

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Sexagesima Sunday, February 8, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 604, 609:2, 605, 660, 611:5-7.

Lessons: Isaiah 34:1-17, Hebrews 10:19-31, Luke 18:34-43.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 35:3-7.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As a Christian reads the whole book of Isaiah, all 66 chapters, a real division will be seen between the first part, chapters 1-39 and the second part, chapters 40-66. That division can be summarized with this description: The first part of the book has been called “Woes and Judgments” and the second part of the book has been called “Comfort and Consolation”.

In fact, orthodox Lutheran teachers have spoken of “Second Isaiah,” the second part as if it were a completely different book, one that especially emphasizes the Gospel. Of course, we surely also find Gospel in the first part of Isaiah, but it is much more obvious in the second part.

Chapters 34 and 35 belong together, forming an important conclusion to the “Woes and Judgments” part of Isaiah's prophecy. These chapters also direct our attention to the end of time. Chapter 34 presents the day of the Lord's vengeance, and chapter 35 presents the day when the glory of the Lord will be seen. Both these days are the same moment, but the outcome will be totally different for unbelievers than for believers.

With that background, today we see that

**ISAIAH CONTRASTS THE JOY OF THE REDEEMED**  
**WITH THE LORD'S TERRIBLE JUDGMENT**

- 1. The picture of the terrible judgment of the Lord on all unbelievers.**
- 2. The beautiful picture of salvation for all who believe.**

In our Old Testament lesson, chapter 34, you heard of the Lord's terrible judgment upon all unbelievers.

The verses immediately before our sermon text read: *"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God."* (Isaiah 35:1-2)

In the previous chapter, our Old Testament lesson, you heard about burning sulfur, blazing pitch, thorns, nettles and brambles. In this chapter you hear about blossoms, splendor, bubbling water, and green grass.

Now we in Minnesota don't often see such a contrast. You either have to travel or watch television or movies to see desert. Here in Minnesota we see much more of the beautiful, fruitful land Isaiah is writing about here.

Both the previous chapter and this chapter look into the future to the last day, the day of God's judgment. The previous chapter speaks of judgment day from the perspective of the law. This chapter speaks of judgment day from the perspective of the Gospel.

Of course, *"All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll"* (Isaiah 34:4) and the enemies of God will be judged and punished. But the Lord has a new Zion in store for his faithful ones, and *"they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God."* (Isaiah 35:2)

What a contrast!

Lebanon, Carmel and Sharon are places which were noted for their rich fertility and beauty. The cedar trees of Lebanon were highly prized in Old Testament times. Solomon used them in building the temple. Carmel, with its range of hills, was noted for its thick luxuriant growth. Sharon, a coastal plain in northern Palestine, was at one time thickly forested with oaks. It was also noted for its dense vegetation and beautiful flowers. God will transform the desert, make it bloom, and fill it with the best of the three green places.

***“Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.””***

In the previous chapter, the nations were warned to listen and pay attention to the revelation of the Lord's anger. That announcement of judgment brought no comfort. Instead, the graphic, gory description was intended to shock and terrify. It did for many people. But many people today just don't believe that God will come to judge the living and the dead. However, God makes it clear at the end of the chapter that such desolation will endure forever for those who do not believe and thus reject the Lord's salvation.

Even believers may stand horrified by the graphic details, but no one is ever comforted by the threats of God, by the Law of God. So God has a different message for believers, for his people: ***“Be strong, do not fear.”*** This is the Gospel message. How often the Scriptures give us that message! At the birth of Christ, when ***“the glory of the Lord shone around”*** the shepherds (Luke 2:9), the angel told the shepherds not to fear. When Jesus arose from the dead, the angels again announced, ***“Do not be afraid”*** (Matthew 28:5). God does not wish to terrify and threaten. He takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. He is much more interested in bringing forgiveness, hope, and life. So God's people hear the Gospel message, and it dispels fear. Through Christ, sins that deserve terrible punishment from God are forgiven. Through Christ, death becomes a sleep from which he will awaken us. Through Christ, even every trial becomes a source of joy because God will cause it all to work out for our good. Believers of all times have been encouraged to wait for the Lord and trust in him. ***“Be strong, do not fear.”*** The Gospel steadies their weak hands and strengthens their legs when they have no power to go forward.

The first words of Isaiah chapter 40 seem to be an echo of these beautiful words of encouragement found here. When Isaiah began the second part of his prophecy, he wrote, ***“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for.”*** (Isaiah 40:1-2) And who is “Jerusalem” but all believers, Gentiles as well as Jews.

The message of God is consistently comforting to his people. The entire second part of Isaiah's prophecy has been called the Book of Consolation. It is filled with wonderful Gospel comfort.

In addition, Isaiah promised that God would come to save his people. In chapter 40 the prophet announced to the towns of Judah, ***“Here is your God!”*** (verse 9). The second half of his book of prophecy continues to proclaim the coming of the Lord, especially speaking of the coming of the Lord's Servant, the Savior. It's as though the first portion of Isaiah tells us the child will come and the second portion gives us the prophetic details of his adult life and ministry.

Here are more signs pointing the reader of Isaiah ahead to the second part of the prophecy. ***“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.”***

What a dramatic reversal will take place! The blind, deaf, lame, and mute will all be changed and healed. There can be only one cause for such a change – the Lord. He would cause all this to happen when he came. And there is more description: the wilderness itself would be turned into a lush green place, where springs of water bubbled up to give cool refreshment. The emphasis is that the Lord would come and bring a remarkable change. In this way, Isaiah pictured the work of the Lord. He writes here: ***“he will come to save you.”*** When the Savior comes, he will bring many rich and wonderful blessings. This will happen especially at his second coming, on Judgment Day.

But we can also point to the miracles in the life of Jesus. In our Gospel lesson, you heard of Jesus healing a blind man. In the same way Jesus heals through his Word all who are spiritually blind.

It's interesting that when the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked, *"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"* (Luke 7:19) Jesus first performed miracles and then told the messengers, *"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: 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. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me"* (Luke 7:22-23). While the first coming of the Messiah was not to be a time when all illnesses, diseases and handicaps would disappear, nevertheless, Jesus did perform such miracles. Those miracles verified his identity as well as verifying the Scriptures that announced his coming. Even people such as Nicodemus, who came to Jesus secretly, at night, said to Jesus: *"Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."* (John 3:2)

Isaiah gives us the picture of the wonderful change that the coming of the Lord would bring. It is a wonderful spiritual transformation. The change in the heart of every believer is such a miraculous transformation. Where there was death because of sin, life springs up by faith in the Messiah – cool, refreshing life, sustained by the Holy Spirit through the gospel.

The presence of water in the dry desert is a favorite picture of Isaiah, a picture which shows the refreshment that faith worked by the Holy Ghost gives to the believers.

In Isaiah 41 we read: *"The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it."* (Isaiah 41:17-20)

These words from Isaiah point forward to the greatest joy that believers will experience beginning on Judgment Day, when there shall be no more pain, no sorrow. Saint John in the book of Revelation makes that clear about heaven: *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.""* (Revelation 21:3-4)

For the Jews who first read and heard Isaiah's words, they would also be reminded of how God graciously cared for his people in the wilderness. Again and again, God made water flow for his thirsty people while they journeyed through the wilderness. But it was more than physical water that God provided. Paul reminds us that the spiritual rock from which the Israelites drank was Christ. *"For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."* (1 Corinthians 10:4)

We, too, together with all who believe, also drink of that rock. Our sermon text is just a little taste of the joy we experience as God's children! In this wilderness transformed into lush pastures, Isaiah goes on to tell us: *"And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD will return. 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."* (Isaiah 35:8-10)

What a beautiful picture of the joys of the believer, especially in heaven, with Christ eternally! Lord, lead us all to that beautiful place! Amen.