

Guest Preacher - Rev. Kenneth Ferguson

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[0 : 00] Now as the Lord enables us, let us turn back to this chapter we read, Isaiah chapter 35, and read again at verse 10.

And sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The chapters immediately before this speak of the enemies of Israel, the people of God, who were in the ascendancy for many years and caused the people of God much affliction.

But the Lord, in chapter 34 in particular, highlights the way he is going to deal with at least one of these when he talks about Edom.

In verse 5 of chapter 34, And so on.

He is talking in the previous chapter about the destruction that is to come upon those who have been the enemies of the people of God.

[1 : 49] Now, in chapter 35, we find the scene changing completely. From the very beginning of chapter 35, The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus.

It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. And so on. The contrast couldn't be more stark. On the one hand, destruction.

On the other hand, a rich blessing. And it's on chapter 35, I want to say a few words, climaxing particularly at verse 10.

The ransomed of the Lord shall return. And I'd like to say one or two words, first of all, about who these are. The ransomed.

The ransomed of the Lord. Secondly, their journey. It says here that they shall return.

[3 : 02] What path are they taking? Well, he is talking earlier on about a particular road that has been made in the wilderness.

A highway shall be there, it says in verse 8. And it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way.

Even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. And so on. That's the second thing. This journey that the redeemed or the ransomed are taking.

It's a particularly marvelous road. It's the way of holiness. And thirdly, the destination.

They will come to Zion with singing everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

[4 : 07] Firstly, who are these mentioned as the ransomed of the Lord?

Well, the subjects are the people of God. They have been ransomed.

What does it mean that they were ransomed? Well, when you look at the history of the people of God, go back in your mind to their experience in the land of Egypt.

There they were tyrannized and enslaved by their master. But the Lord had mercy on them. And it says this in Deuteronomy 7, verse 8.

The Lord has redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. The same people, as mentioned here, the ransomed of the Lord, they are the redeemed of the Lord.

[5 : 13] And the Lord came into their experience in the land of Egypt in a miraculous way, opening a way for them in a marvelous way through the Red Sea and at last taking them through the wilderness into the promised land.

The Lord redeemed them. And also you see in 2 Samuel chapter 7, who is like your people Israel, he asks, whom God went to redeem to be his people.

And that word, redeem, is the same in essence as the word we use, ransom. In other words, if you read in the New Testament in 1 Peter 1, verse 18, knowing that you have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

These people mentioned here ultimately are the blood-bought people of God, the ransomed of the Lord. The people of God in the Old Testament, ransomed in the way that they were from Egypt and all the other enemies around them, they form a picture for us of the reality of the ransom that is true concerning the people of God through Christ.

He has gone to pay the ransom price. Oh, the Lord visited Egypt. He destroyed the power of Pharaoh.

[7 : 16] Also, when the people of God were in captivity in Babylon, the Lord made sure that they would be released and made free to come back to Zion again, which is historically probably what Isaiah here in this context is talking about.

But the context is wider than that, in that it talks about a gospel ransom, a gospel salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The ransomed of the Lord. What were we ransomed from? Well, we were ransomed from the power of sin, weren't we?

We couldn't extricate ourselves from the prison house into which the law of God tied us because of our sin.

The only way out of that prison house would be if we were to fulfill every aspect of God's law to God's eternal satisfaction, and we couldn't do that.

[8 : 26] But Jesus Christ came in the fullness of times, and he, in his life and in his atoning death, gave complete satisfaction to every aspect of God's just requirements, so that on the cross he was able to say, it is finished.

And those who believe savingly in Jesus, the ransom price has been paid for them, and they are now free from condemnation.

As Paul in Romans begins so marvelously, there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

the ransom of the Lord, those who are coming to believe in Christ and shelter under his wings.

But then it goes on. This group of people, the ransom of the Lord, shall return and come to Zion.

[9 : 42] Return from what? Well, historically, you could say they returned from Egypt, thinking of that picture. Or, also historically, you could think that they came from Babylon, the captivity of Babylon after 70 long years.

They came back. It says here, they returned. But, thinking in gospel terms, in relation to our personal turning or returning, what is it talking about?

The ransom of the Lord shall return. What are we going to return from? Well, when the Lord comes into our experience savingly, as I mentioned with the young folks earlier on, we must turn in repentance from our sin unto God.

That's something that the Apostle Paul said right into the Thessalonians. And he says, this is the end of chapter 1, 1 Thessalonians, that they turned to God from idols to serve the living and through God and to wait for his Son from heaven.

There is a real turning of repentance. And those for whom Christ Jesus died, in a day of his grace, they are enabled to turn from their sin unto God.

[11 : 28] This he, death, and destruction writ large over the sinful life that they've been living. And they flee from it.

They flee from it. You remember when John Bunyan describes the Christian leaving the city of destruction with a burden on his back.

and he's looking for a place of safety. He looks for a place of safety. And he can't rest until he finds it.

I'll come to Bunyan in a few moments with another idea. But this is saying, they shall return. I found it interesting that in the original, this returning isn't necessarily a one-off situation.

It is a present continuous. In other words, people who have turned to the Lord, they have to keep coming back to the Lord.

[12 : 48] There are things in life that draw them away from the path that they ought to be walking. Coming back to John Bunyan, when Christian asks for directions of a man called Goodwill about the way to go, Goodwill says to him, and this is Pilgrim's progress, look before thee, does thou see the narrow way?

That is the way thou must go. It was cast up by the patriarchs, the prophets, Christ and his apostles, and it is as straight as a rule can make it.

this is the way thou must go. But when the people of God are living their Christian life in this world, there are many other by-paths that call for their attention, many other things in life that try to entice them away from the straight and narrow.

The path described here is a path of holiness. What are the things that draw us away?

I mean, when you think of Israel as a nation, they were the covenant people of God. Nevertheless, they kicked against the Lord.

[14 : 48] They went into idolatry of various kinds. The nations around them enticed them into various kinds of idolatrous practices and lifestyles.

And in a sense, when you think of them coming back from Babylon, you may think of it as coming back having been chastened for their waywardness and sin.

That's why they were sent there, because the Lord's word was not acknowledged by them, it wasn't obeyed by them the way they ought to have been doing, and the Lord sent them into captivity.

But he didn't leave them there forever. He brought them, and he brought them back with joy to Jerusalem once again. What about the various meadows of which John Bunyan speaks?

there is one particular one, Bypath Meadow, that seemed so inviting. Rather than the road on which they were walking, they were finding it was hurting their feet, as it were, and they discovered this meadow running parallel with the road that they had been commended to walk on.

[16 : 19] And they went over the stile and started walking Bypath Meadow. Bypath Meadow led away from the real path that was straight as a rule.

And where did it take them? It took them to the castle of giant despair. there. But the Lord remembered them there and brought them back from there.

Maybe you're thinking this morning, well, I have been tempted by Satan in so many different ways over the past while.

people. It's as if he's drawn me away from my reading of the scripture, from my life of prayer, from doing what I ought to have been doing as a Christian person.

It's as if you're in a wilderness tempted by the devil. And you know, when Satan tempted the Lord in the wilderness, we find on the three occasions that we have recorded for us, prefixed by this, if you are the Son of God, do this.

[17 : 42] If you are the Son of God, do that. Bringing a doubt into the mind, as it were, if it were possible, not that the Lord ever could have fallen into temptation, he couldn't.

It was not able for him to sin. Nevertheless, that pattern can be seen in the life of God's people, when we are sidetracked by Satan, and the ultimate plan he has is to bring us to despair.

Yeah. ransom of the Lord shall return.

I don't know what you're going through this morning. Maybe it's a personal dilemma, some personal situation that you can't divulge to anyone, but whatever it is, will the Lord who has begun the good work in you will perform that work until the day of Jesus Christ, because it says here, the ransom of the Lord shall return.

They shall return. And then it says, they are walking on a road of holiness, a holy, dedicated road.

[19 : 18] That is, dedicated to godliness. And by the Lord's strength we are able to walk on that road. Even if we find ourselves coming so short, so often, the Lord nevertheless has taken control of us, and he will lead us safely on.

The good shepherd will never leave his people. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, O Lord. It's a highway, and a way.

In the ancient times, they used to elevate to elevate or build up a road through the wilderness. If some important people were coming, like a king was coming to visit, they wouldn't think of allowing the king to walk on a common wilderness path.

They would elevate a road, prepare a road. And we have the road prepared for us.

Where? I am the way, Jesus says. I am the truth. I am the life. He summarizes it all, even by that one statement.

[20 : 47] I am the way. Look to me and be ye saved. All the ends of the earth. The redeemed shall walk there.

They're walking in Christ through faith, by Christ, through grace, with Christ, in obedience, day by day, in life.

life. And they come to Zion. That is their destination, shall we say. They come to Zion.

Zion was where the temple was. Zion in the Old Testament is where the sacrifices were offered, where praise was offered, where the Lord's presence was made known.

you know that over the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place, that the Lord's presence had come down, the Shekinah glory, and there the Lord was.

[21 : 58] And that is where the people of God come, by faith. They come to the God of the Word. They come to Him and trust Him, and leave all their affairs with Him, knowing that He's able to do in them and for them everything that's necessary for time and eternity.

And it says here that they come to Zion with singing. What song do you think they'll be singing when the people of God are brought back to their place and are heading to glory, as it were in a day of grace?

Oh, they're singing songs of thankfulness. Thankful to the Lord that He didn't mark their iniquity against them. Thankful to the Lord that He didn't leave them in the land of captivity.

Thankful to the Lord that He didn't destroy them because of their sin. They will come to Zion with singing, everlasting joy upon their heads.

I wonder if we can bring eternity particularly to focus upon these words, everlasting joy upon their heads.

[23 : 26] the joy we have here seems to be so temporary, moments of rejoicing, but there it's an eternity of rejoicing.

And it says everlasting joy upon their heads. I think the Apostle Paul had a picture that he left with us, 2 Timothy chapter 4.

He looks forward to the crown of righteousness which the righteous judge will give him at that day. And not to me only he says, but also unto all them that love is appearing.

A crown of righteousness, a crown of glory, a crown of joy, joy as it were, enveloping the people of God having finished the race of life through faith.

the winners at the Greek and Olympic games, Roman games, were crowned with a wreath.

[24 : 38] And maybe that's a picture of what we have here. An earthly wreath is nothing in comparison to the everlasting joy upon their heads.

and it says that they shall obtain gladness and joy. I came across a comment about this.

Yesterday I was thinking about it. One of the commentators says, it's as if they're full of joy and joy is over taking them more and more as they're going on.

the pictures we have of glory in the book of Revelation, they're amazing, aren't they?

They only tell us a little. But this is one of the things that they tell us. That the lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed his people and lead them unto living fountains of water and God shall wipe away all tears from their eye.

[26 : 04] They come to Zion with singing. The song begins here, maybe in a gathering like this, maybe in a prayer meeting, maybe at your own fireside, worshipping.

The joy of the Lord begins to well up in your heart and you know what it is. It's different from the joy that the world gives to you. The joy of the world is fleeting, but the joy of the Lord is a blessing that leaves its mark upon your soul.

And nothing, nothing else can replace it or match it until it comes again. When you read a word of scripture and the word of scripture is so apt to your situation or you have a view of Jesus Christ as your friend and as your brother, as your saviour, the joy of the Lord fills your soul.

Think of a place where that joy overwhelms you throughout eternity. Everlasting joy upon their heads.

They shall obtain gladness and joy. Another commentator said gladness and joy as it were from the inside and from the outside.

[27 : 41] It's as if they're enveloped by joy. And sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The fears you have today, the doubts you may have regarding your eternal salvation, the sorrow you have because of your imperfect life.

The things you should have done and you haven't done. The things you have done and you've done them so shabbily leave you sorrowing.

But there is a place where there is no sorrow and no sighing. there is no place for them there in heaven.

The ransomed of the Lord, those for whom Jesus has paid the price for their redemption and their forgiveness.

They shall return. Their journey is on the straight and narrow, but sometimes they're drawn this way or that way because of the devil and his intrigues.

[29 : 08] But God will have the last word with his people because they shall come to Zion at last with everlasting joy upon their heads.

obtain gladness and joy sorrow and sighing shall flee away or to be among those redeemed the ransomed of the Lord.

Despite our faults and our shortcomings if God undertakes to perfect us at last he will not fail to do that.

He will knock all the corners of me and of you so that at last we fit into the place that the Lord has gone to prepare for us. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. Lord have mercy upon our souls and bless us richly in all that we seek to do in your name. We thank you that you're able to do great things for us and we praise you.

[30 : 19] that you're able to do greater things still for those who wait upon you. Bless the congregation we pray and remember us if we are privileged to come here in the evening to worship you once again.

Go before us we pray and undertake for us and forgive all of our sin. In Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. I will bring your worship to our close at this time singing to God's praise in the 16th Psalm Psalm 16 in Sing Psalms verses 8 to 11 Before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he is at my right hand I will not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering.

to the end of the Psalm verses 8 to 11 Before me constantly Before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he he is at my right hand and not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue which I will sing my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering for you will allow!

My soul and may to stay nor will you leave your pure holy one to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine bliss shall I know that you I done joy from your face will shine now may the grace of our

Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forever more Amen