with fearful heart.”** The fearful of heart are those who look about this world and say, “Boy, this world is a tough place.” Sin abounds. It seems as though God is no longer in control. And even when we look at our own lives and ways we see our disobedience to God, we see the doubt, the lack of love, the callousness we have toward the true treasure of the Lord. In truth, half the time we aren’t even sure what the treasure of God is. All of these things cause us to fear. “What will be? What will happen? Lord, where are you? How can I get by?”

The Lord addresses us through his prophet with these words. The Lord says that these words are actually directly for us. That tells us to listen, but as our Epistle reading reminds us, not just to listen but to put into practice the wisdom of the Lord. And what wonderful opening words from the Lord: **“Be strong.”**

You know, if I am going to be strong, it is not me, it is not my human side that is going to help. I am going to need the Lord. I am going to need his wisdom, promises, hopes, encouragement and guidance. I am going to surround myself with God’s truth and marvel, not imagined, but the truth and marvel of God revealed in the Word. Now when I say, “not imagined” I am addressing all those people out there who think what they feel, what they perceive, what they “see” as God’s working in their life is being proof of their goodness and faith in God. “Oh, God sent me a butterfly today, He was speaking to me…I want everyone to think positive and upbeat because that’s the way God is going to work in your life…You want a bus? Just pray for a bus and get all your prayer warriors to do it too and God will surely give you a bus!” Imagination! Name one passage anywhere in Scripture that says such imagination is a true and factual working of God? Show me without any doubt that your new car or hat or whatever, is the doing and will of God in your life!

Let’s stick to the Lord and his Word. God says, **“Be strong.”** God doesn’t tell you that because the world is going to be a breeze and as easy as could be. The world is going to be tough. You, in the name of Jesus will face persecution, trial and tribulation as the world and Satan try to destroy your faith. You, just because you are human are going to face difficulties, troubles, evils and the like, things of this world that are a direct result of the sin that permeates everything! Yet God says, **“Be strong.”** Trust in him. Believe what He says. God says he will never give you more than you can bear. God says enduring troubles makes your stronger because you trust He will get you through. **Be strong!** Not in yourself, but in the wonders, marvels and promises of God. And please note that is exactly where this passage leads you.

God says, **“Don’t be afraid.”** I’ll keep this simple. If God is for you, and he is, what is there to fear? You want to know the biggest cause of fear? You thinking you are in control and that you have a handle on life and truth and what will be. Want to get rid of fear? Then just trust that in God. God knows what He is doing. God has everything under control. Fear is quelled where trust in God is firm and sure.

The next line tells you why the first two are true. **“Look! Your God will come with vengeance. With God’s own retribution, he will come to save you.”** I am amazed at how many people there are who can’t get these words. These are the people who jump all over that fact that God will come and the fact that God will save, but boy, if they have to explain God’s vengeance and retribution they are totally lost. And yet the wonder and truth of these words is exactly what we need to grasp.

First, God is coming. That is what Isaiah told people. Isaiah was pointing ahead to when Jesus would appear in the world. Jesus, God’s Son, born of a virgin, born humble and lowly, born to carry out God’s vengeance and retribution. Jesus, God’s Son, born to be our Savior and born to be the King of kings and Lord of lords.

By the way, the fact that God will come is rectilinear prophecy, fulfilled only in Jesus. But really the part of what Jesus will do, that is actually intermediate prophecy. Prophecy that has a spiritual and a later physical fulfillment in Jesus. Let me explain.

There is no doubt that Jesus has come. And there is no doubt that Jesus came for vengeance. Jesus came to do face to face battle with Satan. Jesus came to take on the temptations, trials and falsehoods of Satan. Jesus came to confront the death that Satan brought into our world and to show that said death is nothing, a mere symptom of a greater evil that Satan has been bludgeoning us with. So first understand that Jesus came to take on Satan with his power of sin and death and to pour upon Satan what he surely and truly deserves. Second, understand that Jesus won that battle, that Satan and his power has been broken and ended. I have no doubt that Satan’s hell got hotter after Jesus and I have no doubt that God’s retribution has been fully carried out in Jesus too.

That’s right, God did carry out retribution. Retribution means: “a deserved punishment, payment for evil done.” God exacted “retribution!” But pay attention to the words of Isaiah. It says, **“With God’s own retribution.”** There is something different about God’s ways. It is true, there was sin to be paid for. The sin of every person who ever lived, mocked, despised and disobeyed God no matter who, big or small, had to be paid for. God said the price was “death.” In actuality the price is eternal damnation or eternal death. The price is the wrath of God poured upon every sin against God, poured fully upon every sin there ever was. But God does not take his retribution out on the sinner. He takes it out on Jesus. Retribution God’s own way. Sin is paid for, sin is atoned for, sin is revenged and avenged but not on us sinners. It is paid for in Jesus. Jesus took our punishment. Jesus took our death and paid the price, Jesus serves as our retribution in sin.

That is the first fulfillment of this intermediate prophecy. The second is interesting. The second fulfillment is when Jesus returns again. When Jesus returns again we are told that this world as we know it ends. Those who are believers will be with God in heaven forever and ever because of Jesus and his retribution on our behalf. But those who are unbelievers, who have rejected and despised this gracious retribution of Jesus, we are told that this retribution will be poured upon them for all eternity in hell. Jesus will do this. He has every right to do this. He paid for every sin. He gave his life for every rotten and evil thought, word, and deed of our lives. He took every souls hell. For those souls who reject Jesus, who tell Him in their lives and hearts to take his cross and get lost, so it will be. Jesus will be lost to them. And Jesus will in perfect justice and righteousness, let them have back the eternal agony He carried for them. God’s very own retribution for souls rejecting the salvation He had won for them.

Isaiah prophesied these things. Isaiah tells you to look for these things. And to help all the more Isaiah points to the uniqueness of the comings of Jesus as proof. The first time Jesus comes you will see: **“The eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unplugged. The crippled will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy.”** Just look at how our Gospel reading showed how this took place. When you see God doing these things, then know that what God has said is absolutely true and trustworthy.

Or look. When you see no more desert and shortage of water in the new world, know that you can trust God. When we are found in the perfect, holy, eternal kingdom of God, in a world purged of sin and operating exactly as God created it, then you will know that God is truthful and right in all that He Is and does. Now, we haven’t seen this second part yet, but as far as I am concerned it is completely true and factual because of what Jesus did the first time. I trust in the Lord because of the fulfillments of Jesus! Welcome to the heart and wonder of faith. And when that heart and wonder of faith is yours, what do you have? Strength! No fear! God is on our side, always has been, always will be in Jesus.

Great words of prophecy. Words that uplift and fill with wonder. Words that are true because not only did he promise to do it but it happened in Jesus. Our God has come! Dear people, “Be strong. Do not be afraid.” God has come and God has saved. Amen.