

DOUBT & THE SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH

Isaiah 35

INTRODUCTION

We are going to begin this morning with Isaiah 35, but fairly quickly we are going to end up in Luke's Gospel where Jesus applies Isaiah 35 to John the Baptist's situation.

I want to do this because I think sometimes in our modern context we tend to remove the Scripture from life and treat it like an intellectual exercise or a classroom activity. But here we are going to see Jesus take our Isaiah text and bring it into the real life struggles of John the Baptist.

It's instructive to us not only on how to see Isaiah 35, but how we are to see all of God's promises in Scripture.

ISAIAH 35:1-7

What a promise! Note what's in here:

- VS 1-2 -- The wilderness is transformed into a lush and fruitful paradise. To the same degree that it was desolate and dry, it is now lush and fruitful. To the same degree life was difficult, life is now joyful.
- VS 3-4 -- Fear is undone. Everyone who is abused or fearful is strengthened and perfect justice is done to the oppressor.
- VS 5 -- The blind see
- and the deaf hear
- VS 6 – the lame man is not only healed, but he leaps like a deer
- And the mute man is not only healed, but he can sing
- VS 7 – the burning sand becomes not just rich earth, but a cool pool of water to dip in
- and the dry, cracked ground becomes a spring of bubbling, clear water for refreshment
- and the dry, forgotten place where only the jackals would bed down becomes a fertile and shaded beach.

You might categorize all of these things as the undoing of all of the effects of the Fall on creation. The effects of sin on nature have been reversed.

ISAIAH 35:8-10

Isaiah paints a picture of a highway that he calls "The Way of Holiness".

This highway can only be traveled on by the righteous. Yet, even the unclean fools will not be able to go astray – they will be kept on the path despite their foolish desire to wander off.

This road leads the “ransomed of the LORD” back to Zion – the Kingdom of God where they will find eternal joy, eternal gladness, where all sighing and tears will be forever wiped away.

This is the undoing of the effects of the Fall not only on nature, but on the heart of man. Sin has been removed from the heart.

JOHN THE BAPTIST’S DOUBT

John the Baptist was the last of the OT prophets and was also the cousin of Jesus born nearly at the same time. In fact, he was one of the first to identify Jesus as the Messiah when he leapt in the womb when he was around Jesus when Mary was pregnant.

JOHN WAS THE ONE THAT JESUS WENT TO IN ORDER TO BE BAPTIZED INTO HIS MINISTRY.

In Matthew 3, we see Jesus coming to John. John acknowledged Him as the Messiah there publicly, humbly baptized Jesus, and then immediately stepped out of the limelight and began sending followers to follow Jesus.

At the moment Jesus is baptized, a miracle happens. The Holy Spirit appears like a dove over Jesus and out of the sky comes a voice that says, “Here is my Son in whom I am well pleased.”

It doesn’t get any clearer than this!

JOHN IN PRISON

A short while later we find out that John is in prison. He has come out against Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife Herodias.

Herodias manipulates Herod into putting John into prison and later taking his head.

While John is in prison, likely just before Herod executed him and literally delivered his head to his wife, John apparently has a crisis of doubt.

JESUS RESPONSE

READ Luke 7:18-28

WHY WOULD JOHN BE DOUBTING?

We don’t know for sure (other than John had heard what Jesus was doing), but it’s easy enough to see that many of the things Jesus was doing and saying were not what John would have expected. He was spending a lot of time at the sinner’s table. He was also not doing anything to overthrow Rome or the religious establishment.

At the same time, John’s life had really gone down the tubes since Jesus came along. John certainly was willing to die for God, but to die for the cause of a man that may NOT be the Messiah? That was different.

The question John is asking, “Are you really the Messiah?” is one that we all ask when we are in the pit like John the Baptist.

In one way or another, we ask “Jesus, are you who I thought you were or should I give up and find another way through?”

JESUS IS SO GRACIOUS WITH THESE DOUBTS!

Jesus doesn’t rebuke John, but instead Jesus invites the messengers to spend the day with Him. He demonstrates miracles to them all day. At the end of the day, He quotes Isaiah 35 (the first part) and part of Isaiah 61.

Simply put, He says, “Look at what I promised. Look at what I’ve fulfilled. Don’t doubt me, don’t be offended by me, trust me. I am all you need, you don’t need any other.”

Jesus doesn’t ever ask us for blind faith. He asks us to look at Him, and when we look at Him, we believe. There is a big difference. If we are having a crisis of faith, it is because we aren’t looking at Jesus we are looking at the prison.

ASK JESUS WHO HE IS

Jesus has made some outrageous claims and some lofty promises.

It’s normal to wonder if you’ve put your faith in the right man. It’s normal to look at your life and wonder if He is who He claims to be and if He will do what He promises to do. The doubt is not the problem.

The problem is your response to the doubt. Will you bring your doubt to Jesus? Or will you relieve your doubt, by reaching out to Egypt for help, for yourself for help, or will you simply give up hope altogether.

I say we bring our questions to Jesus this morning and let Him answer for Himself. I think we all know what He will say. He will talk to you like He did to Abraham when he would come to God asking if He would fulfill His many promises. God would simply repeat the promise over and over.

WHAT’S TO COME

Go back to Isaiah 35:8-10

This part is in process right now. We are on the Way of Holiness, Yahweh’s ransomed people headed towards eternal gladness.

Make no mistake. That journey began the moment you make Jesus your Lord, but it is not yet finished. Yet, in Christ (above the line) it IS FINISHED.

This is the mystery and the tension that we live in now. The tension between the “already” and the “not yet”.

The end of Verse 8 gives us the good news. “even if they are fools, they will not go astray.”