

Isaiah 35—The Coming Homecoming
First Baptist Greensboro
Homecoming Service

I. Introduction

- A. It's such a joy to be here with you this morning. I really never expected this but thank you. What a merciful gift of God's goodness. Thank you for having me.
- B. It's Homecoming here at Greensboro First Baptist.
 - 1. It's a time to come home where for a few hours everything seems good and right. It's meant to be a place where we feel at home with God and we rest in the goodness of the gospel of Christ.
 - a) Homecomings are absolutely beautiful!
 - b) And Homecomings are also absolutely cruel.
 - (1) They are cruel because they are just a taste of the unending goodness of God to come.
 - 2. We come home. We enjoy it. And we leave. It is over.
- C. In the Garden of Eden, God made everything perfect. It was gloriously good.
 - 1. There he was with his creation in fellowship with them the way it was meant to be.
 - 2. There in the Garden, God freely loved his unique image bearers—Adam and Eve. And in freedom, they loved their Creator and God.
 - 3. Yet, in that freedom a danger existed—the possibility to know good *and evil*. God's creation had the freedom to make choices but there were consequences to those choices. Ultimately, his command was meant to keep them from ruin and death and in joyful, glad fellowship with their Creator.
 - 4. And we all know what happened. They disobeyed God and sin entered the world and death through sin and death spread to all men because all sin.
 - 5. They found out the beautiful fellowship with God in the Garden could be lost and it was.
 - 6. That is not to say God made a mistake. Oh no. God is sovereign. As the psalmist says in (Psalm 115:3 NAS95) But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. And the Bible is very clear that God's plans can never be thwarted. So this was God's plan and he will accomplish those purposes.
 - 7. Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden but God did not leave them without hope. He promised that a child would be born of a woman who would crush the head of the serpent and subsequently all enemies that threaten the goodness of God's fellowship with us.
 - 8. That's why Isaiah 35 exists to tell us that something better than Eden is coming. Isaiah 35 comforts us by making it crystal clear that one day, we will never lose the joyful, glad fellowship of God ever again.

II. Main Point

- A. The Unthreatened Joyful Fellowship with God...Forever

III. Outline

- A. The Goodness Will Return
- B. The Goodness is God
- C. The Goodness will never be threatened

IV. Exposition

- A. Chapter 35 takes a drastic turn from the destruction in chapter 34 to life in 35. The point to be seen is the return of the goodness of God like Genesis 1—the way it was meant to be but even better than Eden because there will be no possibility of losing it ever again.
 - 1. This chapter begins and ends with gladness. Like two immovable bookends, this beautiful poem speaks of such high and lofty things one can scarcely believe them.
 - 2. Notice there in verse 1—the places that are uninhabitable—lifeless and dead—come to life!
 - a) Poetry is so amazing because it can speak in ways that we normally cannot.
 - (1) When sin entered the world, all of creation fell under the curse of God.
 - (2) The world went from the inexpressible beauty of the Garden of Eden to weeds and deadness and dryness of a broken world.
 - (a) The image Isaiah gives us is that of a rose blossoming out of sand!
 - (b) Indeed, this has become a new decoration at our house at Christmas.
 - i) Kimberly takes a flower pot and fills it with sand and places a beautiful red rose in it to remind us of this promise which as we will see, has its fulfillment in the story of Christmas.

- ii) Everything will be made right some day. A great reversal is coming.
- b) The lifeless creation comes to life. Isn't that how God works?
 - (1) As you think back through the amazing stories of the Bible, how often does God display his glory where it seems impossible.
 - (2) Like in the barrenness of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel God's plan goes unthreatened. He brings about life where it was humanly impossible.
 - (3) So too here. Meadow saffrons or daffodils covering a desert is humanly impossible.
- 3. The picture of the rose blossoming out of dry sand becomes even more amazing in verse 2.
 - a) It's not just sparsely covered but rather the blossoms are abundant! Can you image a rocky dry crag being blanketed like a garden?
 - b) This is image we are to see. This full of life resembles that of rejoices with joy and singing!
 - c) To experience God and his goodness is to truly live! And to truly live is to be filled with joy and gladness of God.
 - (1) God's creation was good because he is good.
 - (2) He could not have made that which is good if he himself were not good.
 - (3) Every good and perfect gift is from above!
 - d) Now Isaiah stretches the image as far as humanly possible by comparing what will happen in the desert to that of the cedars of Lebanon.
 - (1) The seemingly endless supply of cedars of Lebanon cover a dead dry desert. That is astounding.
 - e) Bear with me for a moment in a silly illustration. As a Tennessee Vols fan, we know a thing or two about wandering the wilderness for years.
 - (1) When we finally beat Alabama in 2022, there was a glimpse of goodness there that should point me to the ultimate goodness of God.
 - (a) That day in Neyland Stadium, Vol fans everywhere were united in victory celebration. It was euphoric! 15 years we had waited for that moment. We felt as though things were finally made right.
 - (b) And suddenly it was over and we were left with the memories.
 - i) Memories are beautiful and cruel.
 - ii) Yes, I can remember when it happened but I can never return to that moment. It's over and that's how memories are cruel too.
 - (2) I don't share that merely as an illustration. God works in this world through his common grace.
 - (a) At the end of a long day of work, there's nothing better to me than getting home.
 - (b) Home is where everything feels right and peaceful.
 - (c) At home I find rest.
 - (d) But tomorrow morning comes. Problems arise.
 - (e) Even weekends, vacations, etc are all good things that should make us long for more than our homes and weekends and vacations can give. We should long for an eternal home where that goodness can never be taken away.
 - (f) That what Isaiah is helping us to see in chapter 35.
- 4. The goodness of God will return. The desert will blossom! And deadness will give way to life and peace and joy in God forever.
- 5. Indeed, when God rescued Israel out of Egypt and they wandered around the wilderness for 40 years, God provided for them when the wilderness was empty and void.(Deuteronomy 8:2-3 ESV) ² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.
 - a) The Lord had made a promise to give them a land flowing with milk and honey.
 - b) But, like the Garden of Eden, the keeping of the good gifts of God were still contingent on their obedience to the covenant.
 - c) That's why God warned them like this—(Deuteronomy 8:10-17 ESV) ¹⁰ And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his

statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, ¹⁶ who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. ¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'

- d) Well, Moses dies and Joshua leads them into the promised land.
 - e) Why did it fail? It appears that God had done something like what he had promised in Isaiah 35. He caused water to come out of a rock for his people. He showered bread from heaven. Why did the good gift...the amazing reversal from the wilderness to the promised land not work? Why are they losing the land here in Isaiah and being promised to return to Zion again?
 - f) Will this be an unending pattern that never changes?
- B. Though they have a sure promise that God will reverse the curse that came upon this world through sin, they must wait on the Lord's salvation. But how shall we endure to the end? We must hope in our good God but we must believe that the goodness we long for is God himself.
- 1. Isaiah is writing to those already in exile or the enemies could be at the gate of the city. Wherever God's people find themselves, there is hope and encouragement to be taken hold of.
 - a) No doubt they feel helpless and weak. Their hearts race out of control.
 - (1) I know very well how they feel. Indeed, we all do. If we look into the mirror of our lives we will consistently see fear, weakness, and anxiety.
 - (2) The situation Israel finds themselves in is heartbreaking. It seems as though the cycle will never be broken.
 - (3) But until it is fixed, they must believe! They must wait upon the Lord.
 - 2. What must they do in the meantime? Behold their God!
 - a) They must fix their eyes on the Lord their God and trust him.
 - b) God commands them not to fear just like he did with Joshua when they entered the promised land.
 - (1) How was Joshua instructed to not fear?(Joshua 1:7-8 ESV) ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.
 - (2) They are to behold God by knowing his word. If they would only obey his commands, they would see success!
 - (3) So too here. They must hear this word from Isaiah and believe that God will come and save them again. He will come and destroy their enemies again.
 - (4) (Isaiah 35:4 ESV) Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."
 - (5) God's people had abandoned God and his covenant. He is sending them into exile and yet, God promises to come save them and make things right for them.
 - 3. God is the goodness they need not just his benefits.
 - a) Moses was right when he said in Deuteronomy that they would forget the Lord their God in the promised land when they had their land flowing with milk and honey.
 - b) How will God fix this reoccurring problem that his people have?
 - c) There in Isaiah 35:5, the Lord points his people to a day in the future when something amazing will happen.
 - (1) Not only will the desert be transformed into a luscious field of blooming flowers, but the effects of sin—blindness, deafness, lameness will be transformed as well!
 - (a) People often think that if I change my circumstances things will change. For example, if God just turned my life into prosperity then I would be fine.
 - i) Is that the pattern of humanity?
 - ii) Absolutely not.

- iii) We need to be transformed.
 - iv) We need life in us no matter our circumstances.
 - v) Paul says that we are dead in our trespasses and sins. How can we be made alive?
That is the question.
 - d) Yes, our good God will transform everything! What man has destroyed, God will restore for those who love and trust him.
- 4. The image Isaiah continues to give us is beyond our imagination.
 - a) The mute singing for joy.
 - b) Water breaking forth in the wilderness.
 - c) Streams of water in the desert.
 - d) Burning sand becoming a pool!
 - e) Thirsty, dry ground springing forth water.
- 5. All of this is amazing! It sounds like the Garden of Eden and the Promised Land.
 - a) There still remains a huge problem, right?
 - b) All of can be lost because man has proven that he cannot keep God's covenant.
 - c) Adam and Eve could not keep just one command much less 10.
 - d) What is the answer?
- C. Because our last point tells us the problem will be solved. As I read the end of this chapter, I hear the promise that God's goodness will never be threatened again. We will not lose our good God and all the goodness he has promised us.
 - 1. Let's hear the promise before we find the solution.
 - a) Notice there in verse 8 there is a way—the highway of holiness which doesn't sound very promising.
 - (1) It says no one unclean will pass over it. Well that's a problem. The people of God have proven to be unclean and foolish again and again.
 - (2) No fool shall wander upon this highway.
 - (3) There will be no lions or ravenous beasts on the path.
 - (4) But who will be on this highway of holiness? We have been searching for a lasting solution. But how?
 - (a) Notice what it says—(Isaiah 35:9 ESV) but the redeemed shall walk there.
 - (b) Does that mean that God's people have figured out a way to pay God off? Have they found a way to defeat all their enemies? Are they finally going to keep God's covenant?
 - (c) In other words, will they do redeem themselves somehow and finally fix this perpetual problem?
 - (d) What is the answer? Frankly, the answer is not spelled out in Isaiah 35.
 - (e) We are only given the promise that it will be accomplished.
 - 2. However, let's venture on to the solution to man's greatest enemy—our sin.
 - a) As I look over this chapter, I hear things that I see fulfilled by Jesus Christ—God's Son.
 - (1) Indeed, was he not the Rock in the wilderness from whom the water flowed in Deuteronomy 8?
 - (2) Was not the manna from heaven pointing us forward to a day when Bread from heaven would come and satisfy us and we would never hunger again?
 - (3) Did Christ not cause the blind to see and the deaf to hear?
 - (4) When the 5000 were in a desolate place with out food, did he not feed them?
 - (5) I think I could go on an on identifying how Isaiah 35 points us to Jesus.
 - (6) But do any of these things fix the sin problem?
 - (7) Well, no. They do not.
 - b) But while all of these find there fulfillment in Christ, we need more than that.
 - (1) We need redemption. We need our sins decisively and finally paid for.
 - (2) We need God's Spirit within us. We need a new heart. A new covenant. A new hope that we will never again lose our good God.
 - (3) We need a covenant that is not based on our obedience but on the obedience of Christ.
 - (4) Is there a place in Isaiah that helps us know how this will happen?
 - (5) Absolutely there is. I will not read all of it but hear the solution.
 - (a) (Isaiah 53:3-5 ESV) ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet

we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

(b) There it is. All of this happened in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

i) He is the way—the highway of holiness—upon which we walk.

ii) And those who trust in him will have their sins paid for and we will be counted righteous by faith. And he will bring us to God—our eternal goodness.

iii) That is the only solution. God himself takes care of the payment we owe by sending his only begotten Son. That whosoever believes in him will have eternal life.

3. And yes, that's the only way the last verse of Isaiah 35 is possible.

a) (Isaiah 35:10 ESV) 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.

V. Conclusion

A. That is the great conclusion the redeemed are longing for. It is a place in which everlasting joy will be ours and can never be lost.

B. It is also a place where sorrow will be lost forever.

C. And there we will sing praises to our God for endless ages because only God has brought us home.

D. That is the coming homecoming we are looking for. One without end.

E. Are you spiritually dead or alive?

1. (Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV) ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved

2. If you have not been born again, repent and believe. In him you will find rest...you will find a forever home in him.