

“Love! Joy! Peace!” Those are good Christmas words. We see them on the bulletin covers and the Christmas tree ornaments. Those words describe our hearts as we prepare to celebrate our Savior’s birth

However – there is a problem. People who know nothing about Jesus are using the same words. We see them in TV commercials, ads in the paper, signs along the road. When even unbelievers use those words there is bound to be some confusion. Exactly what do those words mean?

God uses those words in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah uses the words “joy!” and “strength!” in our sermon text. This evening Isaiah tells us Christians exactly what those words mean. He tells us that

THE COMING OF GOD’S KINGDOM - GIVES US JOY AND STRENGTH

1. Joy – for our Christmas celebration
2. Strength – for the road ahead

I. Joy – for our Christmas season

A. Deserts begin to bloom

Jesus was born about 2000 years ago. The Prophet Isaiah lived 700 years before that. But God permitted Isaiah to see parts of the future. He permitted Isaiah to see the 1st coming of Jesus (when He was born in Bethlehem); and the 2nd coming Jesus (that day when He will return as the Judge of all people). As Isaiah describes these two comings of our Savior, he offers us pure joy, comfort and strength.

Isaiah is a poet. He paints pictures with his words. Here in chapter 35 Isaiah paints a picture of a desert. Back in Isaiah’s day parts of the land of Israel were very dry. Nothing grew there. As he paints his picture, Isaiah tells us that this desert will be changed. Suddenly the dead, barren deserts will spring to life. Listen to this:

*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.*

These changes will not take place because of new irrigation systems or because of climate change. **God** will **give** the deserts life so that they shout for joy. Isaiah continues,

*²The glory of Lebanon will **be given** to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;*

Lebanon, Carmel, Sharon – these were the most beautiful parts of the land. They were filled with life - huge trees and beautiful plants. God will *give* the beauty and splendor of Lebanon even to the desert. Suddenly the desert will be filled with rivers and springs of water:

*Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.*

*⁷The burning sand will become a pool [of water],
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.*

B. Because God is coming!

Why will that happen? Why will the deserts suddenly turn green and rejoice? It is because God is coming! Isaiah writes, “Your God will come.” (4) The Messiah! Jesus! God Himself will come! He’s on His way!

When Jesus comes, all sorts of wonderful things will happen. Not only will the deserts bloom. Similar things - miraculous things! - will happen among human beings. Isaiah mentions some of them:

*⁵Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*

*⁶Then the lame man will leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue will shout for joy.*

Miraculous works of healing! -- These are the works Jesus performed while He lived here on earth!

There was a time when some men came to Jesus and asked Him, “Are you the Messiah?” Jesus answered, “Look carefully at the works I have been doing: ‘The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.’” (Matthew 11:5) Jesus did the works that Isaiah wrote about way back here in chapter 35!

C. The meaning for our life

1. Our world has become death and desert

God did not create a world that is death and desert. He created a beautiful world, carpeted with trees and plants. God did not create a man and a woman who were blind and deaf; people who mumbled but could not speak clearly; people who were covered with the ugly sores of leprosy. God created two beautiful, healthy people who were perfect and sinless. God’s entire creation was “good,” “very good.”

But we know what happened. Satan entered the Garden of Eden. He convinced the woman and the man to disobey God. When the man and woman sinned against God, they ruined the perfect world that God had created. Satan robbed the man and woman of life and happiness. Satan turned their perfect world into death and a desert.

That is the world Jesus saw when He was born in Bethlehem. Jesus entered a world that was death and desert. You and I see the same thing today. Look at the people in our world. People get old. Our eyes get old, so we need glasses and cataract surgery. Our ears get old, so we need hearing aids. In some cases their hair turns white and their faces are full of wrinkles. Others are barely able to walk, so they need a knee replacement. And finally we die.

2. But Jesus brings Joy to the World

But here comes Jesus! He turns the wilderness into a garden. He fills the desert with rivers and springs of water. He gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf. He fixes crippled legs. He even raises the dead.

And so we sing, “Joy to the world, the Lord has come!” And at the end of that first verse we add, “Let heaven and nature sing!” Angels from heaven were singing on the night when Jesus was born. Even nature will sing. The dry ground on which Jesus walked will feel the footsteps of the Son of God. The trees and the bushes in Palestine will see Him pass by on the road. They will see the Son of God, their Creator. Isaiah writes, “they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.” (v2) “The desert will be glad, and the wilderness will rejoice.” (v1)

No, Jesus did not give His miraculous healing to everyone. He did not create a heaven here on earth. That was not His intention. But - Jesus did perform those miracles so that people would recognize Him as the Messiah whom Isaiah foretold. And He performed those miraculous signs to give us a foretaste of the perfect joy that we will have in heaven.

II. Strength - for the road ahead

The coming of Jesus gives us joy for our Christmas celebration. However - we do not yet have the perfect joy of heaven. Therefore Isaiah uses a second word – the word “strength.” The coming of God’s kingdom provides strength for the road ahead.

A. A world in turmoil

1. Examples

Our world is in turmoil.

- We turn on the news and hear about Russia and Crimea, China and Hong Kong, North Korea and South Korea, Iraq and Iran, Syria and Palestine – wars and conflict around the world. People shooting each other here in the States.
- Add to that the persecution of Christians. Around the world Christians are being killed. Their homes and churches are being burned to the ground.
- Add to that the growth of heathenism in our own country; the way heathen beliefs are being pushed on us Christians.

It is enough to drive us crazy.

2. Strengthen the feeble;

That is what Isaiah is talking about in the next verses:

³*Strengthen the feeble hands,*

steady the knees that give way;

⁴*say to those with fearful hearts, [Literally, “Say to those who are ready to panic, ready to ‘freak out’”]*

“Be strong, do not fear;

3. Your God will come

Why can we “Be strong, do not fear”? Isaiah already gave us the answer. It is because

⁴*your God will come, ...*

he will come to save you.”

Jesus *came* to save us. He came to pay for our sins with His death on the cross. And Jesus *will* come to save us. On the Last Day He will save us by destroying our enemies. Listen to this:

⁴*“Be strong, do not fear;*

your God will come,

he will come with vengeance;

with divine retribution

he will come to save you.”

When the Son of God comes on the Last Day, He will take revenge. It will be payback day. All of Jesus’ enemies

- Those who rejected God, who refused to acknowledge Him as the Creator;
- Those who mocked Jesus and spit on Him, who continue to mock and persecute His people today;
- Those who stubbornly reject the forgiveness of sins which Jesus won for all people and refuse even to listen to His word;

Jesus will reject them – forever. A just and holy God will give them what they deserve.

4. Tough words

Those are tough words. We sometimes ask, “Will God really do that? I have friends, neighbors - even family members - who make no secret of their unbelief. Will Jesus really send all unbelievers to a place of eternal punishment?”

It seems Isaiah himself was frightened by the words he was writing. Isaiah is a master of the Hebrew language; but as he writes this line, he appears to stumble and stutter. He can’t quite get the words out.

Yes, a final judgment is coming. We Christians still have work to do, mission work. We continue to use the words “sin” and “repentance.” We continue to tell others how Jesus paid for the sins of all people. We urge people put their trust in Jesus.

B. The highway of holiness

Then Isaiah adds, do not be afraid. God will provide strength for the road ahead. Isaiah describes a highway that leads from earth to heaven.

*⁸A highway will be there;
it will be called the highway of holiness.*

No unbelievers will be on that highway:

*The unclean will not journey on it;
wicked fools will not go about on it.*

No enemies will be there:

*⁹No lion will be there,
nor any dangerous animal*

Only certain people will be on that highway:

*Only the redeemed will walk there,
¹⁰and the ransomed of the LORD*

Jesus redeemed us. Jesus ransomed us. He bought us back with His own blood. Our sins have been washed away. Because we are spotless in the eyes of God, we are qualified to walk on that “highway of holiness.”

C. One warning

There is just one warning: “Don’t wander off the highway!” Satan still walks around out there. He is like a roaring lion who seeks someone to devour. If we wander off that highway, if we separate ourselves from “the redeemed” people of God; if we separate ourselves from those who gather around God’s word and sacrament; then we are headed for big trouble.

Those who remain on that highway will finally enter eternal life.

*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.*

That will be great!

The world we see is death and a desert. But here comes Jesus. And He brings joy.

Our world is full of turmoil. But here comes Jesus. Through His word He gives us strength for our journey.

Joy! Strength! Those are good words for our Advent season. May God continue to bless us. Amen.