Isaiah 35:4 4Tell those who have a fearful heart, “Be strong. Do not be afraid. With God’s own retribution he will come and save you.”

There is a bit of a debate on these words of Isaiah. The debate is not a big deal, but it is there. What is not up for debate is the fact that these verses are clearly a prophecy concerning Jesus. It is as clear as can be that these words speak of the salvation that is to come, namely Jesus, what he will do and accomplish as the Savior. Where the debate comes in is on exactly what coming of Jesus is being spoken of. Some would say it is his first coming and some would say it is about his second coming. Oh, and yes, there are those liberal theologians who don’t believe in the Bible at all, who say this has nothing to do with Jesus. But if you are a so-called theologian who doesn’t believe in the Bible, well then, what is the point of your theology other than to show you reject God. To me, a theologian or Christian who doesn’t believe the Bible is like the dietitian who doesn’t believes that food has calories! Not a dietitian I want to work with.

So the debate is whether or not this is Jesus’ first coming or his second. Me? I say it is both. I don’t know why you would want to limit this to just one. As a conservative Lutheran we view prophecy, at times, like a person on one mountain top viewing the neighboring mountain tops. In this case, you have what appear to be twin mountain tops and we are describing one and then the other and yet they are twins. As twins, certain things are similar and yet certain things are different. That’s what I believe is happening here. Isaiah is being allowed to see ahead and when he is describing this and that, a portion is from this top and a portion is from that top. Both peaks are about Jesus and our salvation. We can wrestle with which is which but ultimately I don’t know if it specifically matters. What matters is that we capture and grasp the joy and wonder of Jesus and the salvation He will bring. Our theme will be: **HE WILL COME AND SAVE YOU.**

Let’s start by considering the marvel of the first four verses. They say: **“The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose. 2It will blossom abundantly, and there will be great joy and singing. Lebanon’s glory will be given to it, it will be excellent like Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. 3Strengthen the weak hands, and make feeble knees firm. 4Tell those who have a fearful heart, “Be strong. Do not be afraid. With God’s own retribution he will come and save you.”**

What I will tell you is that these words describe Jesus the second time. It is clear the description is speaking about a physical change in the land, a change from desert to lush garden, a change from starkness to utter beauty and wonder. What is spoken of is you and I being strengthened so that there is no longer doubt or fear or anything else that will cause us to be afraid and trembling in our lives. What we are being told is that the absolute glory and majesty of God is before us because God has come. His justice has been rendered and in His justice God has saved us!

What is this about? It is about the new heaven and earth that will happen when Jesus comes again in his glory and marvel. We call that day, Judgement Day! Yet is it not a day of fear and horror for us, rather because of Jesus it is a day of perfect wonder and marvel. There is a new heaven and earth. The world is a completely perfect and awesome place. Deserts will be lush gardens. Beauty and awe will be found everywhere. All of this because such is the promise of God for eternal life and salvation. God tells us a time is coming when all will be made new, wonderful and perfect. When all will once again be holy and pure. Where you and I will dwell and live with Him in absolute joy and peace.

Note that in the next few verses we are going to be given a glimpse of the other mountain top of this prophecy, but before we look at those words, look at the other words of this text. These words once again emphasize what will be when Jesus comes again. They say this: **“Waters will flow in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. 7The burning sand will become a pool, and in the thirsty ground there will be springs of water. Grass, reeds, and rushes will be in the haunts where the jackals once lay. 8A highway will be there, a road, and it will be called The Holy Way.**

**The unclean will not walk there. It will be for those who walk in that Way. Wicked fools will not wander onto it. 9No lion will be there, nor will any ravenous animal go up on it. They will not be found there, but the redeemed will walk there**

**10Then those ransomed by the Lord will return, they will come singing to Zion, and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain happiness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”**

Again, to me, it is clear what is being spoken of. I say that because these words so clearly agree with what we are told will be when Christ returns again. Here are some of the things we understand. Water in the new world will be in abundance for all parts of the world. Note then that **“grass, reeds, and rushes”** will be found all over. Again the picture is that of a lush, well-watered, garden, a picture that is made a direct contrast to the desert wastelands of the world.

The picture of wonder and joy is made even more complete by speaking of the highway, a wide, expansive road, smooth, level and straight. A road, by the way, called **“The Holy Way.”** Here is the picture again of the perfect and restored world, but a world where things are smooth, straight and good. Do note that this road is called “The Holy Way.” Need I remind you that the original Christians of the Apostles’ day where called **“followers of the Way,”** (Acts 9:2, 24:14)? That highway found in the perfect world is there because of Jesus. It is literally a road that speaks to the work and wonder of Jesus but it does so in such an interesting way, again all in accord with other portions of God’s Word.

For instance, look where is speaks of the fact that the unclean and the wicked will not be found on this way. Or it speaks of the absence of the lion or any ravenous animal on this way. We are told that only the redeemed, those bought back by the Lord will be there. How awesome. You are aware that Satan is described for us as a **“roaring lion seeking to devour?”** Yep, these words tell us prophetically that Satan and evil are gone and no longer a part of the world that will be and all of this because of Jesus.

Check out the last words. They say, **“10Then those ransomed by the Lord will return, they will come singing to Zion, and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain happiness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”** That’s us! We are found on the highway! We are given a clear and straight path to the wonder of God’s eternity, called Zion. Because in Jesus we are the ransomed. And what will be ours? **“Everlasting joy, happiness and joy.”** And from the negative perspective, **“sorrow and sighing will flee away.”** Here is the Lord our God giving us a glimpse, a promise of what He has in store for us. Note that those who are ransomed are ransomed by the Lord. It is the Lord who brings all of this about. It is the Lord who redeems and saves. It is the Lord who fulfills and completes the promises that are given here.

Now, so far, we have only been focusing on the second coming and what it will bring. Blended into these words is also a glimpse of what will happen when the Savior comes the first time. I love how it is done. In the very middle of this picture of God’s eternal wonder of Heaven, is given a sign of how we can grasp this is all true and real. And yes, I am going to repeat some of the verses, because they help us transition from one mountain top to the other. Still true statements, but another look and peak.

Verses 4-6. **“4Tell those who have a fearful heart, “Be strong. Do not be afraid. With God’s own retribution he will come and save you.” 5Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be cleared. 6The lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy. Waters will flow in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.”**

I will tell you, that it is these words that help me all the more to grasp the truth and joy of what God is promising. They do that, because as God is telling us about his kingdom, his eternal heaven to come, God takes a moment and tells us why this isn’t just fantasy and false hopes. God shows us what will happen when Jesus comes the first time. In other words, God, for the sake of His Old Testament people and us, is showing what will happen that causes the second to be true and it is all because of the work of our Lord.

Notice that I include verse 4. We’ve already said that verse four is about Jesus coming the second time, but in prophecy these words can also be included in speaking of Jesus coming the first time. What is a fact, no matter which coming you are speaking of is the fact that **God has come to save!**

Wasn’t that the point of Jesus’ first coming? Jesus came to bring about God’s retribution. What is interesting is that the word retribution can mean either “deserved reward” or “deserved punishment.” Jesus brought about both.

Because of the holy and perfect life of Jesus, yes, Jesus endured every temptation we do and yet was without sin, God caused Jesus to become our “reward.” Jesus died to take our punishment and because of what Jesus did, God rewards us with the forgiveness of sins and thus eternal life and salvation. God does this through the gift of faith.

Faith clings to Jesus. Faith grasps that Jesus is God and Lord, the end all and be all of all things. Jesus is not only the Savior but Jesus is also the Judge, given the right hand of God because of His work of redemption which has redeemed all. You will get the reward of Jesus by faith. When God looks into your heart and sees the faith He has gifted you, then you will be rewarded, you will be declared ransomed and redeemed of the Lord. No, I am not talking about you being holy and perfect or even you obeying and witnessing or loving the Lord. You and I are sinners. Yet, when you and I, sinners that we are, are appalled, sorrowful and repentant, we undergo a change of mind and way. We are new creatures created to do good works to the glory of God. It all happens because that is what God brings about. He saves us in Jesus. He clothes us with the robe of Christ’ righteousness. So in the name of and because of the victory of Jesus we are saved. God grants us His reward.

But when you have, of your sinful nature, effectively killed faith, booted out grace, indulged in, embraced and loved sin, then you have effectively rejected the gift of Jesus. You have said that you desire to stand before God on our own without Jesus. The result will be “punishment.” Eternal punishment for rejecting the grace and love of God. You will not be found on this highway. In truth, you will not be found in this eternal world of peace and joy that God grants to His children. You will not be saved but judged!

We can say this because the lame will leap, the mute will sing, the blind will see and the deaf will hear. Did you miss what was said in our Gospel reading? When Jesus is asked by the disciples of John, **“Are you the Coming One or should we wait for someone else,”** did you hear how Jesus replied? Jesus replied with the words of Isaiah, actually the words of a couple of different prophets all with the same picture of the Savior. Jesus said, **“Go, report to John what you hear and see: 5The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor. 6Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”**

Jesus applied our words of prophecy to himself! Do you want to know if he is the Christ? Then look at how he fulfills and completes the promises of God in every way. I love the fact too, that Jesus doesn’t just give a straight, “Yes” or “No.” Jesus directs us to God’s Word. Since God’s Word is kept, since God’s promises come true, then all of God’s Word is true. Yes, Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of God who causes all of this to be!

And please, don’t overlook what Jesus clearly states: **“Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”** Does Jesus offend you? Do you find his Word and command, his direction and encouragement, his love and grace too much trouble and a problem? Then you will miss out on the blessings of Jesus. The blessings of Jesus are the forgiveness of sins and the salvation God has promised. The lesson boils down to the issue of faith. A living, active, Jesus is my Lord and Savior faith. You are a peach tree that bears peaches, not a preach tree that produces nothing. It is about faith.

So in Jesus, all becomes true and factual. In Jesus God saves. In Jesus the lame, deaf, mute and blind are healed. Such is the nature of the forgiveness of sins. In the forgiveness of sins the words about waters in the wilderness and streams in the desert come true. Think of the waters of baptism and how they change our spiritually devoid hearts to the joy of God’s eternal gift. All in Jesus. All because Jesus is promised. All because Jesus has come and will come again.

Thank you Lord for your words. Thank you for your gift of Jesus. Thank you Lord for saving us. Amen.